

## The Missouri Veterans Program

By

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The Missouri Veterans Program (MVP) was established the summer of 2017 as a result of a pilot PTSD therapy group. The first official Veterans Wing in the Missouri Department of Corrections was created at the Moberly Correctional Center (MCC). The mission was to provide veteran's specific resources for incarcerated veterans. Those who have returned from America's various conflicts, from the Vietnam War into the present Global War on Terrorism, are returning with emotional, social, and psychological traumas. These afflictions have often led to the antisocial behaviors that have resulted in the veteran being involved in the criminal justice system. The Missouri Veterans Programs are designed to promote growth and healing in a therapeutic environment.

The first Veterans Wing at MCC houses sixty-six males who have once served in the various branches of the United States military or the National Guard. Unlike the rest of the prison, the Veterans Wing has the following incentives: a washer and dryer, microwave, big screen television with movies, and a computer to develop job skills. To aide in rehabilitation, the Veterans Wing normally has a canine that receives constant love and attention. Often, a veteran will adopt the "house mascot" and take the animal home when released. A new dog will then be placed with the veterans through the Puppies for Parole Program at the facility.

The men are divided into three platoons, just like in their former military service, as a means to split the various duties required to remain in the wing. One rotation of the platoons is the Honor Guard. Three members of the platoon will dress alike and perform the daily raising

and lowering of the American flag in front the the housing unit. One tradition of the program is to hoist the branch of service flag of the veteran on the day that he is released from confinement. The other duties of the veterans are to maintain the lawn around their housing unit and to keep their living areas up to military standards cleanliness. The men can also serve in leadership positions to maintain the everyday functions, develop problem-solving skills, and for less staff involvement.

The MVP at Moberly, who has set the standards for the rest of the Missouri prison system, will be a permanent part of veterans' rehabilitation. The Missouri House of Representatives adopted House Resolution No. 1569 on April 8, 2019, that secures the services that veterans can receive at the institution. The Vet Center, in Columbia, Missouri, sends a PTSD specialist to the prison once a week to provide mental health support. The Missouri Veterans Commission has also been involved by providing a Veterans Service Officer to assist the men in receiving their VA benefits. As our nation's military continues to engage in conflicts around the world, those who end up in the Missouri prison system now have an option for self-improvement and a path towards restoring their honor.