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DAILY SOUTHTOWN

# Beverly Gold Star mom leads crusade to help veterans with PTSD

By Susan DeGrane

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FEEDBACK



Goldstar mother Modie Lavin, center, community outreach coordinator for the Road Home program, leads an effort to help veterans who struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder. Also involved in the effort are Chicago 19th Ward Ald. Matt O'Shea, left, and Neil Byers, owner of Horse Thief Hollow. Susan DeGrane/for Daily Southtown, June 2021, Chicago, Illinois (Susan DeGrane / Daily Southtown)



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Gold Star mother Modie Lavin of Chicago's Beverly neighborhood is leading an effort this June, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Awareness Month, to help veterans heal from their war experiences and move on with their lives.

Lavin's son, Marine Corps Cpl. Conner T. Lowry, was killed at age 24 in 2012 while on patrol in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. He received a Bronze Battle Cross and other military honors.

A street sign at the intersection of 103rd Street and Maplewood Avenue bears Lowry's name. A memorial stands just across from the Beverly Park field house at 2460 W. 102nd St.



A memorial dedicated to Marine Corps Cpl. Conner T. Lowery stands just across from the Beverly Park field house at 2460 W. 102nd St. (Susan DeGrane / Daily Southtown)

Since then, Road Home has provided specialized mental health care and support services to 2,600 veterans and their families. The program also connects veterans and their families with much needed social services.

For the first year after her son's death, Lavin said she was overwhelmed. But before long, she found herself taking on a special mission.

"When I met my son's battle buddies, I realized I wasn't the only one grieving," she said. "So, I decided to help veterans. I'm honoring my son by helping them."

In 2014, Lavin began working as a community outreach coordinator for the newly created Road Home Program: The National Center of Excellence for Veterans and their Families at Rush University Medical Center.

“Most people don’t realize that when a person joins the military, the whole family joins the military,” Lavin said.

Road Home serves veterans, including National Guard and other Reserve members, regardless of their length of service, discharge status or ability to pay. It also assists victims of military sexual trauma.

“We’re trying to fill some of the gaps the veterans administration doesn’t address,” said Brian Klassen, Ph.D., clinical director for the program, a clinical psychologist and faculty member in the department of psychology and behavioral sciences at Rush Medical College.

“This program is for people suffering moderate to severe PTSD, and it’s a national program,” said Klassen. “Ninety percent of the veterans we serve are from outside of Chicago, and 80% are post-911 vets.”

Some hail from as far away as Guam, the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico and take part in on-site boot camps that provide intensive counseling and positive experiences such as yoga and art therapy. Most, however, receive outpatient services. Support groups also play an important role.

Due to the nature of war, military personnel are likely to experience greater stressors than most civilians, Klassen said. Many also struggle with regaining a sense of purpose once their terms of service have ended.



A street sign at the intersection of 103rd Street and Maplewood Avenue bears the name of Conner T. Lowry, son of Goldstar mother Modie Lavin. (Susan DeGrane / Daily Southtown)

“To understand what they’re going through, it’s helpful for people to know that PTSD is a relatively common condition,” he said.

About half all adults in the U.S. are exposed to trauma that can trigger PTSD. That can include being in a car accident, being the victim of a crime or losing a family member.

Soon after coming on board with Road Home, Lavin enlisted Chicago 19th Ward Ald. Matt O’Shea to help her garner support for the program.

“We’ve seen when men and women come home from the service, many times family falls apart because they can’t understand what happened to their loved one,” said O’Shea. “This program helps.”

As part of work by O’Shea and Lavin, Valentines for Vets became an annual event involving residents at the Smith Village retirement community and children from St. Cajetan School. The seniors and children made cards and assembled gift bags for veterans served by Road Home.

More recently, Lavin recruited O'Shea and two Beverly pub owners to participate in the Help a Hero Campaign. The effort raises money for Road Home, which is financed through philanthropic organizations and personal contributions.

At the start of June, the 19th Ward office began selling red, white and blue T-shirts for \$15 and yard signs for \$20. Both items are emblazoned with the words "Freedom Isn't Free," and can be purchased online at [www.19thwardmobile.com/19th-ward-veteran/](http://www.19thwardmobile.com/19th-ward-veteran/).

The office coordinated a mass pick up June 8 at St. John Fisher School, 10200 S Washtenaw Ave., for people who purchased signs and T-shirts. The date for another pickup is yet to be announced.



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Neil Byers, owner of Horse Thief Hollow, 10426 S Western Ave, and John Brand, owner of Open Outcry Brewing Company, 10934 S Western Ave., teamed up to develop two new beers to raise money for Road Home.

Horse Thief Hollow's patriotic pale ale is called Because of the Brave. Open Outcry's new brew is called Home of the Free.

"We're using the same brewing technology, but using different hops," Byers said. "A dollar from each pint we sell is turned over to the Road Home program. We're hoping to help veterans start the next chapter in their lives and let them see that there are people willing to help."

Byers hopes to raise about \$1,200 for Road Home.

Adrian Morrison, the head bartender at Horse Thief Hollow who pours those Brave ales, is a former U.S. Marine and Reserves member who served in Afghanistan.

"Most Marines never quite transition back to civilian life," Morrison said. "Once military always military. They're still folding the corners of the bed. Having good friends and vets around you helps."

"I hear veterans say they feel so mixed when people thank them for their services," Klassen said. "A lot of them feel like that's just words. The Help a Hero effort enables people to put that gratitude into action. It offers a way to show appreciation by actually doing something that helps

veterans.”



Adrian Morrison, head bartender at Horse Thief Hollow, is a former U.S. Marine and Reserves member who served in Afghanistan. (Susan DeGrane / Daily Southtown)

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