



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
September 19th, 2017**

I. Call to Order & Introductions

Dan Bullis, Chairman, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Dan asked for all present to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance and to remain standing for a moment of silence for all of those who have given their lives and those who have been wounded for our country in the different conflicts in which our country has been engaged. A POW/MIA Empty Chair is placed at all official meetings of the Commission as a physical symbol of the thousands of American POW/MIAs still unaccounted for from all wars and conflicts involving the United States of America. A moment of silence was also held for ten sailors who died in the USS McCain accident, including Electronics Technician 2nd Class Kevin Sayer Bushell, 26, from Gaithersburg and Information Systems Technician 2nd Class Timothy Thomas Eckels Jr., 23, from Baltimore.

II. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made to approve the June 2017 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the June 2017 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Special Presentation: Bridging the Veteran and Non-Veteran World – “Is Anyone Listening?” – Paula J. Caplan, Ph.D. Associate, Hutchins Center, Harvard University

Website - Is Anybody Listening? Film: www.isanybodylisteningmovie.org

Website – Listen2Veteran: www.listen2veterans.org

Website - The Listening Session Guide:

http://whenjohnnyandjanecomemarching.weebly.com/uploads/5/9/5/1/5951178/the_listening_session_guide_august_2016.docx

This film is based on Dr. Caplan’s three-time award winning book When Johnny and Jane Come Marching Home. Dr. Caplan is a psychologist at Harvard and does research on connecting the veteran and non-veteran community. The film has been shown all over the country with approximately 53 screenings. Due to an anonymous \$25,000 donation, the film could be made. The Veterans featured in the film answered an ad that was posted on the Veterans in Film and Television Facebook page. All the Veterans who responded to the ad ended up in the film. Dr. Caplan contacted a PBS Station in California to gauge their interest in airing the film. They requested some editing as well as captioning of the film, which cost an additional \$15,000. DVDs of the film are available for purchase with tiered pricing – lower for Veterans and non-profits and highest for universities. Dr. Caplan is currently developing a film for Isaac Pope, a Veteran featured in the Is Anybody Listening film, about his life and what happened in the war. The film will premiere this December when Mr. Pope turns 100.

In 2011, Dr. Caplan organized a conference at the Harvard Kennedy School that featured 28 different methods of therapy including physical exercise, meditation and mindfulness, become involved in the arts and community service, and service dogs. The same year Dr. Caplan visited the Pentagon and met with the head of Behavioral Health and their top two aides to discuss methods of therapy. She noted to them that DoD and VA press releases were reporting an increase in rates for suicide, homelessness, substance abuse and family breakdown despite an increase in providing therapy services and medication resources. Today, some VA facilities have been using medication, yoga, and service animals as alternative therapies.

The floor was opened for questions and comments.

- How would a non-Veteran access a list of available Veterans? Any Veteran or non-Veteran can contact Dr. Caplan at welcomjohnnyandjanehome@gmail.com to be connected with someone else for a session. Or anyone organizing this Project in their area can do the matching up. It is then up to the veteran and nonveteran to schedule a time to meet and do the session. Individuals can also visit local Veterans organization, such as the American Legion, Veterans homes, nursing homes, hospice care, or ask their clergy. In Ashland and Richland counties in Ohio, a veteran-focused listening initiative was coordinated by The Ohio State University at Mansfield, North Central State University, Ashland University and the Richland County Veterans Administration. Chapters are also being established in Chicago and California. Listeners should read the Listening Session Guide prior to any listening session. No audio or video recording or note taking should take place. The session should be held in a space where there will be no interruptions. Listener are also available for a close family member of a Veteran.
- Veterans of different eras may be able to share their stories with no judgement. While the Listen 2 Veterans project does not match Veterans with Veterans, this can be beneficial to both participants. Some Veterans prefer to talk to other Veterans while some do not. The Listen 2 Veterans project seeks to connect the non-Veteran population with the Veteran population.
- If this film was to be shared in a high school setting, would it be appropriate for high school students age 17 to 18 years old be listeners? The parent or teacher of the student should be the judge of the situation.
- It was asked how Dr. Caplan began her hypothesis for this project. Dr. Caplan reported that she held a research project at Harvard Kennedy School. The Veteran participants were from all eras (WWII to present), combat and non-combat, male and female. They were asked a few questions after the listening session as well as a one-month follow-up: what was good about the sessino, what was bad, and what surprised them. While they did not receive 100% response participation, there were no negative responses received. For more information, about the research project please visit <http://whenjohnnyandjanecomemarching.weebly.com/draft-paper.html>.
- The Commission has a Speakers Bureau and Veterans have spoken to various schools on Veterans Day about their experiences. Bill Gray, Commissioner, noted that he has benefited from speaking to the students and they in turn have benefited from hearing about his experiences.
- There were concerns expressed by several people that the film portrayed psychiatric or mental health therapy and medication in a negative light and Veterans who are using these methods may feel guilty/shame when seeing this film. It was suggested that the film be edited to include the message that some people do find therapy and/or medication and/or alternative therapies helpful for them. The point being that there are many options and people need to choose what works best for them. Dr. Caplan noted that the film was edited to fit the PBS time limit. She would like to add information regarding the Kennedy School 28 different kinds of approaches.
- Do VA therapists list whether they served in the military? It is up to the individual therapist to indicate if they have served.

IV. Chairman Report:

Dan Bullis, Chairman, will be presenting the Commission's top two policy priorities for FY18 before the County Council Health and Human Services Committee on October 18th. Two policy priorities identified were: 1) the continuation of the awareness and promotion of the coming CBOC and 2) the Vietnam memorial. Susan made a motion to adopt these two policy priorities. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the policy priorities were unanimously approved.

Dan asked for suggestions for future presentations and meetings.

V. Announcements:

Mark Servatius, Public, reported that the Unity Club will host it's first Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meeting for Veterans starting this Saturday evening.

Hazel Gross, Elks Lodge #15, reported that Team River Runner is pleased to welcome Betsy to their program a few Sundays ago. Betsy noted that Montgomery Parks is looking into getting a grant from the Department of Natural Resources to install an accessible launch at Riley's Lock. Team River Runner will be hosting its annual fundraising biathlon on October 1st in Georgetown: https://teamriverrunner.myetap.org/fundraiser/dc_biathlon17/.

Julie Riggs, Serving Together, reported that a free workshop titled "Recognizing the Effects of Secondary Trauma, Compassion Fatigue & Burnout on Service Providers, Clinicians & Caregivers Assisting the Military Population and Others" will be held on Tuesday, October 17th from 9:00am to 12:00pm at the Henry M. Jackson Foundation in Bethesda. Registration required: www.every-mind.org/community-education/continuing-education/.

Betsy received an email from Minkoff, the developer for the Gaithersburg Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) and they will be pulling the permits tomorrow to begin work. The goal is for the CBOC to be opened in December, 2017.

Adjournment: 8:00pm

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, October 17th, 2017 from 6:00pm to 7:30pm at Health & Human Services Building, 401 Hungerford Drive, 1st Floor 1A Conference Room, Rockville, MD 20850

Respectfully submitted:

Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I

Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager