

Veterans and Hearing Loss

OEI Podcast Episode #6

(Host: Alle Rhames)

(Guests: Cheryl Rogers and Larry Campos, VSO Officer)

Alle....(0:04): Hey everyone welcome to “Have You Heard” a listening project. On this podcast, we share tips, stories and practical advice to help people with hearing loss stay connected. My name is Alle and I’m so happy today to be your host along with my lovely colleague Cheryl who’s actually from New Mexico. And we’re going to interview someone who’s very very special. Special to us and special to everyone. Veterans are such a vital part of our past and our present, and we can learn so many important facts surrounding experiences with hearing loss due to service. How many Veterans do you have in your life? I know that I have many in my life. I know that both Cheryl and I personally have worked with many Veterans over the years. They experience many different levels of hearing loss based upon their previous service. My own grandfather is actually a World War II Veteran, I’m so proud of that. He has severe hearing loss due to the tours that he took and he actually has Meniere’s disease. My brother-in-law is a Navy Seal currently and is constantly having to protect his hearing and also have it checked often which makes sense. So I’m really excited to have our guest on today and get him introduced. So let’s go ahead and dive in.

Cheryl....(1:21) Hi this is Cheryl! We have with us today Larry Campos, who is a VSO director in my state of New Mexico. I’m proud to have you Larry, thank you for joining us! (Larry.....and thank you for having me). We’d love to learn a little about you. So can you tell us; how did you become a Veterans Service Officer?

Larry....(1:43) Well I’ve been a state employee for over 20 years, serving Veterans in New Mexico in different capacities. Mostly involving employment and training services. I became a certified and accredited VSO the spring of 2018 to be able to serve Veterans and their dependents to obtain benefits. I’m a service disabled Veteran myself and I became a VSO so that I could help Veterans and their dependents get the benefits that they deserve.

Cheryl....(2:14) Wow. Sounds like helping Veterans has been a lifelong passion. Would you explain why many Veterans have hearing loss?

Larry....(2:22) Well the most recent data from the Veterans Administration indicates that there are 1.1 million Veterans with service connected disabilities due to hearing loss. Most of the hearing loss and tinnitus in the military are due to noise exposure often from air crafts, gun fire, heavy equipment and roadside bombs. The top service related medical issue for military

Veterans isn't missing limbs, isn't traumatic brain injuries, or even post-traumatic stress disorder. It's a hearing injury.

Alle...(3:00) Oh definitely thank you for pointing that out. Because not only was that something that I personally did not know. But I believe that most people don't realized that hearing loss is that prevalent from service.

Larry...(3:12) The VA estimates that more than 60,000 military members are on disability for hearing loss from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom.

Cheryl...(3:24) With those numbers, we can see why there's a need to provide resources to Veterans. What community services are in place to help such vets?

Larry...(3:34) Well Cheryl, the one that stands out is the Hearing Loss Association of America. They provide assistance and resources for people with hearing loss and their families to learn how to adjust to living with hearing loss.

Alle...(3:50) Ah yes, at OEI we have been proud national sponsors of HLAA for over 10 years. I worked with them actually for about I wanna say 11 years. They are a fantastic resource for vets to find groups that convene together to provide information on how to deal with hearing loss on a personal level, professional level and on a group level. And as well as they provide a space for vets and anyone with hearing loss to come together and relate to each other.

Cheryl...(4:18) Yes, CapTel works extensively with them. What are some other helpful organizations that you'd like to mention?

Larry... (4:25) We in New Mexico refer Veterans to the Veteran Virtual Chapter where members communicate online via an app called "Base Camp". They conduct monthly meetings on zoom which are complete with captions. Also the VA offers two main services. They offer free or low cost hearing health care such as hearing aids. And if it's a service connected injury, they offer a stipend for the injury. The third one that I want to mention is the New Mexico Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. This also is an agency that provides assistance to the deaf and hard of hearing in New Mexico, for New Mexicans and their families.

Alle...(5:08) And I know that almost every state throughout the country has programs that provide assistance to those with hearing loss too. So it's not limited to just New Mexico residents, is that right?

Cheryl...(5:20) Right. Now which outside organization do you work with most frequently? And how do you feel working with them?

Larry... (5:27) I work a lot with the agents in long term services which has a Deaf and Hard of Hearing department. It's run by people who understand what's needed. They show good follow through and they never forget about our Veterans.

Alle....(5:42) Which is so important. Our vets are very very special people.

Cheryl....(5:47) Now, what did you do to link Veteran services with CapTel?

Larry....(5:51) Well, three years ago I was at a conference where CapTel had an information table. That was my first time learning about CapTel phones. I requested a demo phone be shipped to all our VSO offices in New Mexico. A month or so later, you showed up at my office and you started to work to ensure that all of our VSO's understood the program. Since then, you have become a partner of the department of Veterans Services and you provide updated training to all our VSO's during our Veteran Conferences, our annual training conference that we had and we appreciate that. We encourage Veterans with hearing loss to sign up for the no cost phone and no cost service. Veterans Services is a partner and champion of CapTel and this is a very valuable and important program for us. Information on CapTel Captioned Telephones is also on our department's website.

Alle....(6:58) I'm so happy to hear that you met Cheryl this way. I meet a lot of really wonderful vets this way as well.

Cheryl....(7:05) Thank you Larry I appreciate your support as well as the support of the VSO's. Now for emphasis and clarification, in order to receive a CapTel phone a Veteran's hearing loss does *not* have to be service connected, I just want everybody to know that. Thank you for being our guest Larry!

Larry....(7:25) It's my pleasure! Thank you!

Alle....(7:28) Yes Larry, thank you so so much and Cheryl thank you so much as well for pointing that out. Cheryl, thanks for joining me today and for introducing us to Larry who is so special to us. He has so much important information to share with us which I'm so grateful for. For anyone who is listening and would like to know more about the CapTel Caption Telephone or any other hearing related resources, please check out our website at oeius.org that's oeius.org. We have Outreach Educators all throughout the country and you can find your local Educator at oeius.org by just clicking on contact us to request more information and we'll make sure to have someone get right back to you. We're in the business of helping others and with Veteran's Day this month we're happy to shine an extra light on how we can help the Veterans that we know, especially those with hearing challenges. Don't forget to join us next time for a very special special holiday episode which will be a lot of fun. I know I'm going to listen. Thank you so much for joining us today on the "Have You Heard" podcast. Make sure you subscribe and remember to stay safe and stay connected. Bye everyone!

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