John W Crews Jr DAV Center #13

Stephanie Crosby

NURS401

American Military University

Professor Signe Gilbert

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 The John W Crews Jr Disabled American Veterans center is in West Columbia, South Carolina just outside of the metropolitan area. This thirteenth chapter of the DAV serves veterans from all branches in Columbia and the surrounding areas. They hold meetings every third Tuesday of the month and is open to all members to attend. Yvonne Cunningham is the local chapter commander, but my point of contact for this paper is Charlotte Whitaker, the office manager, (DAV, 2024).

 The role of the DAV is to fight and advocate for veterans’ right after they leave the military. No matter the age, military occupation specialty or branch, the DAV serves its veteran population equally in acquiring benefits, housing and professional development. Professionals are available to guide veterans through making VA claims and obtaining a disability rating and healthcare. Career counselors provide guidance and step by step plans to prepare transitioning servicemembers for a civilian career outside the military. The DAV also works legislatively, advocating to lawmakers for the development of programs that provide additional benefits to veterans. The DAV served over 1 million veterans in 2023, filing over 200,000 claims with the VA on behalf of veterans and earning them over 28 billion dollars in benefits, (DAV, 2024).

 The DAV is truly a one stop shop for veterans who are exiting military life, or just looking to stabilize their finances through career change. The DAV joins the fight for veterans rights on Capitol Hill by lobbying for legislation which makes benefits more accessible, particularly when it comes to healthcare. Navigating the VA claims system is tumultuous, oftentimes requiring veterans to go outside the VA system to hire disability lawyers who specialize in VA claims. The DAV can help mitigate these costs by providing professionals who can advocate for veterans in their claim process.

 The DAV also advocates for the employment of veterans through employment programs such as the Patriot Employer Program, which compiles a comprehensive directory of companies who not only hire veterans but provide support and accommodation for their specific needs. Any member of the DAV can nominate a company to become part of the directory, provided the company passes the requirements of the DAV for membership, (DAV, 2024).

 When disaster strikes, DAV is there to help its members by providing disaster kits and emergency funds to veteran families who have been impacted by small or large scale natural disasters. Victims are provided with food, clothing and shelter, supported by donated dollars to the DAV. In 2022 alone, the DAV distributed over 2 million dollars in relief funds. Additionally, 975 relief kits were issued, all thanks to donations from members and corporations supporting the cause, (DAV, 2024).

 A significant barrier to care for veterans is transportation to VA clinics, (Mary K Wolfe, et al., 2020). The DAV also shows up for its members by providing vans, by appointment to transport the veteran to their closest VA clinic, at no cost. These vehicles are all donated by the local chapters of the DAV and Ford Motor Company, (DAV, 2024). A veteran need only to peruse the hospital directory provided on the DAV website to locate and reserve the service nearest to them.

 Veterans are not the only population to which the DAV provides support. Caregivers and family members of veterans also have resources available to help understand and support the veteran throughout transition. Education is available covering the unique needs and challenges of veterans of combat. Caregivers can learn how to screen their loved ones and look out for risk factors relating to mental health and suicide risk. The program is powered by TCARE, which provides a professional dedicated to caregiver and family support. Families can meet with and consult these professionals at no cost, giving their loved ones the best chance at successful transition and healthy family relationships, (DAV, 2024).

 The John W Crews DAV Chapter #13 center is a small, unassuming concrete building in the West side of Columbia, South Carolina. Upon entry, you are greeted by a small, tight knit crew of veterans who consider themselves to be professionals in their service to their community. They hold monthly meetings, with lunches provided, where they discuss their goals and accomplishments. The atmosphere is that of a small town, where everyone knows everyone, and newcomers are welcome.

 This crew loves eating and they have no shortage of the southern classics to serve their veterans and families. Younger generations share in their love of service, by volunteering their time in the kitchen, and at community outreach events. This chapter is full of veterans of every age, proud to wear the DAV badge at every event throughout the community. The community events are aimed to reach new veterans and educate the public on the mission of the DAV and how they can support or benefit from its services.

 Chapter #13 is small and intimate but represents South Carolina nationally by participating fully in national DAV events, in full attire, with a color guard. As witness to their pride and dedication, it is easy to trace these veterans’ values back to their time in service. They never stopped caring about the service member next to them, long into retirement. The dedication of the members at John W Crews Chapter #13 exemplifies the commitment to care all veterans deserve.

Works Cited

*Challenges veterans face*. DAV. (2024, January 25). https://www.dav.org/what-we-do/challenges-veterans-face/

Mary K. Wolfe, Noreen C. McDonald, G. Mark Holmes, “Transportation Barriers to Health Care in the United States: Findings From the National Health Interview Survey, 1997–2017”, American Journal of Public Health 110, no. 6 (June 1, 2020): pp. 815-822. https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2020.305579