

NYFS offers counseling for returning vets

With the recent return of Minnesota National Guard veterans of the Iraq war, many families are experiencing an adjustment period as loved ones reintegrate back into their daily lives. The stress of the coming holidays can complicate this situation. Fortunately, public and private organizations are lending a hand to make this transition go as smoothly as possible.

In an effort to prepare mental health professionals and other service providers for the special needs of returning vets, the Minnesota Social Services Association recently offered a training session designed to give professionals the tools and information they need to help vets and their families make the transition. Lucy Spina, mental health counselor with Northwest Youth and Family Services, recently attended the session and said it is important to remember that all returning vets can expect to experience some degree of difficulty returning to "normal" civilian life. She adds that while veterans were required to attend reintegration training events across the state in September and October, these events are not always sufficient for all veterans and their families.

The long separation can be difficult on marriages and families, she added, especially if the loved one returns home with physical or psychological injury due to the war. Problems can include post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, thoughts of suicide, substance abuse, depression and marital or family instability. Often, problems don't surface until weeks or months after returning home. Veterans experiencing extreme distress are encouraged to seek help immediately by calling 911 or the Crisis Connection at 1-866-379-6363.

At NYFS, counselors will be available to provide long-term counseling services for returning vets and their families. NYFS accepts Tricare military insurance and offers services on a sliding-fee scale to those without insurance.

The Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs has also established LinkVet, a call center designed to provide information on veterans' benefits, healthcare, education and reintegration. Help is available by dialing 1-888-LINKVET between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. All calls are referred to Crisis Connection after working hours.

While professional help is crucial, Spina says the general community can assist in veterans' reintegration by voicing their support. "Be non-judgmental about your view of the war and recognize their sacrifice, effort and courage."

For more information about counseling services for veterans at NYFS, please call 651-466-3808.

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