

NAVIGATING EMPLOYMENT OBSTACLES: THE EXPERIENCE OF VETERANS WITH DISABILITIES

Kelly Durkee-Erwin
Individualized Placement and Support Employment Specialist
VA Boston Healthcare System

Disclaimer and Acknowledgement

**The views expressed in this presentation
are those of the presenter and
do not necessarily reflect the official policies
of the Department of Veterans Affairs
or the United States government.**

I have no relevant financial relationships to disclose.

**This material is based upon work supported by the
Massachusetts Executive Office of Veterans Services.**

INTRODUCTION



FULL BIO

- Kelly A. Durkee-Erwin comes from a long line of military heroes – starting with her grandfather Private First Class, John T. Mulhane, who was killed in action during World War II in March of 1945. Her mom and siblings became American War orphans.
- Her dad, uncles, and father-in-law served during Vietnam, and her three brothers joined the US Army from 1983 to today.
- Kelly has received a number of awards for her dedication and work in Veterans C.A.R.E program at the VA Boston as an IPS Employment Specialist
- She is a Gold Star, Blue Star, and Purple Heart Family member and a proud member of the American Legion Auxiliary, Military Order of the Purple Heart Auxiliary, Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary, Blue Star Families, Gold Star Families, and is the 2024-2025 Massachusetts Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary President
- In her free time (when there is any!) she volunteers with the Waltham American Legion Band, JP VA Hospital, Scouting Troop 248, Military Friends Foundation and is a board member of the Waltham Arts Council. She also cohosts a Waltham local cable show titled 'Kelly's Heroes' which focuses on getting essential information to local veterans.
- Finally, Kelly lives in Waltham with her husband, son, family friend, Mom and Dad.

Overview

Introductions

Survey of obstacles

Identified obstacles

Overcoming obstacles

Resources

Individual Placement and Support (IPS)



- Competitive employment
- systematic job development
- Rapid job search
- Integrated services
- Benefits planning
- Zero exclusion
- Time-unlimited supports
- Worker preferences

IPSworks.org

Whole



Health

OBSTACLES OBSERVED



Obstacles by category

Benefits Eligibility

Communication

Financial

Housing

Medical

Stigma

Benefits/ Eligibility

Definition of Veteran (State vs. Federal) = eligibility



VA Veteran Readiness & Employment (VRE)

GI Bill

VA services

- Solution:**
- 1) Veterans Affairs Eligibility Officers
 - 2) Speak to a VRE counselor
 - 3) Veteran Service Claims Officers (VFW, DAV)

Communication

- 1) Access to technology
- 2) Military speak
- 3) Civilian understanding
- 4) Human interaction vs. remote isolation

Solution: 1) Technology programs – Laptops4Veterans etc
2) Outreach of VA – Social Work, Emp prgrams
3) Getting people back face to face





Financial

- 1) Cost of transportation
- 2) Cost of interviews
- 3) Stability/food
- 4) Insecurity/strain on relationships

Solution: 1) VA Financial Working Group
2) Nonprofits: Dress to Success, Rosies Pantry
3) Mental health/family counseling

Housing

- 1) No job – no rent
- 2) Massachusetts rents
- 3) HUD/VASH voucher scarcity
- 4) Homelessness

Solution: 1) HUD/VASH program
2) City/Town VSOs
3) Legislation
4) Nonprofits – Father Bills, VNEOC





Medical

- 1) Ongoing diagnosis
- 2) New diagnosis
- 3) Appointments/Cost
- 4) Accommodations

Solution: 1) VA or Community Care professionals
2) Veteran Service Claims Officers (VFW, DAV)
3) Reasonable accommodations officers/ADA

STIGMA

Media Portrayal

PTSD Stigma

National Guard/Reservists

Ongoing treatment

- Solution:**
- 1) Accurate portrayal in media
 - 2) Holding employers accountable (USERRA, ESGR)
 - 3) Speak out – normal counseling for all

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Over, under, or around

Where to go for help



VA Hospitals, CBOCs,
or Vet Centers



Employment
Specialists



City/Town Veteran
Service Officers



Veteran Service
Organizations



Non-profits



Service centers



Regional Veteran
Collaboratives

Resources

Organization	Website	Focus
Veterans Affairs	https://www.va.gov/	Benefits/Eligibility
MA Exec Office of Veterans Services	https://www.mass.gov/orgs/executive-office-of-veterans-services	Veteran resources
MA VSOs	https://www.mass.gov/info-details/find-a-veterans-service-officer-near-you	City/Town Assist
IPS Works	https://ipsworks.org/	IPS Tools
Financial resources for Veterans	https://www.va.gov/REACH/challenge/money-challenges/	Finance

THANK YOU

Kelly Durkee-Erwin

617-390-4169

Kelly.durkeeerwin@va.gov