

Veterans & Family Support Promotion #1 | July 2023
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My name is Tessa Butcher, and I am a Life Member of Fred E. Ellis VFW Auxiliary 2715 in McPherson, Kansas. I was born in Okinawa, Japan, where I lived until I was 2. When I turned 16, I joined the Auxiliary under the eligibility of my father, Richard Butcher, who is a retired Air Force veteran. He served for more than 20 years and was deployed during Desert Storm.

Through the years, I have held offices within my Auxiliary, District and Department. In 2016, I was honored as the Delegate to our District Convention, elected me to serve as President. 2017 brought a huge surprise when Past National President, Dee Guillory, asked me to serve as the Western Conference Youth Activities Chairman and again in 2019 when I was able to serve during Past National President, Peggy Haake's year as National Flag Bearer. In 2022, I had the honor of representing Kansas as our Department President under the theme "One Team, One Goal, Making a Difference." Due to the efforts of all our Auxiliaries, working together, we were awarded the Circle of Excellence.

Having served as Chairman for several Programs on the local, District & Department level, I was honored when this year, I was asked by National President Carla to serve as a National Ambassador. This is my first time serving as a National Ambassador and look forward to seeing how other Departments promote this Program.



PROGRAM GOALS:

- **NATIONAL VETERANS SERVICE**
- **VETERANS & MILITARY SUPPORT PROGRAMS**
- **SUICIDE PREVENTION & MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS**

Veterans & Family Support is the heart of our organization and a Program every member can and should participate in. We are all united in our passion for this organization and at our core we are all here for the same purpose, to support our veterans, service members, their families and our communities! This year we'll be ***Banding Together for Our Veterans*** by focusing on National Veterans Service, Veteran & Military Support Programs and Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Awareness.

Through the **National Veterans Service** and **Veterans and Military Support Programs**, there are several resources available to assist our veterans, active-duty military and their families. I encourage you to utilize the **Resource Rack Cards** located behind MALTA under Member Resources. These cards provide phone numbers and websites for several different organizations that benefit our veterans, service members and their families.

National Veterans Service helps veterans, service members and their families obtain the benefits they deserve, at no cost to them, by pairing them with a service officer. Service officers can be found by going to the VFW Website, www.vfw.org and looking at the VA Claims and Separation Benefits section under the assistance tab. Service officers are able to assist with filing claims for:

- Disability

- Rehabilitation & education
- Pension programs & death benefits
- Employment & training programs

Service officers also help navigate the VA System and ensure our veterans receive:

- Hospital care
- Outpatient care
- Specialized health care for female veterans
- Alcohol and drug dependency treatment
- Medical evaluation for disorders associated with military service, exposure to Agent Orange, radiation or other environmental hazards.

The **Veterans and Military Support Program** is made up of three components – **Military Assistance Program (MAP)**, **Unmet Needs** and **VFW “Sport Clips® Help a Hero Scholarship.”**

The **Military Assistance Program (MAP)** allows VFW and Auxiliaries to apply for financial assistance for send-offs, homecomings and get-togethers for the Adopt-A-Unit program. Adopt-a-Unit’s goal is to develop supportive relationships with units before, during and after deployments to help deliver the vast network of resources the VFW and Auxiliary has to offer for not only our veterans and active-duty personnel – but their families as well. Both the Adopt-A-Unit application and MAP application are available by going to the VFW website and clicking on Troop Support under the community tab. Both applications must be filed online. The MAP application is also available under Member Resources in MALTA.

Unmet Needs provides grants up to \$1,500 for basic life needs. Applicants must be the service member, veteran or eligible dependent listed under the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System.

Eligibility for the grant must fall in one of the following three categories:

- A. The Applicant must be currently on active duty, whose financial hardship is a result of a current deployment, military pay error or from being discharged for medical reasons.
- B. The Applicant may have been discharged after Sep. 11, 2001, and have a financial hardship that is a direct result of military connected service injuries and/or illness.
- C. The Applicant may have been discharged prior to Sep. 11, 2001, and be on a fixed income, that must include VA compensation for service-connected injuries/illnesses and who are facing an unexpected financial hardship.

Visit www.vfw.org/assistance/financial-grants to learn more.

In 2013, Sport Clips® launched the VFW’s “**Sport Clips® Help a Hero Scholarship.**” These scholarships support service members and veterans as they work to get the education and training needed to begin the next chapter in their lives. Applications are accepted **Aug. 1 through Nov. 15 for the spring semester** and **Jan. 1 through April 30 for the fall semester**. Applicants may apply once per academic semester, regardless of prior award or denial. Applications must be filed online at www.vfw.org/assistance/student-veterans-support. Scholarships are awarded up to \$5,000 and are administered directly to the schools.

It's so easy to combine other National Programs with Veterans & Family Support! As we approach Independence Day, make plans to march in a parade! I encourage your Auxiliary to purchase some of the **Thank You coins** that are available from the VFW Store. They are a great way to recognize our veterans in attendance and a way we can say thank you for your service. While not a public holiday, July 27 is Korean War Veterans Armistice Day. Celebrated each year on the same day, we as Auxiliary members can show our appreciation for our veterans from the Korean War era by holding remembrance programs for them with a Flag or wreath-laying ceremony at our local veteran memorials.

September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, which encourages organizations to come together to spread awareness about **suicide prevention** and to advocate for **mental health** legislation. The VFW and Auxiliary can band together with other organizations to raise awareness and foster community engagement to change the stigma surrounding mental health. It's important that we know the warning signs so that if we recognize that someone in our life is suffering, we can encourage them to reach out and get the help that they need. So, what are those signs?

- Change in personality.
- Agitation – being uncharacteristically angry, anxious or moody.
- Withdrawal from family & friends
- Poor self-care
- Hopelessness

The National Organization has provided us with resources to utilize in promoting advocacy for **suicide prevention and mental health awareness** such as the blue teardrop stickers and pins as well as the Veterans Crisis Line posters.

It's **up to each of us** to honor our veterans' service to this great nation. All of us *banding together for our veterans* will fight for their rights and offer the support and encouragement that is needed not only to them – but to our active-duty military and their families as well. I look forward to hearing from each of the Department Chairmen and can't wait to see what you all do with this Program!

Program Awards: This year, there will be **two** National Awards available for **Auxiliaries**. The first is to one Auxiliary in each of the four Conferences that has the **most outstanding activity and/or event to increase awareness of military suicide and mental health**. The second is for the **most outstanding activity and/or event to increase the support of veterans, service members and their families**. See the 2023-2024 National Program Book for more details.

