



VETS4VETS LEADERS MANUAL



Vets4Vets Leaders Manual

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Materials Needed for a Local Meeting

Copy of the full Leaders Manual (available online and updated frequently)

“We Care List” of local Iraq and Afghanistan-era vets willing to take calls from other vets, including:

**Phone numbers;
Times available to get calls;
E-mail addresses; and
Small slips of paper and a pen for people to copy down contact info.**

Date, time and place of next Vets4Vets group locally and national (free) Vets4Vets Weekend Workshop

Community Resources Sheet (with personal contacts, see page 9):

**VA Vets Center nearest and VA hospital;
Community Mental Health Agency locally;
Psychologists locally willing to treat Iraq and Afghanistan-era vets on low or no-fee basis (www.GiveAnHour.org);
12-step programs for at least alcohol (AA) and narcotics (NA);**

List of Veterans Organizations in Local Area

**Veterans Organizations with Veterans’ Service Officers;
Local Veterans Organizations reaching out to Iraq and Afghanistan-era Veterans**

Script for Vets4Vets Meeting

Hi, my name is _____ and I am the leader for this meeting.

This is a meeting of Vets4Vets, a peer support group for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans.

We are a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to giving Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans an opportunity to tell our stories to one another. We do not take positions on any issue.

This is a place where we can celebrate the good things and complain about the bad. We know that we will function better in society if we have a chance to share these high and low points with other veterans and not carry them around inside us.

A "Vets Care List" is circulating with the names of other Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans who are willing to take your calls. If you are willing to take calls, please put down your name, phone number, email and best times to call. The list will circulate twice, once to list your name and once for you to copy down any contacts you are interested in.

Are there any experienced V4V vets present today who would be available to meet with newcomers after the meeting?

Just for the record, are there any other veterans here today?

(If there are any non-veterans or non-Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans present, ask the Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans if they are willing to let the non- or older veterans stay and participate. If any Iraq and Afghanistan-era veteran objects, thank the others for their support and ask them to leave.) If the older vets or allies want to hold their own support group, just give them a copy of this Manual and set a time to get back together to say "goodbye."

We follow a very simple outline. Anyone can lead one of these meetings just by picking up this Leader's Manual.

We are not a mental health agency. If you feel you need professional help, we suggest that you contact the Vets Center of the Veterans

Administration immediately (provide local contact name and number). We also have a list of agencies and people in this community who have volunteered to see Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans without charge and have a list in this manual of national mental health resources which are available to Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans.

We do not take any advocacy position on any issue. We leave our politics at the door. We are open to all Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans regardless of your position on any issue.

We do urge you to get involved in the community as part of your healing.

A list of the various local groups of Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans who are getting involved in the community is available after the meeting. They speak for themselves and do not represent Vets4Vets. We urge you to confine your comments at this meeting to your personal concerns and leave the political issues to other groups.

Here are the ground rules for this group.

We will set a timer so that everyone gets an equal time to speak.

We do not interrupt each other or comment on each other's stories, no matter how important it may seem. However well intended, interruptions or advice is often hurtful. We also do not refer to each other's stories even to the person who told the story, unless we first ask their permission. What you hear here, whom you see here, let it stay here.

It is okay to have and express strong feelings about these stories, both positive and negative. Many of us have had to keep those feelings to ourselves. Too often our civilian family and friends are just not able to listen. A Vets4Vets group is a place to express those feelings. This may mean some people may, cry, laugh, tremble or get angry when it is their turn to tell their stories. We will be able to deal with the things we are talking about better afterwards, as a result of telling these stories and expressing our feelings. When each person's time is up, we simply direct our attention to the next person and stop focusing on our own feelings.

We take a moment to notice something pleasant in our surroundings or something we are looking forward to as a way of making this transition.

We always begin our meetings by going around and telling each other our names and what our military service is or was. In these introductions, we always include one thing that is new and good in our lives or that we liked about the military. This helps us focus our attention on the meeting and not on whatever else might be on our mind.

