



Mainland BC

Military Family Resource Centre

News release

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Military vet says family, community support vital for medically released personnel

Vancouver, BC – Canadian Armed Forces Corporal Angela Ayre (retired) endorses the value of the Veteran Family Program-sponsored mental health first aid course being offered to medically released veterans and their families by Mainland BC Military Family Resource Centre (BCMFRFC). Not only did she complete the course's pilot program, she is personally familiar with the tremendous challenges faced by medically released veterans.

Mental Health First Aid – Veteran Community is only one component of the new Veteran Family Program launched last April which BCMFRFC delivers on behalf of Veteran Affairs Canada (VAC). Accessible through all 32 Military Family Resource Centres (MFRC) in Canada, the Veteran Family Program supports the health and well-being of families as they transition from military to post-service life.

Ayre was medically released by the military after a 14-year career that started right out of high school. Up till that point, being a soldier was her identity and to be told that she could no longer put on the uniform and serve her country was devastating. Thanks to the care and support of family, friends, her military family, and health care professionals, she successfully migrated into a new and fulfilling career.

She now works as a Veteran Family Program coordinator with BCMFRFC, guiding medically released veterans and family members through the oftentimes difficult transition from military to post-service life. The conditions of a medical release can range from physical ailments to mental health issues including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and substance use.

According to Ayre, medically released vets can find themselves in a unique state of shell shock, overwhelmed by feelings of confusion and loss because the decision to be medically released was not their choice. Medically released veterans can also face a tremendous fear of the unknown, and of losing their military families which are as strongly bonded as any conventional family.

"Serving in the military is not like a regular job. Soldiers eat, breathe and sleep their job. Everything they do is closely knit. They are willing to die for the person beside them. They are operationally trained to go to war and to sacrifice," said Ayre.

Among the medically released veterans with whom she interacts, mental health issues are commonplace, and families are the ones who support them. The Mental Health First Aid – Veteran Community course educates the family, gives them tools to assist the veteran and each other through tough times so that they are not alone.

For example, the course can help veterans and their families deal with "go mode" mentality. In the military, soldiers are on alert at all times; hence, the term "go mode". It's hard for them to let go of this when they leave the military. It cultivates a fertile breeding ground for anxiety and PTSD, and may put families on edge, too. The course helps everyone better understand issues and behaviours veterans and their families may be experiencing during times of transition.

Ultimately, it will enable participants to build the skills and confidence necessary to engage in effective conversations about mental health and recognize the most common mental health problems and illnesses. It will increase their comfort level with, and willingness to, assist others, and mitigate discrimination around mental health problems and illnesses.

For Ayre, the most important aspect of the course was learning about the different elements of mental health, and how to be a better listener to those in need. She says it doesn't erase the stigma but it helps.

The two-day course is open to all members of the community who can contribute to supporting the veteran community. Courses will be offered in various locations in the province. The next course takes place Nov. 1 and 2, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., at the Coast Chilliwack Hotel at 45920 First Avenue. Space is limited with priority given to medically released/releasing veterans and families. Registration is on a first come, first served basis. Register by contacting info@bcmfrc.com.

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA), mental illness indirectly affects all Canadians at some time through a family member, friend or colleague. In any given year, one in five people in Canada will personally experience a mental health problem or illness.

Canadian Armed Forces families face a unique intersection of challenges: extended separations from loved ones; frequent relocation; and the elevated risk associated with the military member's occupation. The Mainland BC Military Family Resource Centre (BCMFRFC) is a registered charitable organization (Reg. No. 1387 24430 RR0001) that supports more than 1,600 military and veteran families in British Columbia, offering resources and services to help address these challenges.

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