

NORTH CAROLINA FOCUS ON SERVICEMEMBERS, VETERANS, AND THEIR FAMILIES

A PROJECT OF THE NORTH CAROLINA DIVISION OF MENTAL HEALTH, DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES

February 27, 2014

North Carolina National Guard

Present: Ernest Allis, Wesley Alston, Nicole Barnes, Archie Barrow, Cindi Basenspiller, Blake Bourne, Shawn Butler, Anthony Cowden, John Dill, Paul Dillon, Wendy Dyer, Don Evans, Li Fang, Ph.D., Linda Finkle, John Freudenberg, Lea Glaze, Angela Harper, Robert Harris, Laura Haygood, Ann Hedrick, CH Jonathan Heitman, James Hicks, Rob Hogarth, Andy Jackson, Rob Jones, Terri Kane, Kenneth Kempf, Harold Kudler, MD, Linda Larsen, Jim Leary, Dick Mann, REP Grier Martin, Leslie Maynard, Heather McAllister, Enrique McClymont, Kiernan McGorty, Henry Moore, Mark Mosher, Joan Moss, Sara Nienow, Stephanie Nissen, Megan Norton, REV Dr. John Oliver, Sheryl Pacelli, Ilario Pantano, MAJ Frank Poovey, Jean Reaves, Betty Jo Shepherd, Robert Sherwood, COL Vernon Simpson, Jeff Smith, Tony Sowards, Belivia Spaulding, Flo Stein, Doug Taggart, Mark Anthony Taylor-El, Mark Teachey, Donald Thomas, GEN Kevin Turner, Austin Walther, Kirk Warner, Brian Wilson, GEN Cornell Wilson, H. C. Woody Woodward, and Diane Yelverton

Dr. Kudler opened the meeting with introductions of all those present. He thanked Mr. Pantano for bringing more folks into Focus. Mr. Pantano stated that most of the work will occur after the meeting ends. The benefit of attending Focus meetings is that every month you will meet new potential partners and have an ongoing dialogue.

The first speaker was CH Jonathan Heitman, NC National Guard. Since 2007, he has been serving the NCNG as a chaplain in producing resilient servicemembers and providing ministry to the families. He quoted from GEN George Marshall: "The soldier's heart, the soldier's spirit, the soldier's soul, are everything. Unless the soldier's soul sustains him he cannot be relied on and will fail himself and his commander and his country in the end." CH Heitman said that spirituality goes beyond religion and provides a sense of belonging and purpose. He talked about the need for servicemembers to have resiliency--physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. He goes where the soldier goes and looks for partners to help with family members in the community. CH Heitman assists in programs such as Strong Bonds, events that target singles, marriage, and family, as well as topic-specific programs at the armories during drill weekends.

REV Dr. John Oliver also focused on the need to build resiliency. The military experience of a veteran has ripple effects on family members, care providers, and the community. Clergy may play an important role as research has shown 4 of 10 individuals with mental health challenges seek counseling from clergy; that individuals are 5 times more likely to reach out to a minister than all other mental health providers combined; and that veterans often feel more comfortable approaching their pastor than they do a mental health professional. He promoted

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clergy education since clergy see behavioral health issues all the time and are often not well trained (www.aspe.edu).

John Dill is the owner and head coach of CrossFit Sua Sponte in Raleigh. He was a Ranger and had tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. He was also a civilian contractor. Crossfit is a natural fit for veterans because it has a similar type of physical training that is used in the military and it is disciplined. It also adheres to the Paleo diet. Workouts are named after heroes. Competitions at local and national levels provide incentive. They host events, often grueling, where money is donated to Wounded Warrior projects.

An attendee asked what caused the change in attitude toward veterans with PTSD during the Vietnam War and the current wars. Dr. Kudler stated that it went back to the 1989 Vietnam readjustment study conducted by the Research Triangle Institute. At that time, Congress was considering shutting down the Vet Centers that started in 1975. The RTI study found that 30% of Vietnam veterans had PTSD and the need for Vet Centers continued.

Tony Cowden is the owner and founder of Crossfit Wilmington. He was a special forces Green Beret in the Army in 1997-2004 and has been a contractor for OGA since 2004. He joined the Army NG in 2011. He started his gym in 2009. He has marines and army as clientele and sees benefits for veterans—physical health and fitness, psychological, and emotional. In addition, veterans like the camaraderie and support. He currently offers free memberships to combat veterans. He started with 16 veterans and now has 47.