Let's go around now and introduce ourselves with our name, our military service and something new and good.

(After everyone has introduced themselves to the extent they want to)

Now let's each take a turn. When it is our turn, we have found that it is always useful to talk for at least a little while about what was good about our military service. Then if we want, we can talk about what was hard about either the military or how the civilian society treats us as veterans.

NOT TO BE READ OUT LOUD: (To the leader: to calculate the time available for each person, divide the number of minutes remaining in the meeting--two hours is best for the whole meeting—by the number of people in the group and set the cooking timer for one minute less to allow for transitions—always subtracting five minutes for the closing. For example, if the meeting is for two hours and the introductions and the leader's comments have taken 20 minutes, just subtract 5 from the 100 minutes remaining. If you have six people, divide 95 by 6 which is close to 16, but take off that one minute for transitions. That would give everyone 15 minutes of uninterrupted time to tell their stories.)

Now let's begin taking turns. Everyone will have ____ minutes to share their stories (the number of minutes you just calculated).

We pick numbers to decide on a speaking order. If a subgroup of vets wants to meet separately for all or part of the meeting, such as women vets, please let me know. (If 2 or more folks express such a desire, ask one to be the leader and have them meet separately and join the group for the closing.

Who would like to go first?

NOT TO BE READ OUT LOUD, FOR THE LEADER:

After each person's time runs out, I say "that is time", but give the speaker a chance to finish their thought (a minute or so if needed.) Then, if they wish, I will ask them to tell one thing that gets their attention away from their story and back on present time, e.g., what are you looking forward to? What do you like about this room?

(After the last person is finished taking his or her turn, remind people)

Remember everything you hear here is confidential. What you hear here, let it stay here. If someone has asked for help during their turn and you feel you can help, after the meeting, first ask them if it is alright to talk about the subject they mentioned. This makes it much safer for people.

Our next Vets4Vets meeting like this is (time, date, and place.) If there is a local workshop, announce it. (The next free natural workshop is _____)

We have found that it is useful for each of us to share one positive thing they liked about the meeting or how the person led it.

When we are done, will you please help me put the room back in order?

Are there any Vets4Vets announcements?

(If there are, give the following Vets4Vets ground rules for discussing business or other topics. Remember not to interrupt each other and to let everyone else speak before you speak twice. We do not announce political activities during these support groups.

Thank you for letting me lead this meeting.

Sample List of Veterans Organizations

Here is a list of national groups who are helping with the issues of veterans. You can usually locate a local group in your community or nearby by going to the websites listed below.

Listing does not mean we endorse any opinion. We do think it would be good for our healing and for our country for all of us to get involved in some way.

When a local Action Group forms to deal with any of these issues, it should first consult with the existing groups. It usually makes more sense to work with an existing group than to start a new organization. However, if no group is adequately dealing with your issue, by all means start your own. Please note that we do not discriminate among organizations of veterans of this era.

Veterans Service Organizations (largest and most recent wars, full listing available on request):

American Legion (www.legion.org)
AMVETS (www.amvets.org)
Disabled American Veterans (www.dav.org)
Paralyzed Veterans of America (www.pva.org)
National Gulf War Resource Center (www.ngwrc.org)
Veterans of Foreign Wars (www.vfw.org)
Vietnam Veterans of America (www.vvoa.org)

Veterans Organizations Focusing on Iraq & Afghanistan-era Veterans:

Coalition for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans (www.coalitionforveterans.org)
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (www.iava.org)
Student Veterans of America (www.studentveterans.org)
Iraq War Veterans Association (www.iraqwarveterans.org)
Veterans of Modern Warfare (www.vmw.org)

Other resources:

Veterans Administration for all federal benefits (www.va.gov)
Vet Centers for readjustment counseling for returning vets (www.vetcenter.va.org)
VA Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (press 1 as veteran)
(www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)
National PTSD Center (www.va.gov)
Free or inexpensive professional counseling (www.giveanhour.org)
Suicide hotline 1-800-SUICIDE
National Veterans Foundation (www.nvf.org) 888-777-4443 for a range of services on a hotline staffed by veterans
Website for national association of state veterans service departments

Mission, Vision, & Principles Statement

Our Mission

Vets4Vets is a non-partisan organization dedicated to helping Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans to heal from the psychological injuries of war through the use of peer support.

