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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Transition Can Create Stress for Veterans and Their Families

Veteran's Day gives civilians an opportunity to honor those who are, or who have been, in military service. Many have heard about the difficulties facing Veterans once they leave the service, but only the Vets themselves and their families really understand what it may be like.

Leah Hale is not just the Valley Community Services Board Veterans Support Specialist, she is the wife of a Veteran.

Her husband served for 10 years, and they went through the typical Veteran experiences of living on post and moving multiple times in short periods. Their time of service was filled with many positive moments, but when it was complete, they discovered that transitioning from military to civilian life was something for which they hadn't trained. Who knew?

Who knew that losing the day-to-day structure, the military life mindset, and the comradery and support of other serving families, would be such a big challenge; that finding employers willing to hire Veterans or their family members would be so difficult; that it could be really tough settling into another new place to call "home?"

Who knew a military life without deployment to a war zone could still cause stress, PTSD, physical wear and tear, and other sorts of trauma. Who knew resources in and out of the military were sorely lacking, for the Veteran and the family?

By its nature, the military prepares a soldier as early as basic training for the endeavors of their time in service. They are trained early that the unit is the number one priority. Troops learn a new language of military terminology that only insiders really understand. They spend weekends and special occasions away from their family. Little by little, it can all bring trauma and a need to adjust, even when the experience was good.

While on active duty, a Veteran has some resources, though notoriously not great. However, once they leave the system, the strict "outside-in" structure of daily life is gone.

“In the military, the Vet is given everything and follows a very structured plan,” Hale said. “When you’re in the civilian world ... you’re left to think on your own and find structure in this chaos we call life.”

This is one reason some Veterans have difficulty keeping a job; they struggle to separate the military structure with the civilian world. This can cause a lot of job hopping, anxiety, and depression. Still, help is becoming more prevalent.

“There is a change happening in our society and resources and organizations are supporting and understanding the (mental health) needs Veterans have,” Hale said.

There are approximately 16 million Veterans in the United States and more than 700,000 reside in Virginia. Hale said that of the approximately 8,000 in the VCSB service area (Augusta and Highland counties), more than 60 percent are likely unaware of the services and benefits available to them.

The military and civilian community that works with Veterans is beginning to break the stigma of mental health challenges. This means getting the help one needs can be simpler and quicker.

VCSB opened Hale’s position as Veteran Support Specialist in late 2021. She is thankful for the opportunity to help guide other Veterans to receive the services they need to continue to be successful in life outside of the military. She helps Veterans get connected to the Veteran’s Administration to file for disability. She has helped other Veterans getting equipment to continue their education, to find legal assistance and more.

Veterans may contact Hale directly at 540-280-2252 or are referred to her in the VCSB intake process. VCSB has connections with Veteran support groups and offers individual counseling services.