



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

## Senator Young Backs Life-Saving Veterans' Program

CATHARINE YOUNG December 4, 2018

| ISSUE: **VETERANS, JOSEPH DWYER PEER-TO-PEER VETERANS' SUPPORT PROGRAM, COMMUNITIES**

OLEAN – Every day, an average of 22 U.S. military veterans take their own lives. For many, this tragic outcome results from personal battles with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or a traumatic brain injury (TBI).

To help protect veterans who sacrifice so much to defend us and our country, Senator Catharine Young (R, C, I – 57<sup>th</sup> District) has secured a \$135,000 grant in the state budget to create a Cattaraugus County branch of the PFC Joseph Dwyer Peer-to-Peer Veterans Support Program.

Senator Young also secured \$185,000 to continue the program in Chautauqua County, where the program has successfully helped veterans since 2015.

The Dwyer Program, as it is commonly known, has been highly successful in bringing veterans together in a secure, anonymous setting in order to help one another cope with PTSD and TBIs. Currently, the Dwyer Program is helping veterans in 16 New York counties. In 2015, Senator Young secured funding to bring the program to Chautauqua County.

The program is open to all veterans, regardless of branch of service, deployment record or official medical designation as suffering from PTSD.

The program is operated with six goals in mind:

- Pursuing outreach and education;
- Providing peer-to-peer support;
- Building resiliency among veterans;
- Encouraging a connection between veterans, their families, friends, and the community;
- Providing access to suicide prevention/intervention initiatives; and
- Fostering an atmosphere of hope.

“When veterans return from combat, they often face challenges as they reintegrate into civilian life,” Senator Young said. “Families and friends of returning soldiers, and soldiers who have been home for decades, sometimes find it difficult to understand the demons haunting their loved ones. Personal dialogue with those who have experienced the same struggles has been shown as a highly-effective tool to help those suffering from PTSD and other stress disorders find relief.”

Steve McCord, director of the Cattaraugus County Veterans’ Services Agency, said the Dwyer Program will be a welcome addition to the services available to county veterans. He also thanked Senator Young for her ongoing support of veterans.

“Anytime we can bring in a new program to help veterans, especially those struggling with PTSD, it’s a great thing,” he said. “We support this program and we’re extremely excited about bringing it to Cattaraugus County.”

According to the Dwyer Program website, since the program began five years ago, not one struggling veteran who has participated has taken their own life.

“The Dwyer Program provides a unique veteran-to-veteran approach that connects servicemen and women with those who can relate, so that all involved can draw on their personal experience to cope with PTSD, with the ultimate goal of saving lives. The program is named in memory of PFC Joseph Dwyer, a war hero who, despite the support from a loving family, passed away in 2008 from complications with PTSD following his return from service in Iraq,” Senator Young said.

Cindy Reidy coordinates the Dwyer Program for the Chautauqua County Veterans’ Services Agency. She said an average of 60 veterans participate in the Chautauqua County program each month, and new veterans join the program weekly.

“Veterans have their own language, that’s for sure,” she said. “Our job is to give them the space where they can feel safe, make a connection with other veterans and start talking to one another.”

She said one veteran who just joined the program had not left his house in nine years other than for doctor’s appointments. His wife encouraged him to attend a Dwyer Program meeting.

“Now he comes to all our events,” Ms. Reidy said. “He said, ‘I have brothers now.’”

First established in Suffolk County as part of the 2012-2013 State Budget, the Dwyer Program has already been used successfully to assist veterans in Chautauqua, Broome, Erie, Niagara, Jefferson, Monroe, Nassau, Onondaga, Orange, Putnam, Rensselaer, Rockland, Saratoga, Dutchess, Suffolk and Westchester counties.

Cattaraugus veterans interested in taking part in the program can contact Cattaraugus County Veterans' Service Agency at: <http://www.cattco.org/veterans> or at **716-701-3296**.

In Chautauqua County, veterans can call Ms. Reidy at 716-661-8447 at her office or via cell phone at 716-661-8447 for more information. You can also visit the program's website at: <http://dwyerchautauqua.com/> or its Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/DwyerChautauqua/>.