Our Vision

Our primary goal is to help Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans understand the value of peer support and to regularly use peer support to express their emotions, manage their challenges and ease their reintegration into society. Our vision is that anytime a veteran needs to talk with someone who really understands, a local Vets4Vets peer support group is available at no cost. We envision Vets4Vets being a common name in the minds of all veterans as a place where they, and their comrades, can go to heal.

Our Principles – We Believe:

- Sharing personal experiences with those who have shared similar experiences is a powerful healing tool.
- Peer support does not require professionals.
- Peer support can take place in many formats including weekend workshops, one-on-one and in small or large groups.
- By taking equal and uninterrupted turns we benefit by both listening and speaking.
- By expressing the feelings associated with our experiences, we help each other heal.
- In providing an environment that is confidential, safe, and accepting.
- Taking part in positive community action, of their choosing, empowers veterans to further promote healing and reach out to other veterans.
- Use of drugs and alcohol hinders real emotional healing.

Philosophy

Purpose. Vets4Vets (www.vets4vets.us) is a non-partisan peer support organization for Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans who served post-9/11. By establishing a national community of veterans and allies, Vets4 Vets is dedicated to helping veterans find value and meaning in their experiences while healing from the psychological injuries of war. Through one-on-one interactions, local groups and Vets4Vets leadership workshops, veterans take equal and uninterrupted turns sharing their experiences and expressing their feelings in a truly confidential setting. Vets4Vets' premise is that the veteran's healthy management of stress and the establishment of trustworthy bonds in the Vets4Vets environment will lead to the development of positive and productive relationships in the veteran's family, career and society. Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans, as well as other veterans and allies wishing to promote this national network may participate.

Historical Background. Vets4Vets was inspired by the "rap" groups formed by Vietnam veterans on their return from combat. That generation of veterans discovered the value of meeting together and telling their stories to other veterans. This process helped many veterans manage the stress of combat, military service and public sentiment. Many were encouraged to become involved in ways that benefited not only the individual, but society. Since the mid 1930s peer support groups have gained popularity largely through the 12-step programs which used support group gatherings to help those who had developed unhealthy ways of dealing with stress. Support groups are now widely used in all areas of society by groups of people who share a common bond.

One-on-One Relationships as Key. The primary strategy of Vets4Vets is to allow the veteran the opportunity to tell his or her story in an environment where he or she can be heard and understood. The individual, despite race, sex, or economic status can speak of his or her service without interruption in an atmosphere which promotes respect and non-judgment. Such a climate helps to foster self-respect while building self-esteem. As experiences are shared, trust grows and feelings of isolation decrease. The Vets4Vets process works as each veteran takes the time to get to know other Iraq veterans one person at a time. The key then to all Vets4Vets programs is taking the time to build one-on-one relationships with other Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans.

Relationships to Existing Organizations. Vets4Vets strives to cooperate with existing organizations and to encourage veterans to create new ones where needed. The veteran's participation in Vets4Vets is not a substitute for counseling or medical treatment provided by existing organizations. Vets4Vets seeks to acknowledge the common goals shared by organizations serving veterans and to promote cooperation and communication among these organizations.

