

## Interview with Vantage Point

0:06 **Narrator:** Welcome to Vantage Points. A program designed to explore issues and topics of local interest. And now here is the host of Vantage Points, Calvin Carter.

0:27 **Calvin:** Welcome once again to our program. Today's topic will be the Joining Forces UB Project at the University of Buffalo and I'd like our guests to introduce themselves.

0:38 **Lisa:** Hi, I'm Lisa Butler. I'm an associate professor in the School of Social Work and the principle investigator on this project.

0:44 **Susan:** And I'm Susan Bruce. I'm a clinical associate professor in the School of Nursing and the co-principal investigator with this project.

0:52 **Katie:** And I'm Katie Mclain-Meeder. I'm the project manager of the Joining Forces UB Project.

1:00 **Calvin:** First of all let me say thank you for the work you're doing on this project. Let's start off with a real basic question. What is Joining Forces?

1:06 **Susan:** I'll answer that. Our project, actually let me give you the context. It was inspired by the Joining Forces initiative. It was launched by Michelle Obama and Joe Biden from the White House in 2010 and their initiative was basically to encourage civilians across the country to do whatever they could for veterans and their families. And, um, that has inspired many groups to sort of get onboard, to align themselves. So we at UB, um, in the school of nursing here, aligned, uh, I think in 2012, we started a collaboration between the two schools, um, to develop this project. What we're doing is we've developed an interprofessional training program for students in both schools so that they learn both, they sort of get basic educational training and also clinical training to work and be more effective with veterans and military families. And so that's what we've done, that's what we developed.

2:06 **Calvin:** That sounds like a pretty daunting task.

2:08 **Susan:** Actually it's been a very fun task. A lot of work but very, very gratifying. It's tremendously rewarding to be working in the veteran community in Western New York.

2:21 **Katie:** We haven't done it alone either. As two schools, the School of Social Work and School of Nursing have sort of spearheaded this initiative but it's definitely in collaboration with both the local VA and also with the support of many veterans in the community and uh, veterans who run organizations that serve other veterans and military family members. So we certainly are well supported.

2:46 **Calvin:** So how long does it take to go through this program.

2:49 **Lisa:** It depends on which school you are in because, do you want to talk about the school of nursing?

2:53 **Susan:** The, the school of nursing is, this is more of a focus for a graduate nurse who's already a nurse and is working perhaps on a Master's or a Doctoral degree. The idea of the focus is the student would take a course which introduces the student to the military culture, which is very important, and gives hours, actual clinical hands-on hours, um, as a provider with veterans. In the end they do a big project and they can go out and say that they not only have this degree but their degree focused on military veterans and their, and their families. So that's the way it works in the school of nursing.

3:37 **Lisa:** And in the school of social work, it's part of our MSW program, our Master's in Social Work program, and so that's a, for a traditional student that's about a two year program and so we've incorporated in the first year this introductory class and in the second year we have an interprofessional seminar that the student attends while they're in the clinical placement. And so both of those are done with students from both schools. It's definitely an interprofessional program. In addition to that for the social work specialization we require additional coursework in other courses that they're already taking, course work that focuses on veterans and military families.

4:16 **Calvin:** How many students are involved?

4:18 **Lisa:** Well we just started, so, um, I think in social work about, we have about 20 students involved, some are in their first year of the program and some are in their second year.

4:30 **Susan:** We have less through the school of nursing and it's only the structure of what our curriculum is like right now. So we're evolving as this goes on, um, I think we've had two go through, two begin the process already with others interested, but it takes a little work on our end of things, the way we do things.

4:50 **Lisa:** Yeah this, it's an evolving process.

4:53 **Calvin:** So this is funded by the UB Provost's 3E fund?

4:58 **Lisa:** Yeah, the initial funding we applied for what was called a 3E grant and got that and that started in February of 2013, so, and it goes until July of 2015, and we're presently actually applying for additional funding from other sources. We also, part of this project, um, also we sort of have a research arm to this too and so we are developing research projects that we'll seek funding for, that will also continue to support this.

5:27 **Calvin:** So what kind of special training is involved in this? I mean what, I would assume that there are special needs for veterans as opposed to the general public.

5:36 **Lisa:** Yes, and that's really what this is focused on because students in both the nursing program and our program get wonderful general training. These are excellent programs. But it's really, it's actually, I think the way we've come to think about it is, it's really an issue around being culturally competent to work with the military population, a veteran or family member and cultural competence in this case means really knowing what's involved in being in, in a military family, in, you know, being a service member, what they've endured, what the deployment, you know, circumstances were like, what redeployments do to that, what efforts to reintegrate, what challenges are there. It's really just making students very, very aware of all the issues that we now know can arise across these situations, um, and there's many and fortunately there's a tremendous amount of excellent research and large studies have been done to summarize these findings including from the Institute of Medicine where they give us tremendous resources. In the class, we teach a class on Introduction to Veteran and Military Families Care Issues and in that class we really sort of try to cover everything soup to nuts from sort of basic introduction to military life and military culture to the specific issues that are raised for family members, both spouses, and parents, and children, and others and also for service members trying to reintegrate as veterans.

7:06 **Calvin:** Will this cover psychological issues?

7:08 **Lisa:** Yes, yes and physical, we do both.

