The Veterans Transition Program (VTP) is a group-based program developed at the University of British Columbia (UBC) by psychologists and medical experts to help men and women returning from military service transition to productive civilian life.

Over 200 veterans have participated in the program to date, all of whom reported benefits. Recent and ongoing research has shown reduced trauma symptoms, decreased depression and increased self-esteem. Perhaps equally indicative of the program’s success is that approximately 90% of those who complete the program move on to new career opportunities and again become productive, contributing citizens.

Growing and Immediate Need:

It is estimated that between 15 and 30% of the men and women who serve in Afghanistan will be impacted to some degree by operational stress injury as a natural result of trauma they experience there. As the Afghanistan mission winds down, this means that approximately 3,000 returning Canadian soldiers could benefit from specialized transition support services over the next three to five years.

They may experience a range of symptoms including an inability to focus on work or family; recurring nightmares and insomnia; addiction to drugs or alcohol; fits of rage and depression; and, tragically, even suicide. Based on international data from past and current conflicts, the suicide rate among veterans is significantly higher than among the general population due to the intensity of symptoms related to trauma.

It’s critical to make support services available to our returning veterans in the short term to help them transition to fulfilling and productive lives before long-term negative behaviours and related consequences set in. During previous work with veterans of World War II and other past conflicts, participants urged VTP’s developers and counsellors to make this program available and accessible to all newly returning veterans—so they and their families would not suffer the same anguish and pain these long-term veterans had experienced for years before participating in the program.

Program Format and Approach:

The Veterans Transition Program is a group-based program that facilitates veterans working with other veterans, along with specially trained counsellors. This peer-to-peer approach has proven to be particularly effective for people who’ve been trained and worked in the military, which is also anchored in group and team-based principles and initiatives.

Groups are facilitated and managed by highly trained and experienced registered counselling psychologists with backgrounds in psychology, trauma and medicine.
The program involves 10 days of retreat-based group work, consisting of three separate weekends over three months
where the group comes together for various exercises and skill development sessions, which they take back to their home
lives between retreats.

The group work involves communications skill development, career exploration and counselling, and re-enactment
exercises to help participants process and move beyond any trauma injuries in a supportive, structured and safe
environment.

The program also holds shorter introductory sessions to provide some skills training and help potential participants assess
whether or not they wish to enroll in the more comprehensive program.

Many past participants have gone on to take specialized training to become “paraprofessionals” so they can now
participate in the groups to help new members. Past participants are also often the most committed and effective
advocates for the program, encouraging former colleagues to get involved as well.

The groups are open to anyone who has served in the military and is free to participants thanks to funding from the
BC/Yukon Command of the Royal Canadian Legion.

**Experienced, Dedicated Program Team:**

The Veterans Transition Program was founded by Marvin Westwood, PhD who is a Professor at the University of British
Columbia’s Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education. He is a renowned, published
expert on group work and trauma counselling. Dr. Westwood’s commitment to the program stems from a personal
experience with a family member, who was a World War II veteran suffering from deep-seated trauma injuries which
haunted him and impacted his entire life until he was able to process the events and reconcile with his family just shortly
before his death.

Program co-developer, Dr. David Kuhl is a medical doctor with extensive experience counselling medical professionals
that work in high stress environments. Dr Kuhl has also studied, the profound and painful role unresolved trauma plays as
former veterans face end of life. Also, Dr. Tim Black, a psychologist with an expertise in group treatment, and has hands
on experience working with some of the most troubled Veteran populations.

The Program Coordinator, Tim Laidler is himself a former Afghanistan veteran who participated and benefited from the
Veterans Transition Program. Tim also serves as a paraprofessional in many group sessions and actively reaches out to
other veterans to ensure they seek and receive the support they need to transition successfully to civilian life, as he has done.

**What’s Next for VTP?**

This is a critical and pivotal time for the Veterans Transition Program. To meet the growing need for proven effective
transition support for Canada’s veterans, VTP has developed a strategy to establish clinical research on the program
outcomes at UBC. A not-for-profit division is also being established to facilitate national accessibility, ongoing study and
excellence, and ongoing funding and advocacy for Veterans.

The establishment of the not-for-profit Veterans’ Support Network is targeted for the Fall of 2011 to raise funds, drive
awareness and advocacy, provide training for paraprofessionals and deliver the Program itself.

*For more information, contact Tim Laidler, Operations Coordinator at VTP
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