Assumptions: Vets4Vets is founded on the following assumptions:

Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans are good. Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans are good men and women. Veterans of war are required to make spontaneous decisions that may have life-or-death consequences in an environment of intense fear. These decisions are difficult and sometimes "second-guessed" by the veteran upon his return to society. This is known as survivor's guilt. Society may further complicate the veteran's confusion by placing judgment. It is important that the veteran understand that he or she made the best decision possible given the information he or she had and the circumstances in which he or she found him or herself.

War and military service impact veterans. Veterans who have gone to war have been impacted by the negative experiences of war. These experiences may influence current behaviors and ways of thinking. Some veterans struggle with painful memories and self-blame while others miss the close friendships that were formed or the structure and self-discipline that the military provided.

Resolving pain and finding meaning in the experience restores health. Vets4Vets is founded on the belief that in a safe and trustworthy environment, veterans can and will begin to resolve their painful war experiences and the natural loss associated with transitioning environments. This process is often emotionally charged and the expression of feelings is encouraged. In such an environment the veteran is given not only the opportunity to process his or her emotions but to reflect on his or her personal strengths in surviving tragedy thereby finding hope and identifying purpose. Vets4Vets offers help by creating the forum wherein the veteran's story is told without interruption and witnessed by an empathetic listening group as each veteran understands that he or she will be granted an equal turn.

The Group Meeting

Special Considerations:

Supplies: A **kitchen timer or a stop-watch** is needed to run a group. Setting a timer allows each veteran the opportunity to have an equal turn. In addition to the kitchen timer, **a list of community resources** can be useful to veterans who require information regarding benefits and services.

Group Size. Consideration must be given to group size to allow each veteran ample time to speak and be heard. If the group is large (more than 8) the group should be divided into 2 groups thereby allowing sufficient time for each participant. Upon a group member's request and by group agreement, the group may be divided into subgroups to meet a particular need or to address particular issues (i.e., a woman requesting a woman's only group to discuss issues that women in the military face; a divorced veteran requesting a group to address the issues of divorce, etc.). As groups grow, a particular membership may decide to form their own Vets4Vets constituency group.

The Leader. Typically, a Certified Vets4Vets Peer Support Group Leader leads our local groups (see the Background Section on Leadership). However, anyone can act as leader of a Vets4Vets support group as all members are considered peers. Whoever accepts the responsibility of leadership for a particular meeting however will decide the order of speaking, assign time limitations and determine the need to divide into subgroups. The leader will end the group with a request for positive feedback of the member's experience.

Special Topics. The leader may decide to take a more directive role by introducing a topic about which group members can speak. Examples of topics include: what the veteran likes about being a veteran; the challenges of being a veteran; what the veteran would like the public to understand about veterans; how the veteran would like to see veterans' lives improve; the ways in which the veteran would like to reach out to other veterans.

Frequency of Meetings. The group will decide how often and for what time period their Vets4Vets constituency will meet.

Background:

1. **Vets4Vets is not mental health therapy.** The leader further establishes what Vets4Vets is not. Vets4Vets is not a professional mental health agency. It is a peer support group which may serve as an adjunct to but not as a substitute for professional treatment for those who need it. Should the veteran feel the need for professional support, Vets4Vets can provide a list of community organizations and resources. (See Resources Section at the back of this manual).