7:11 **Susan:** And that's what the nurses, our nursing end is really more geared toward the physical which I think makes the blend between social work and nursing so interesting. The nurses that are being trained are being trained to be advance practice nurses, nurse practitioners. One of the things this brings out is the identification of who served in the military. In fact, there is a program that's called "Have You Ever Served?", where we start to focus now, when we take a history from a person, were they in the military, where were they, you know, very, very, um, minute details because what we're finding now through the research that Lisa was talking about is we're finding that is that some of the physical problems are related to their service, but if they don't tell us or if we don't ask then we may never put that one and one together and really get a two, we may be off. And it seems to be timely now, with the new, um, the new affordable health care act where more people are going to have insurance, including veterans. And for those veterans that don't go to the VA, that come into a clinic or a private office, if we don't ask, we don't know, and we may miss out on treatment, not only for them but their families.

8:30 **Calvin:** Mm-hm. I cover stations across New York State and Connecticut and in some of my interviews with veterans groups, I hear that some returning vets simply don't want anyone to know. They have moved on to a new part of their life and they'd rather not get involved in their benefits. So it becomes a great unknown to a lot of people.

8:51 **Susan:** It's estimated that about 24% of the veterans across all wars go to the VA. The other 76% don't, so the other 76[%] are out there for the social workers and the nurses to encounter. So those are, those statistics strike me.

9:08 **Lisa:** And not knowing about military status, either for the veteran or their family member. I mean families go through their own whole large process here and it's really helpful to understand that connection for them to be able to contextualize what you're seeing when they're presenting to you and potentially to access interventions that might be more effective with those folks. So we really are trying to take this, sort of, holistic large approach that's very sensitive to the particular issues these family members and service members face and um, use the best research we can to inform our students so they can address it as well as possible.

9:47 **Calvin:** I think an awful lot of attention is rightfully so given to the veteran him or herself but the rest of the family is involved in all of this.

9:55 **Lisa:** Yeah they serve too.

9:57 **Calvin:** Yeah absolutely, absolutely. Now in the training sessions that you have and in the classes will you or are you involving, uh, actual veterans? Are they coming in?

10:08 **Lisa:** Yeah, well, you mean as students?

10:11 **Calvin:** Or as instructors.

10:13 **Lisa:** So this year, which was the first year we taught it, it was co-led by three people and two of which were veterans and they were veterans from different eras. There was at least one veteran as a student and there were a number of students who were military family members and we also had a number of guest speakers who were veterans, many actually, we had probably 10 guest speakers and they all, certainly the majority of those were, uh, veterans or military family members. So yes it's a very, it's a very sort of rich, I think, experience of hearing all sorts of different kinds of background and experiences and perspectives but that all relate to being in this, in this community and in this population.

10:56 **Katie:** And as Sue mentioned all of the students, both in the nursing focus and the social work specialization will do a field placement and so they'll actually, um, you know, have actual experience working with veteran clients and military family members as well. So we're hoping to give them sort of the academic perspective and also the hands on, you know, what it's like to work day-to-day with veterans and military families, that training as well.

11:24: **Lisa:** We've had really positive support, um, and response from the VA for which we're tremendously grateful and um, so the students get these experiences not just working in addition, I should say, to working with veterans and their families in a VA setting which is you know, a tremendous and quite unique opportunity for them. So we're thrilled that that piece of it has really worked out well.

11:49 **Calvin:** These, uh, clinical settings. Are we talking about going out to veteran's assistance groups and working with them?

11:56 **Katie:** So Lisa mentioned the VA. There's several VA placements. But also we've developed placements in the community, um, with organizations that not necessarily focus their work on veterans but serve veterans in some capacity. So for instance we have partnered with the Veteran's One-stop Center here in Buffalo, um, and that offers placement opportunities for several social work students. We've also developed placements in places that aren't specific to veterans but serve veterans. So mental health organizations and that sort of thing. And we've developed a nursing placement at Brylin Hospital which is a psychiatric hospital here.

12:38 **Susan:** And we have one at Freedom Village too which is an inpatient residential substance abuse.

12:43 **Katie:** Right. And there, the arm Freedom Village is specific to veterans, to veteran men. So we're trying to expand beyond the VA because as Sue mentioned we know that not all veterans seek services at the VA. So we've tried to sort of, cast our net wide and have certainly experienced a warm welcome from our community partners.

13:05 **Calvin:** For listeners who would like to learn more about the program, can you give us some contact information, perhaps the website, any numbers they could call?

13:13 **Katie:** So this is Katie again and if listeners would like to know more they can certainly contact me, Katie Mclain-Meeder. My phone number is 716-829-5864 and we certainly welcome, uh, listeners to go to our website which is [www.buffalo.edu/joiningforces-ub](http://www.buffalo.edu/joiningforces-ub).

13:41 **Calvin:** This seems like a no-brainer to me. This is a program that probably should have started years ago.

13:46 **Lisa:** Well thank you for this opportunity to tell folks about it. We're really thrilled to be working on it.

13:50: [music playing]

13:58 **Narrator:** This has been Vantage Points, a discussion of topics of local interest. The opinions expressed on Vantage Points do not necessarily represent the views and opinions of Family Stations Inc. Join us again next week for another edition of Vantage Points.

14:14: [music playing]