

## 'Give an Hour' to assist veterans

### Program seeks mental-health professionals to donate services to military personnel

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Staff Writer

About three months ago, Downingtown resident Jennifer Crane discovered a program aimed to help veterans who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This program, known as Give an Hour, encourages mental-health professionals to provide free services, such as counseling, to military personnel and their families.

"It's amazing," said Crane, who served in Afghanistan in 2003 during Operation Enduring Freedom. "Before the program, it was hard to find help."

Crane, who suffers from chronic post-traumatic stress disorder and other health problems, said she received Give an Hour services from Jeanine Aversa at Psychology Associates of Chester County.

It's beneficial for veterans to have access to free services because they often have a lack of money when they return home, according to Crane.

According to a November 2007 study put out by the National Alli

ance Against Homelessness, nearly 26 percent of homeless people are veterans. But veterans only make up 11 percent of the nation's 18-and-over population.

The concept of Give an Hour is to ask mental health professionals to step up and provide free services for an hour a week for military personnel, veterans and their families, according to the program's President Barbara Romberg, a psychologist in the Washington, D.C., area. She founded the program in fall 2005 and services have been provided since the summer of 2007.

"We are harnessing a tremendous amount of awareness and using it where it's helpful," Romberg said.

A forum about the program recently took place at the Crozer-Chester Medical Center on Oct. 10. U.S. Rep. Joseph Sestak, D-7th, of Edgmont, participated in the panel discussion with Romberg and Crane.

"It's an effort in the community to work with families and individuals before they leave (to serve) and after they come back," said Sestak, a former three-star admiral who served in the Navy for 31 years.

Staff from the Coatesville Veterans Affairs Medical Center attended the forum, too.

"We're glad that there are private sector programs that also provide programs to veterans," said Robert Whitney, clinical coordinator of Coatesville VA's PTSD inpatient program. "We welcome any help for veterans."

A contribution Give an Hour provides that the Coatesville VA does not is therapy to children of veterans, Whitney said. The Coatesville VA provides a PTSD inpatient clinic, and three outpatient mental-health clinics, two of which are in Springfield and Spring City, he said.

For more information about Give an Hour and to register as a provider, visit [www.giveanhour.org](http://www.giveanhour.org)

For more information about the Coatesville VAMC and its programs visit [www.coatesville.va.gov](http://www.coatesville.va.gov). For the hospital, call 610-384-7711, ext. 5034 for eligibility. For the mental health clinic, dial ext. 6801.

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