2. **Each veteran is allowed to speak without interruption.** The veteran who has the floor should be allowed to speak without interruption. Often in an unstructured setting, out of a desire to provide feedback or to interject a similar feeling or experience, the listener interrupts. Neither is heard when two people speak at the same time or talk over one another. Therefore, the listening group members are expected to show respect to the speaking veteran by simply listening and offering the speaker their undivided attention. Listening nurtures understanding and promotes communication. It is as important as telling one's personal story. In addition, cell phones should be silenced or left at home or in the car.
3. **Information shared during the group process is doubly confidential.** Group members gain trust & rapport by sharing in an environment where confidentiality is honored. The veteran's story is not discussed or referred to outside the group. Should a veteran wish to approach another veteran about information shared in the confidential setting, the approaching veteran should first seek the sharing veteran's permission prior to initiating the discussion.
4. **Each group member is asked to respect the views of others by avoiding political discussions and other controversial topics.** Group members are asked to refrain from wearing political t-shirts, hats and buttons. There is to be no recruitment of individuals to one's political organization. Should the veteran view a discussion of politics or a controversial issue as important to his process, following the meeting the veteran may ask the individual with whom he intends to discuss the topic if that individual minds listening.
5. **Attempts to initiate romantic relationships at meetings are discouraged.** Peer support traditions have found that romantic relationships formed during the healing process are not successful and instead lead to disappointment, isolation and anger.
6. **It is acceptable and appropriate to express strong feelings both positive and negative.** Many veterans have kept these feelings to themselves because they have learned that others are unable to listen or cannot understand. In the Vets4Vets environment, it is appropriate to express those feelings that in other forums may be viewed as negative: crying, laughing, anger are all totally permissible when telling one's story. Following the veteran's disclosure, the veteran will be reminded that he is no longer in the situation that caused distress and the veteran will be asked to refocus by observing something pleasant in his surroundings. This technique assists the veteran in transitioning his attention to the here and now and on the next speaker.

Speaking order is decided by picking numbers.

Building a Local Group

Attracting Participants. Like many successful peer support networks, Vets4Vets believes in attraction and not promotion (Step 11 in the 12 Steps of AA). There are a number of ways in which veterans can encourage the participation of other veterans in

Vets4Vets support groups. The first and preferred manner is by reaching out to other Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans, one veteran at a time. By modeling the approach used in the group meetings (dividing time equally and listening without interruption), the recruiting veteran encourages the potential group member to listen to his or her story and then offers the potential member the opportunity to experience the telling of his or her story without interruption. This can be a powerful experience for the veteran who may, for the first time, finally feel heard. Sometimes it will be necessary for the recruiting member to begin by listening, i.e., if the veteran cannot wait to tell his story. The potential Vets4Vets group member may find it difficult to withhold comments and interjections. The experienced veteran kindly and patiently reminds the veteran to allow the experienced veteran to finish speaking. When it is the new veteran's turn to speak, the more experienced veteran models attentive listening. Remember, building an organization occurs most effectively through one-on-one relationships. The easiest way to recruit another veteran is to invite him or her to a local group meeting or one of our free national workshops.

Where do you find Iraq/Afghanistan Veterans?

For most of us, the easiest way is to reach out to our old unit buddies. Give them (or a couple of them) a call and invite them to join you at a national workshop. Others of us are still in the Guard or Reserve or have family or friends who served.

Other ways to begin the process of connecting with Veterans include networking with local college/university veterans groups and established community agency representatives. Personal one-on-one meetings with these individuals can be extremely helpful. Most are more than willing to provide and disseminate information to further the connectivity among Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans. Below is a list of suggested contacts:

1. Local College/University Vet Groups. Plan a visit and meet the veterans in vets group. Go to www.studentveterans.org. Or start your own group at college/university.
2. Corrections and law enforcement. Many of us work in this area. Non-professional peer support offers the advantage of complete confidentiality, so many officers have taken part. The national office can give you references.
3. Post-Deployment Health Reassessment Coordinator. Chaplain at local military units
4. VA Clinics and hospitals
5. Military Ombudsman or Department of Veterans Services for your state
6. Regional and County Offices of Veterans Affairs
7. Operation Homefront
8. USO
9. Coalition for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans (CIAV- www.coalitionforveterans.org)
10. Local Community Mental Health Agency (www.samsha.gov)
Media - radio, television, local newspapers
Numerous websites (See Resource section at the back of this manual)
Local organizations targeting the delivery of services to veterans

Location. Meeting sites can be secured by contacting many of the aforementioned establishments. Sites that currently host 12 step meetings can be approached as well as community colleges, the Vet Centers, local churches and hospitals.

