



NEWS FROM THE OFFICE OF  
**ADAM J. BELLO**  
MONROE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

**For Immediate Release**  
**Friday, May 10, 2024**

## **COUNTY EXECUTIVE BELLO ANNOUNCES LAUNCH OF VETERAN SERVICE AGENCY'S NATURE-BASED THERAPY PROGRAM**

*Evidence-based program helps veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression and addiction*

**ROCHESTER, NY** — Monroe County Executive Adam Bello today announced the launch of Monroe County's Nature-Based Therapy program. The program uses team-based outdoor activities to help veterans who are working through PTSD and other mental health challenges. Research has shown spending time with others in outdoor settings provides a support system built on shared experiences and a sense of belonging.

"I've heard from veterans and their families about how helpful this nature-based therapy has been in their lives. After hearing their stories, I'm recommitting Monroe County to supporting this program," **said County Executive Bello**. "We owe our veterans a great deal of thanks, and we must back those words with actions. This program is one of many services Monroe County provides those who served our country."

Nature-based therapy connects a cohort of individuals with an immersive therapeutic experience that integrates the healing properties of nature to promote physical, emotional, and mental well-being. Each cohort typically pairs 12 veterans with three staff members, and any veteran or active duty service member is eligible to participate. The program is based out of the EquiCenter, located at 3247 Rush Mendon Rd. in Honeoye Falls.

The Nature-Based Therapy program is fully funded by Monroe County and is staffed by two NYS licensed therapists from our Veterans Service Agency, wilderness experts and peer mentors. The first cohort begins this month and will meet for 3 hours weekly over a 12-week period. New cohorts are scheduled to start throughout the year.

"I'm grateful to County Executive Bello, for continuing to put words into action regarding our Veterans," **said Nick Stefanovic, Director of Monroe County's Veteran Services Agency**. "It has become clear that the status quo is not working when it comes to treating our veterans struggling with mental health. We need to think outside the box and invest in innovative approaches to mental health treatment. I extend my warmest welcome and thanks to Liz Brooks and her team who lead this program. I look forward to witnessing the impact this program will have on Monroe County's Veteran population."

The number of veterans suffering from serious mental health concerns is growing. Seventeen veterans die by suicide every day in the United States, according to the [2023 National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report](#). The National Center for PTSD estimates an average of 7 percent of all veterans will experience PTSD in their lifetimes, and more than one in ten veterans have a diagnosed substance use disorder.

Anyone interested in enrolling should schedule an intake appointment with one of the program's clinicians by contacting Clinical Director Elizabeth Brooks at (585) 369-8682 or by email at [ElizabethBrooks@monroecounty.gov](mailto:ElizabethBrooks@monroecounty.gov).

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