### 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.

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# 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

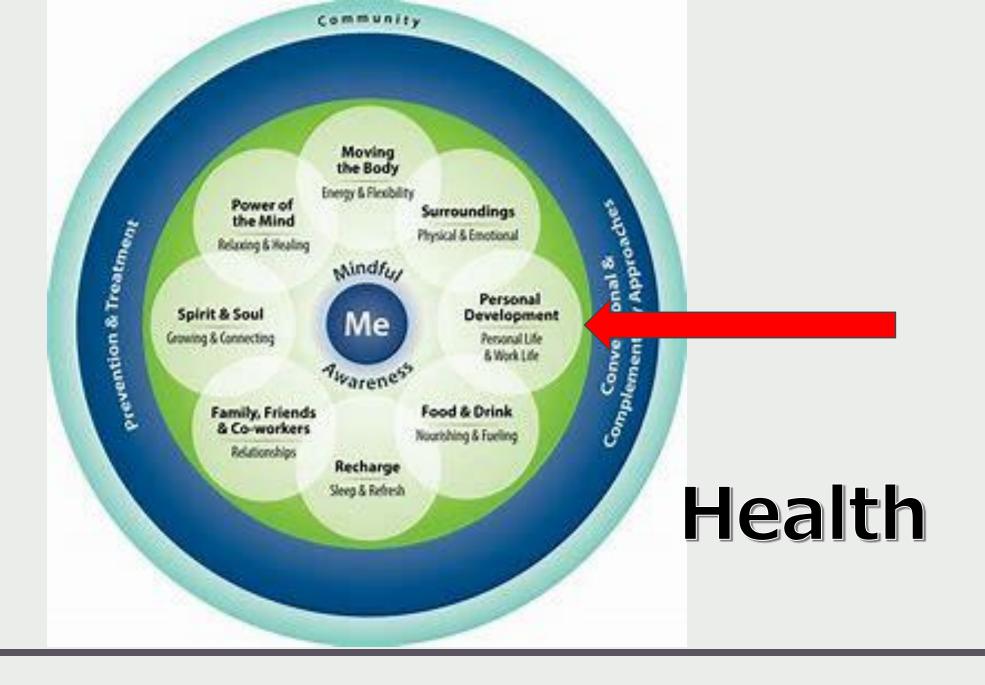
# Individual Placement and Support (IPS)



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

IPSworks.org

## Whole



# 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

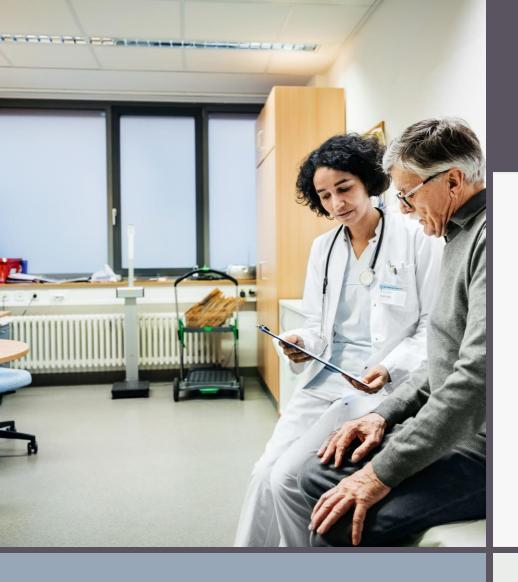
#### Housing

- 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

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