Building Leadership

We provide free leadership training to anyone who wants to lead a local group or to lead day-long or weekend workshops. We will fly you to Tucson for a week of training. Please contact us if you are interested. Typically, a local Vets4Vets leader learns the basic skills of Vets4Vets peer support at one of our residential weekend workshops around the country, then seeks to start a local group in his or her community by contacting local military units, agencies or schools who serve vets. Then they attend a week-long training in Tucson. If they complete that training successfully, they become a Certified Vets4Vets Peer Support Leader. As long as such leaders are building and leading a local Vets4Vets group, they are welcome to attend additional weekend workshops. We hold Leadership Workshops for our local leaders twice a year.

Resources

Taken from the PBS Website for Frontline where all the websites are listed.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/heart/etc/resources.html>.

Another useful resource guide for Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans is available from Veterans for Common Sense at their website www.veteransforcommonsense.org, specifically,

<http://www.veteransforcommonsense.org/files/vcs/guide.cfm?TopicID=0>

U.S. Military & U.S. Government Services

"Military OneSource" -- Comprehensive Military Assistance

"Military OneSource" was established in June 2004 as a one-stop shop for **all** service members who need "help to cope with life's little -- and not so little -- issues." The service, which was previously broken down by individual service branch, offers 24-hour help by phone (800-342-9647) or by e-mail. Its web site provides advice on everything from coping with stress to caring for an elderly relative to recovering from drug and alcohol addiction. In addition to online articles, there are booklets, CDs, audiotapes, and interactive tools available, all free. Service members can log on to the main site or go through the original portals specific to each branch. To access advice and help by individual service branch:

- **ARMY** - "Army OneSource" 800-464-8107
- **MARINES** - "Marines OneSource" 800-869-0278
- **NAVY** - "Navy OneSource" 800-540-4123
- **AIR FORCE** - "Air Force OneSource" 800-707-5784

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline

The only national suicide intervention hotline (800-273-TALK-8255) funded by the federal government, this number works 24 hours, seven days a week and is comprised of

over 100 crisis centers nationwide.

The National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Just about everything you might ever want to know about PTSD -- from the biology of the disease to its impact on spirituality -- is provided on this Web site in the form of fact sheets, medical papers, videos and more. The NCPTSD is a part of the VA that works to advance the clinical care and social welfare of America's veterans through research, education, and training in the science, diagnosis, and treatment of PTSD and stress-related disorders.

VVA's PTSD Claims Guide

The purpose of this guide is to assist the veteran, or the veteran's survivor(s), in presenting a claim for benefits based on exposure to psychologically traumatic events during military service that has resulted in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

DeploymentLINK

The difficulty of readjusting to home is addressed here on this Web site, with input from all four branches of the services, the Reserves and the VA.

VA Readjustment Counseling Services

You will be able to locate a Vet Center in your state on this Web site.

Vet Centers are small community organizations managed by the VA and dedicated to providing counseling for combat veterans from combat veterans. The site also links to tele-health services and the National Center for PTSD (see below).

The Courage to Care

A collection of electronic factsheets, this site covers everything from flu season to "psychological first aid" and features input from the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences.

REALifelines

The Recovery and Employment Assistance Lifelines initiative is a joint project of the U.S. Department of Labor, the Bethesda Naval Medical Center and the Walter Reed Army Medical Center. It works to create a seamless, personalized assistance network to ensure that seriously wounded and injured service members who cannot return to active duty are trained for rewarding new careers in the private sector.

TRICARE

The Web site for the official military health plan, TRICARE, explains what services are covered and also offers limited medical advice. One of the interesting links is "Healthy Choices for Life" which presents the results of a major 2002 survey of "health related behaviors" of military personnel.

Individual Services

The official web pages for the medical departments of each service branch that offer

press releases and directives from the top brass.

