



The Victory for Veterans peer support program at St. Luke's Penn Foundation has received a 2024 PA Suicide Prevention Award from the Commonwealth Prevention Alliance (CPA) in recognition of its success in reducing veteran suicide. Team members accepting the award are: Trish Nye, Robert Brands, Kristin Pogwist, Chris Troxell, Jane Straw.

Victory for Veterans Program Recognized for Reducing Veteran Suicides

By Sam Kennedy

BETHLEHEM - The Victory for Veterans peer support program at St. Luke's Penn Foundation has received a 2024 PA Suicide Prevention Award from the Commonwealth Prevention Alliance (CPA) in recognition of its success in reducing veteran suicide. The award is given to individuals and groups that are making significant contributions to improving their communities, schools and beyond through prevention and positive mental health initiatives. Victory for Veterans is one of four 2024 award recipients from the Northeast Pennsylvania Region.

The goal of Victory for Veterans is to reduce veteran suicide. Carbon County has the highest number of veteran suicides of all the 67 counties in Pennsylvania.

Victory for Veterans is a group of certified peer specialists who provide outreach, counseling and education to veterans who may feel isolated, are potentially at risk for suicide and are in need of mental health services. The program enables veterans to talk with another veteran about their military experiences or difficulty adjusting to civilian life. In addition, the program assists veterans with challenges of everyday life, such as finding a job, housing, educational and vocational programs and counseling services.

"We are honored to be recognized for our important work of helping to prevent veteran suicides," said Robert Brands, the Victory for Veterans manager. "We know a lot of veterans in Carbon and Schuylkill counties are struggling with the challenges of everyday life, and our program is designed to help them overcome and navigate the many barriers and issues they face, including when transitioning from military to civilian life."

Victory for Veterans was launched in the late winter 2022 in Carbon County and expanded to include Schuylkill County in September 2023. The program is funded through a \$535,424 grant from the Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Program of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). It is one of many services St. Luke's provides to those who have served their country through military service.

Certified Victory for Veterans peer support specialists draw upon their lived experiences of recovery from substance use or mental health issues, along with skills learned in formal training, to support veterans struggling with similar problems. Because they can understand veterans' issues, peer specialists are uniquely qualified to offer practical skills/knowledge, empathy, hope and insight, said. Brands, a Persian Gulf War combat veteran who served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1987 to 1991 in Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

In addition to peer support, Victory for Veterans connects veterans to behavioral health and substance use counseling available through the VA and St. Luke's. Its case managers refer veterans to community organizations that provide housing and employment services.

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460 FROM 2015-2021 REPORTED ACCIDENTAL OVERDOSE DEATHS IN NORTHAMPTON COUNTY, PA

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76,975 FROM 2018-2022 DOSES OF NARCAN GIVEN BY EMS

4 OUT OF 10 PILLS BOUGHT ON THE STREET CONTAIN LETHAL DOSES OF FENTANYL

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Treatments and Resources

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