



Office of  
Mental Health

8<sup>th</sup> Annual ASAP Veterans Summit  
11.2.22

PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Program Statewide Expansion

# PFC Joseph P. Dwyer Peer Support Program

## What is the Dwyer Peer Support program?

- Honors the memory of PFC Joseph P. Dwyer and his service in Iraq;
- Began 2013 as a pilot with four counties, expanded to 25;
- 2022 NYS budget allocated \$7.7 million for statewide expansion;
- NYS OMH is the fiscal conduit for funding, just completed statewide regional forums to support expansion;
- Works to support Veterans and their family members to transition from military service and reintegrate into civilian life;
- Provides peer-to-peer **non-clinical supports**, services, social activities and events, opportunities for community service;
- Welcomes all veterans, regardless of service dates, or discharge status;
- Peer mentors receive training and support in their role;
- Free and confidential.

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## Barriers to care for veterans:

- Veterans may be reluctant to identify needs and reach out for support;
- Military culture: discipline, teamwork, self-sacrifice, loyalty, “code of silence”
- Stigma associated with mental health and SUD issues - public stigma, self stigma, structural stigma in military;
- Negative experiences in military, including military sexual trauma, PTSD, TBI;
- Geographical access to care, bureaucracy, transition to VA care, reintegration to civilian life;
- Lack of military cultural competency in civilian providers.

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## Why do Dwyer Peer-to-peer programs work?

- Dwyer can replicate service experience: a defined mission and role, shared organizational structure, culture and goals, identified hierarchy and built-in support;
- Separation from service – loss of role identity, social isolation, trauma, lack of trust, stress, MH issues, SUD issues;
- Provide social connectedness and engagement, common lived experience, develop positive relationships, social supports, ability to give to others in community;
- Local control over programs and services tailored to community;
- Vet-to-vet peer support
- If needed, warm handoff/referral to professional MH/SUD services.

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## Resources

NYS Office of Mental Health

[karen.debell@omh.ny.gov](mailto:karen.debell@omh.ny.gov)

[Dwyer\\_project@omh.ny.gov](mailto:Dwyer_project@omh.ny.gov)

NYS Department of Veterans Services

[benjamin.Pomerance@veterans.ny.gov](mailto:benjamin.Pomerance@veterans.ny.gov)

NY State Dwyer Coalition

[gavin.walters@hvcvr.org](mailto:gavin.walters@hvcvr.org)