- Army Medicine
- Navy Medicine
- Air Force Medicine

Non-Governmental Support, General Support, and Advocacy Organizations for Service Members, Veterans and Their Families

National Veterans Foundation

The only nationwide non-governmental national hotline for veterans and their families providing crisis intervention, resource referral, benefits information and emotional support: 800-777-4443. (Monday-Friday, 9 am to 9 pm Pacific Time).

National Gulf War Resource Center

This is an international coalition of organizations that has been advocating for veterans since 1995. The NGWRC is a resource for information, support, referrals and how to file claims. Under "Resources" there is a self-help guide on PTSD, and be sure to explore the "PTSD and Readjustment" bulletin board.

PTSD Alliance

PTSD Alliance was launched in 2000 and works with anyone suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, including military veterans. The Alliance is a multi-disciplinary group of professional and advocacy organizations that have joined forces to provide educational resources to medical and health care professionals, individuals diagnosed with PTSD and their loved ones, the general public and the media.

Lariam Action USA

Lariam Action is an information and support service for people who have questions about the effects of the anti-malaria drug Lariam© (mefloquine). Lariam recently has become an issue because some U.S. troops in the Iraq war think it is linked to their severe behavioral changes.

Veterans and Families

"Let's get homecoming for veterans right this time," says the Web site of Veterans and Families, neatly summing up the organization's mission. A national non-profit community service and support organization, it is founded and directed by veterans, parents, grandparents, family members, employers, mental health professionals, academics and community leaders. It offers an online support group and links to recommended reading.

Patience Press

The wife of a Vietnam veteran created this site as a clearinghouse for PTSD information after her husband lived with the disease, undiagnosed, for fourteen years. Spouses will find a special section written with them in mind.

Disabled American Veterans

Formed in 1920 and chartered by Congress in 1932, the million-member DAV is the official voice of America's service-connected disabled veterans -- a strong, insistent voice that represents all of America's 2.1 million disabled veterans, their families and survivors. Its nationwide network of services -- free of charge to all veterans and members of their families -- is totally supported by membership dues and contributions from the American public. Not a government agency, the DAV's national organization receives no government funds.

Blinded Veterans Association

If you are a blind or visually impaired veteran, if you are a relative or a friend or if you just want to get involved, the BVA invites you to write, email or give them a call. The BVA is an organization specifically established to promote the welfare of blinded veterans and help them meet the challenges of blindness.

Paralyzed Veterans of America

The PVA Veterans Benefits Department provides assistance and representation before the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, without charge, to veterans with spinal cord injury or dysfunction, and their eligible dependents. They also assist clients with applying for health care, as well as other benefits they may be entitled to.

Military Spouse Resource Center

This organization offers a large resource library for military spouse employment, education, relocation information and much more.

National Military Family Association

The NMFA's mission is to provide timely and useful information to military families. There is much to explore on this organization's Web site.

Society of Military Widows

The Society of Military Widows (SMW) was founded in 1968 by Theresa (Tess) Alexander to serve the interests of women whose husbands died while on active military duty, of a service-connected illness, or during disability or regular retirement from the armed forces. SMW is a nonprofit organization.

TAPS (Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors)

The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, Inc. (TAPS) is a national non-profit organization made up of, and providing services to, all those who have lost a loved one while serving in any branch of the Armed Forces -- Army, Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, National Guard, Reserves, Service Academies or the Coast Guard. The heart of TAPS is a national military survivor peer support network. It also offers grief-counseling referral, case worker assistance and crisis information, all available to help families and military personnel cope and recover. The services are provided 24 hours a day, free of charge.

ESGR: Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve

Guardsmen and Reservists have the right to return to their civilian jobs following their service. Those who think their employers have acted unfairly -- for instance, if they believe they were fired because of their military service -- should contact the ESGR.

Just One Soldier

Iraq veteran Andrew Pogany has launched a national program to recruit mental health professionals in each community who will agree to see one Iraq veteran without charge. He can be reached at 719-351-4515 or gapogany@ngwrc.org.