Dr. Kudler then opened discussion to all those present. Ms. Stein said that Focus and Charlotte Bridge Home were mentioned in a recent SAMHSA call. Ms. Basenspiller said that they work with both veterans and veteran spouses. In 2013, they saw 500 people yet Charlotte is viewed as a non-military town. They are trying to get employers to hire veterans, thus giving them a future. Charlotte Bridge Home is providing wraparound services through military-friendly provider agencies. They work on all different levels, from the community to the policy level.

REP Martin asked how to translate physical and spiritual health into policy. Dr. Kudler mentioned the national IOM report, which promoted the utilization of mental health evidence-based practices. There is a need to create more resilience for servicemembers and the communities that they return to. The issue is how to demonstrate it so that the funds keep coming. It takes an interdisciplinary group to build a system that is self sustaining; this is a challenge to Focus.

Mr. Barrow said that all DWS employees are veterans. They are involved in conducting Stand Downs for homeless veterans. In 2013, 2000 homeless veterans in 50 counties in NC were served. They already have 13 Stand Downs planned for 2014.

Mr. Taggart stated that last summer's legislation, the Corporal Pruitt Rainey Brass to Class Act (<http://www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2013/Bills/House/PDF/H767v7.pdf>), is directing the State Board of Education to establish rules for awarding credit for salary purposes to principals,

assistant principals, and teachers who served in the military. Rep. Martin is currently working or proposed legislation regarding military children.

Ms. Pacelli mentioned the training of service dogs for veterans through Educated Canines Assisting with Disabilities. She has been working with former Army Captain Luis Carlos Montalván and his golden retriever partner Tuesday (<http://www.anythingpawsable.com/until-tuesday-a-soldier-service-dog-and-salvation/>). A training has been scheduled in March.

Mr. Alston stated that a tax credit for employers is available for those who hire veterans (Hire the Heroes Act). The Division of Workforce Solutions administers the program.

On March 29, from 10 am to 3 pm, there is a medical open house for veterans, hosted by REP David Price, the VA, the Old North State Medical Society, the Old North State Dental Society, and other organizations at the Wake-Raleigh Salvation Army Center in Raleigh.

Mr. Sherwood works with a state-run program that helps veterans with mortgages for up to 3 years. The program can reinstate delinquent mortgages for up to \$36K. If the veteran stays in the house for 10 years, the remaining mortgage is forgiven. There are also programs to support any type of higher education.

There has been an update on the Servicemembers' Civil Relief Act (formerly known as the Soldiers and Sailors Civil Relief Act). JAG attorneys should be aware of these changes.

The UNC system is supporting in-state residency for all veterans. The Board of Governors has approved it for the UNC system although it has not yet gone into effect.

Mr. Woodward said that April is the Month of Military Child. They have a program planned at Onslow Beach in conjunction with Camp Lejeune, the USO, and the Sierra Club. A National Symposium will occur in Utah in September—they will be using an outdoor education model. They just raised \$7M to put veterans in Outward Bound programs. Currently, they are working with Golden Corral to develop a camp for 16 to 18 year olds.

The VFW has a national project to adopt a unit of the National Guard. Attendees were urged to look into national projects sponsored by the VFW and other veteran service organizations (e.g., Disabled American Veterans and the American Legion.)

In February, the House unanimously passed legislation that requires public universities to charge veterans in-state tuition rates regardless of the veteran's past state residency. The Senate has not yet passed the measure. Rep. Martin urged VFW members to contact their legislators, as the VFW has vocally supported this issue.

Mrs. Moss asked what was the best way she could volunteer to help veterans. Dr. Kudler suggested that she look at our website for ideas.

Mr. Freudenberg announced the Forward March conference to be held in a local church in Cumberland County on November 20-21. Cumberland County hosts a monthly meeting where attendees share resources. He said local residents have created the Behavioral Health

Association and the Cumberland County Partnership for Children (<http://ccpfc.org>). Another interest is to address the state requirement for school systems to identify military-connected kids. Currently, there is no standard list of questions. CCPFC is interested in developed a list of questions that are based on scientific evidence. Rep. Martin is working on legislation to require a standard list of questions related to a military child identifier for the state education information system.

Ms. Reaves believes that most servicemembers and veterans have the resiliency but the communities do not. She suggested that veteran service organizations assist in connecting the dots in the community (e.g., volunteer opportunities, location of resources). In her former job with AMVETs, she found that veterans don't do well in advocating for themselves. Currently, only 1% of the population has served; it's time to get the remaining 99% resilient and giving back to their veterans.

Mr. Pantano provided a copy of the annual report that NCDVA completed for 2013. On April 17, they are co-hosting an event on women veterans at the NC National Guard. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War so his office will be rolling out a series of initiatives, including a welcome home for Vietnam War veterans.

The next Focus meeting will be held in the Command Conference Room of the NC National Guard Headquarters in Raleigh on March 27.