



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

New Program Will Help Local Veterans Connect, Provide Support For Those Suffering From PTSD

CATHARINE YOUNG December 7, 2015

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JAMESTOWN – Each day, an estimated 22 veterans take their own lives. For many, this tragic outcome results from personal battles with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or a traumatic brain injury (TBI).

In response to these heartbreaking circumstances, Senator Catharine Young (R,C,I-Olean) announced she has secured a \$185,000 state grant that will allow Chautauqua County to establish a local branch of the PFC Joseph Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Veterans Support Program. She was joined by Assemblyman Andy Goodell, Chautauqua County Executive Vince Horrigan, Chautauqua County Veterans Service Agency Director Gary Chilcott, Blue Star Mothers of New York Lake Erie Chapter President Susan Rowley and local veterans.

The Dwyer Program, as it is commonly known, has been highly successful in bringing veterans together in a secure, anonymous setting in order to help one another cope with PTSD and TBIs. The program is open to all veterans, regardless of branch of service, deployment record or official medical designation as suffering from PTSD.

The program is operated with six goals in mind:

- Pursuing outreach and education;
- Providing peer-to-peer support;
- Building resiliency among veterans;
- Encouraging a connection between veterans, their families, friends, and the community;
- Providing access to suicide prevention/intervention initiatives; and
- Fostering an atmosphere of hope.

“When veterans return from combat, they often face challenges as they reintegrate into civilian life. Families and friends of returning soldiers, and soldiers who have been home for decades, sometimes find it difficult to understand the demons haunting their loved ones. Personal dialogue with those who have experienced the same struggles has been shown as a highly-effective tool to help those suffering from PTSD and other stress disorders find relief,” said Senator Young.

“The Dwyer Program provides a unique veteran-to-veteran approach that connects servicemen and women with those who can relate, so that all involved can draw on their personal experience to cope with PTSD, with the ultimate goal of saving lives. The program is named in memory of PFC Joseph Dwyer, a war hero who, despite the support from a loving family, passed away in 2008 from complications with PTSD following his return from service in Iraq,” Senator Young said.

First established in Suffolk County as part of the 2012-2013 State Budget, the Dwyer Program has already been used successfully to assist veterans in Jefferson, Monroe, Nassau, Onondaga, Orange, Putnam, Rensselaer, Rockland, Saratoga, and Westchester counties.

Local officials applauded the funding announcement, highlighting the program’s track record of success and Chautauqua County’s large veteran population.

Assemblyman Andy Goodell expressed his strong support for the Vet-to-Vet peer counseling program, which is one of the most effective approaches to addressing PTSD. “It is hard for a civilian to fully understand the horrors that some veterans experience in combat situations,” noted Assemblyman Goodell. “A veteran who has faced those situations can often relate better to another veteran who has also faced those horrific situations.”

Assemblyman Goodell knows first-hand the importance of this type of counseling. His youngest daughter served as a Marine in the Mortuary Affairs unit in Iraq, wrote a book entitled *Shade it Black* about her experience, and is completing a PhD program focusing on counseling for veterans.

“Senator Young has always placed a high priority on helping our veterans, and her efforts to secure this grant for a peer-to-peer program in Chautauqua County is greatly appreciated,” said Assemblyman Goodell.

Vince Horrigan, Chautauqua County Executive, said, “We have a solemn duty to care for those who fight for our Nation. We thank Senator Young for bringing this wonderful gift of healing and support for those suffering from PTSD to Chautauqua County. Peer-to-Peer counseling and support is a critical link in pulling our vets back to health.”

Gary Chilcott, Director of the Chautauqua County Veterans Service Agency, said, “Every day we are reminded that many of our veterans continue to suffer from the effects of PTSD and TBI. On behalf of our 11,000 Chautauqua County veterans, we are deeply appreciative of Senator Young’s dedicated efforts to establish a PTSD Veterans Support Program.”

Patricia Brinkman, Director of the Chautauqua County Department of Mental Hygiene, said, “The Dwyer Program is a welcome addition to the service array available to the County’s veterans. Connecting with another veteran with a shared life experience will offer the hope and the example that change is possible and life can be better. The vet-to-vet approach will reduce the isolation many of our veterans experience that keeps them from seeking services and will offer them the supports necessary to reach out for what they need to successfully reintegrate into their lives here at home.”

Area veterans interested in taking part in the program can contact the Chautauqua County Veterans Service Agency to learn more and sign up. The Veterans Service’s Jamestown office is located at 610 W. Third Street and can be reached 661-8255; the Dunkirk office is located in the VA Clinic, 166 East Fourth Street and can be reached at 268-6030.

In 2014, then-State Senator Lee Zeldin released a report detailing the success of the Dwyer Program in Suffolk County. A copy of that report can be found at:

https://www.nysenate.gov/sites/default/files/Dwyer%20Program%20Report_o_o.pdf.