

New Veterans Charity in Cape Aims to Meet All Needs

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Kevin Johnson, of Wildwood Crest, and his 5-year-old daughter, Angelina, stand at the family's car. Johnson got help for car repairs from a new charity that helps military veterans, the Citizens-Veterans Advisory Council.

A new Cape May County charity aims to help military veterans in crisis by offering transportation, helping with benefits applications or, in some cases, giving cash.

The Citizens-Veterans Advisory Council of Cape May County helps veterans who are facing eviction, need a ride to the doctor or want help with a disability or health-insurance claim.

What makes the group unique is its network of connections to hospitals, public service agencies and other charities that know how to solve problems fast, member Carol Cohen said.

She is director of the Southern Shore chapter of the American Red Cross, which covers Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland and Salem counties.

“We’re not trying to be a social-service agency. We just want to know what the veteran wants right now to help them get back on the road to sustainability,” she said.

The group has about 40 volunteer members and is getting its federal nonprofit status, she said.

Already it has been able to help numerous people in need, she said.

“We modeled it after the Red Cross’ long-term recovery group that was working after Hurricane Sandy,” she said.

The group focuses on preventing homelessness, helping people get access to Veterans Administration benefits to which they are entitled and providing transportation.

The group helped secure a second van for another local nonprofit, the Disabled American Veterans, based in Lower Township. That group takes veterans daily to

doctors' appointments at VA clinics and hospitals as far away as Philadelphia and Wilmington, Delaware.

Johnnie Walker, of Lower Township, a longtime member of Disabled American Veterans, said the new advisory council is effective because of its members, who have ties to Cape Regional Medical Center, the One-Stop Career Center in Wildwood, the Family Success Center in Middle Township, veterans' groups such as the American Legion and church groups such as Catholic Charities.

"We put a network together to handle just about any situation that arises: medical, transportation, housing, you name it," Walker said. "We have the network contacts to get assistance."

U.S. Army veteran Kevin Johnson, of Wildwood Crest, needed help this year when his car broke down. He didn't have the money for repairs, which made it difficult to get to doctor's appointments or take his 5-year-old daughter, Angelina, to school, he said.

"I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis four years ago, so it's rough. I'm on a fixed income and there are times when the ends just don't meet," he said.

The charity arranged to make the \$900 in repairs to his car, he said.

"You don't know how grateful I was," he said. "It makes me so happy to know people care."

Walker said he thinks the charity can be effective because it provides intervention when veterans need help most.

"Our thing is to help provide emergency help when people need it today. They can't wait six months or eight months. By then they're lost," he said.

Once the group secures nonprofit status, it can begin fundraising in earnest. Walker said he thinks local residents will support the charity's mission.

"We have so many compelling stories of veterans right in our own community, people like (Assemblyman) Robert Andrzejczak, D-Cape May, who lost his leg in Iraq," Walker said. "Those stories hit so close to home for families in Cape May County. And when we have veterans coming home, this community recognizes it. They really do (the homecoming) right."

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http://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/news/new-veterans-charity-in-cape-aims-to-meet-all-needs/article_80964414-37db-11e5-aa0d-6f73b08dfd6b.html