

VALLEY VOICE

The official newsletter of Valley Community Services Board

Veterans grow in support of each other



Veterans and their families serve the country and have found ways to support each other when their service is done.

Each Friday at the Embrace Center in Waynesboro, Leah Hale, Valley Community Services Board (VCSB) Veteran Peer Support Specialist, hosts a brunch and support meeting. Hale cooks for the 20 - 30 Veterans and some family members who attend.

"I wouldn't trade it for anything," she said.

The group began a year ago, meeting in an apartment in Fishersville. Over the months, the Vets wanted to do more than chat and eat. They created a group name, Embracing Veterans, moved to the Embrace Center in Waynesboro, and are becoming more involved in the community.

"Between now and December 18, they have 17 events," Hale said. They will take part in the Out of the Darkness Walk to Prevent Suicide, a holiday craft fair featuring their own handmade crafts, the Staunton Veterans Day Parade, a military and antique car parade through the grounds of



several area senior living facilities, and will take part in the Embrace Center's Teen Angel Tree, which gathers donated gifts for teens who have aged-out of the Salvation Army's Angel Tree program.

Hale began the group because she understands the difficulties of transitioning from active military service to civilian life, both for

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Photos: Top - Veteran Rhonda Rawson speaks with a representative from Brain Injury Connections. Center - Waynesboro City Council Vice Mayor Jim Wood and Todd Wood, Assistant City Manager - Operations. Bottom - Andre Miller and Banita Teixeira with Department of Veteran Services, with Kevin Coffman, Veteran Employment Commission (front).

From the Executive Director



Dr. Kimberly McClanahan

November brings a number of important events. At the end of the month, we celebrate Thanksgiving, which is a time to reflect upon the blessings of the past year and to spend time with family and friends. It is also a month when we celebrate our Veterans. Veteran's Day became an official holiday in 1938, then known as Armistice Day, a day set aside to honor the veterans of World War I. Subsequent to the Second World War, it was recommended that "Armistice" be replaced with the word "Veterans." On June 1, 1954, November 11th became the national holiday dedicated to honoring American Veterans of all wars. In this issue of Valley Voice, we look at Valley Community Services Board's advocacy and action with our local veterans.



Veterans grow in support

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Veterans and their families. Hale's husband, Zach, served for 10 years, and they went through the typical service member 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.

"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."

The members of Embracing Veterans are finding that structure as well as a purpose that gives them a joy they can share with others. They want to share their experiences with young people. On Nov. 18, they will share a Thanksgiving dinner with students from Fishburne Military Academy. In December, they'll deliver the Teen Angel Tree gifts as part of what they've dubbed "Secret Ops Santa."

If you are interested in joining the group or know someone who may be, contact Leah Hale at 540-280-2252 or lhale@vcsb.org.

What are the answers to housing the unhoused?

Right now an individual can find rental assistance in the Staunton/Augusta County/Waynesboro (SAW) region. Right now, there are 150 individuals on the Rapid Rehousing waiting list. The disconnection? A lack of housing stock.

“The issues of homelessness are incredibly complex,” said Lydia Campbell, Community-based Service Manager. “It didn’t happen overnight. We won’t fix it overnight.”

Yes, it’s about unemployment or under-employment. Yes, it’s about wages. Yes, it’s also about housing stock, from low-cost apartments to starter homes.

There is a need for quality, affordable starter homes, so the family living in a rental can purchase that house. That frees up the rental for someone able to afford that rent, which frees up the apartments with cheaper rent for those who may be unhoused or at risk of losing their housing. However, developers have a concern about over-building and feel it is better to have a waiting list than empty units.

A housing summit was hosted by VCSB, the Community Foundation of the Central Blue Ridge, Augusta Health and the Central Shenandoah District Planning Commission in October with approximately 200 people in attendance. Participants discussed the connection between housing, economics, and health. As Campbell told a WHSV TV reporter afterward that it’s “silly” to think a person with severe mental illness or a substance use disorder can follow recommendations for getting healthy without a secure place to live.

The economic impact may show up when potential large employers evaluate an area in which they may want to build a factory, for instance. They evaluate housing, among other issues, Campbell said.

“Where are employees going to live? (Our area) is not super attractive right now.”

Because the area is wide geographically, and rural, the actual homeless population can be quite invisible, according to Campbell. They live in tents in the woods, or their car, or couch-surf at friends’ houses.

“No one chooses to live out there for fun,” she said. “You have to ask not, how did you get here, but, what happened to you?”

Valley Homeless Connection: 540-213-7347
VCSB Homeless Services Line: 540-213-7347
Walk-In @ Valley Mission Mealtimes
1513 W. Beverley St., Staunton
WARM Outreach Line: 540-254-7888
Rockbridge Area Relief Association:
540-463-6642
Supportive Services for Veteran Families
540-283-4918 (veterans only)

Valley Updates

Emergency Services (ES)

Planning is underway for a Blue Ridge Crisis Intervention Team (BRCIT) Therapeutic Assessment Site (TAS) in the Sangers Lane ES office suite area. The anticipated start date is Dec. 1. Hours of operation will be Monday - Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. An Augusta County deputy will be stationed on-site to accept individuals in crisis. This will alleviate some overcrowding in the Augusta Health Emergency Department by diverting some individuals to Sanger's Lane TAS so that law enforcement officers will be able to return to duty.

Veterans Services

Military Community Fall Festival

Saturday, October 28 Noon - 4 p.m.

Embrace Community Center - 932 Fir Street - Waynesboro

Kids activities, crafts, family fun.

For more information: call Leah Hale - 540-280-2252

Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion (JEDI) Team

VCSB staff recently took part in three trainings aimed at exploring equity, bias and more. Facilitator Sly Mata, Director of Diversity Education, UVa led the trainings: *Introduction to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging and Implicit Bias; Microaggressions and Difficult Dialogues; and A Change is Gonna Come: Diversity, Equity, and Belonging.*

Children's Mental Health Services

VCSB's Child Case Managers had the opportunity to "build a brain" in September as a part of their staff development day. The Brain Architecture game is designed to give participants a visual representation of how the brain can be impacted by adverse childhood experiences, while also displaying how community relationships and supports can help turn toxic stress into tolerable stress.



L-R Caitlin Vinson, Amanda O'Connell and Ronda Painter, Child Mental Health Case Managers.

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)

VCSB has the funds for rental assistance through the PSH program. Landlords willing to give individuals and families a second – or third – chance are needed to increase housing stock. PSH program has expanded with 60 additional openings. PSH provides income-based rental assistance and voluntary supportive services (i.e., mental health counseling) for individuals who are living with serious mental illness and are experiencing homelessness. Landlords interested in opening their rental property and ending chronic homelessness through PSH or Rapid Rehousing may call 540-887-3200.