

The Welcome Johnny and Jane Home Project: **A LISTENING INITIATIVE**

Upon returning home and to civilian life, many veterans struggle and suffer from a sense of isolation because of their military experiences. It is important to create an environment that is safe, accepting, and supportive of all veterans; it will help them heal and will increase their chances of attaining their personal, educational, and career goals.

An effective way of fostering a trauma-informed culture specifically for veterans has been created by psychologist and award winning author Paula J. Caplan, Ph.D.* It is based on the book *When Johnny and Jane Come Marching Home: How All of Us Can Help Veterans*, which is about the painful isolation many veterans experience when they return from war or military service. Most of us are both war-illiterate and military-illiterate. Caplan proposes that we welcome veterans back into our communities and listen to their experiences, one-on-one. The astonishing power of listening, often these days underestimated, is explored with regard to having nonveterans simply listen with respect and without judgment to veterans as they share their military experiences. Every nonveteran should listen to a veteran share their experience.

This project is the start of a long overdue national discussion about the realities of war and is helping veterans heal while bridging the chasm between veterans and nonveterans. It is not enough to relegate the healing power of listening to professional therapists or specialized programs. While these may be helpful for some, it often adds to the veteran's sense of isolation. The goal of this project is to teach nonveteran civilians the lost and powerful human art of listening and to create opportunities for veterans to share their experiences with a compassionate, non-judgmental and supportive nonveteran. By promoting this project in our community, we can create safe and supportive opportunities for our veterans. In addition, the project will create opportunities to apply the principles of listening and support to a more general trauma-informed community, to include experiences related to domestic violence, abuse, neglect, and other adverse experiences.

Caplan's *Welcome Johnny and Jane Home* project is about welcoming veterans back into our communities and providing opportunities to share their experiences one-on-one. The project has its roots in cultural and social traditions that *expect* the community to reach out, to be supportive, and to nurture the healing of those who have been wounded by trauma. These traditions foster healing and recovery from psychologically distressful experiences by promoting narrative, interpersonal, and community responses. In addition, these traditions can inform us about ways we can prevent trauma and promote resiliency by fostering safe, stable, and nurturing relationships. The *Welcome Johnny and Jane Home* project provides our community with a new and innovative opportunity to support our veterans and foster their success.

For more information about how you or your organization can support this project contact:

Steve Stone, Executive Director
MHRB of Ashland County
Sstone@ashlandmhrb.org
419-281-3139

Jenny Whitmore, OSU Intern, Project Coordinator
MHRB of Ashland County
Welisten2vets@ashlandmhrb.org
419-281-3139, Ext. 1232

Or visit our website at: www.ashlandmhrb.org

*Paula J. Caplan, Ph.D. is a clinical and research psychologist, activist, social justice and human rights advocate, nonfiction writer, award-winning playwright, screenwriter, actor, and director. She is currently an Associate at the Hutchins Center, Harvard University and recently completed a two-year fellowship at Harvard Kennedy School's Women and Public Policy Program. She is the author of 11 books and editor of a 12th. Her latest book, *When Johnny and Jane Come Marching Home: How All of Us Can Help Veterans*, won three national awards.

Caplan also heads The Welcome Johnny and Jane Home Coalition, whose mission is to de-pathologize war trauma (stop saying those troubled by war are mentally ill) and increase the use of non-pathologizing, low-risk ways to help veterans heal emotionally, morally, and spiritually. The Coalition currently includes, among others, the Military Officers Association of America, the National Veterans Foundation, the Women in Military Service to America Memorial Foundation, International Society for Ethical Psychology and Psychiatry, Iraq Veterans Against the War, and Soldier's Heart.