

Freelance Star

Grant to help military veterans

With \$300,000 grant, service agency will enhance programs for area's wounded warriors

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More help is on the way for area military veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury.

The Rappahannock Area Community Services Board has received a \$300,000 grant from the Virginia Department of Veterans Services to set up a regional program.

Post-traumatic stress and traumatic brain injuries have been serious issues for troops returning from multiple deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Camilla Schwoebel, the program manager, said the aim is twofold.

"One is really looking to help increase the skills of the clinicians in terms of their ability to feel competent serving the military clients, and helping the community become more aware in identifying the symptoms of PTSD and traumatic brain injury," she said.

"We really want to get the word out to the veterans and their families about the services that are going to be available."

Schwoebel is a licensed professional counselor at the community service board's Stafford clinic. She served five years of active duty with the Coast Guard and five years in the Reserve. She begins her new job on Monday.

Schwoebel will be structuring the new program, developing job descriptions for four part-time peer specialists to be based in Fredericksburg, Charlottesville, Lynchburg and Winchester. Those specialists will be seeking volunteers within their communities to help administer the program.

The community services board in each locality will then hire the specialist who will be based at its facility. Those locations were selected to serve Health Planning Region I, which includes eight community services boards in the northwestern part of the state.

The initiative will enhance programs available at Veterans Administration clinics such as McGuire Veterans Hospital in Richmond. McGuire operates a clinic here on U.S. 1.

All veterans, including members of the National Guard and Reserve who are not eligible for benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs, are eligible for the program, according to Dr. Frank DeForest, the Rappahannock Area Community Services Board's clinical services director.

In addition to training clinicians, DeForest said, the grant "will make sure those seeking services receive a warm welcome."

The grant is part of \$1.7 million in funds available from the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program. That was created by the General Assembly in its last session to ensure that services to veterans and their families are readily available in all areas of the state.

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The Virginia Wounded Warrior Program supports veterans with stress-related injuries or traumatic brain injuries.

Those eligible include veterans of any war who are Virginia residents, members of the Virginia National Guard and Reserves who are not in active service, and family members.

Virginia Wounded Warrior Program: dvs.virginia.gov/woundedwarrior

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