

# UNITED

*in a* NOBLE MISSION

UNITED WAY LAUNCHES NEW SUPPORT  
SYSTEM FOR THE MILITARY

BY **Esther Keane**

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**In** early October, with Hurricane Matthew a few days away from Hampton Roads, every shelter was full. Kyle Dalton (not his real name) and his wife, along with their two sons, 14 and 15, and 10-year-old daughter, would have to spend another night in their car. The family had been without a home for over a month, and chances of receiving help before the storm seemed unlikely.

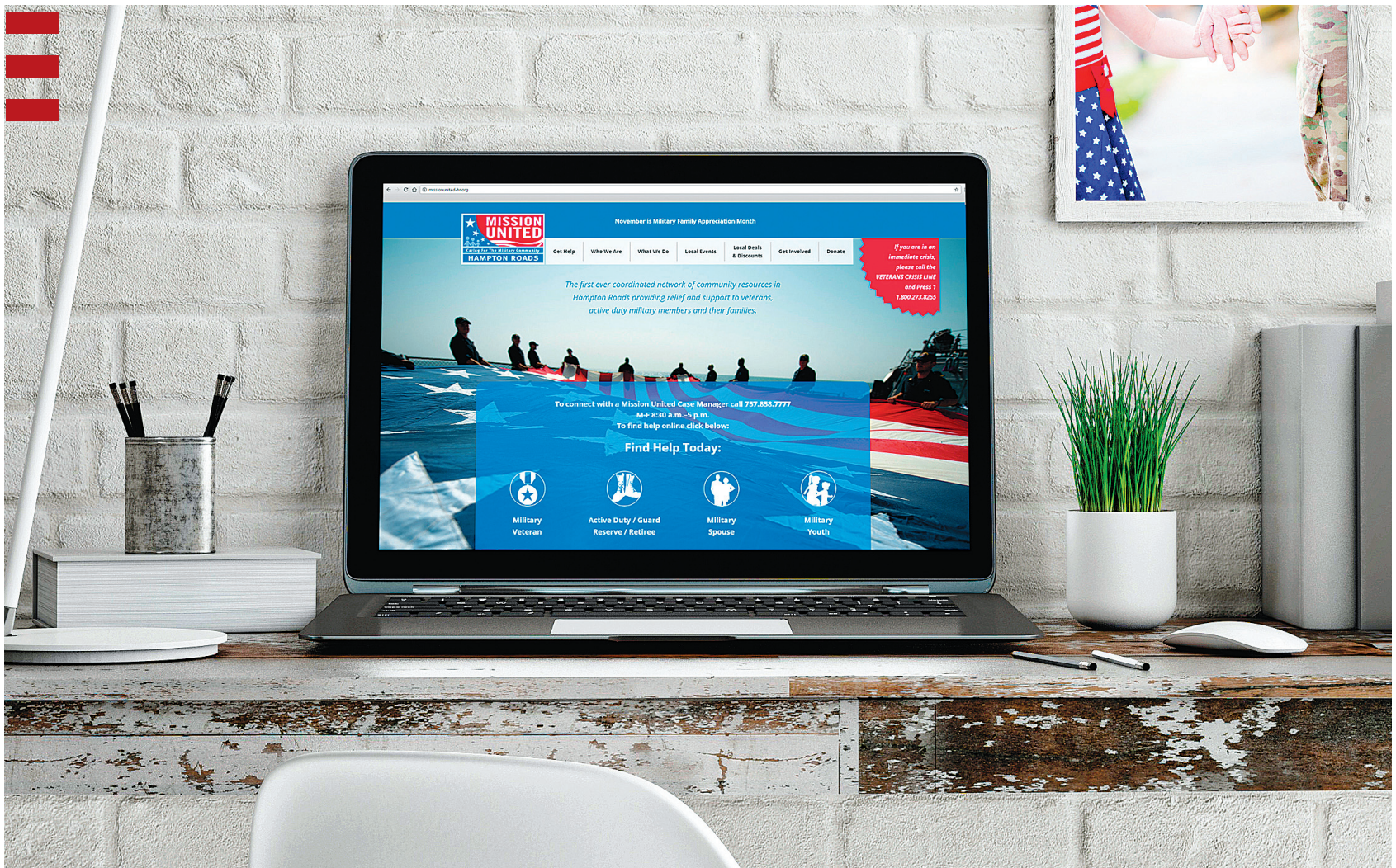
A Marine veteran who had served for eight years, Dalton lost his job as a welder due to repeated pulmonary infections. Although he was receiving medical benefits from the Veterans Health Administration through the Hampton VA Medical Center, the job loss set off a domino effect that put him and his family on the street. Finding shelter before the storm was just one issue among many the family needed help with.

Before the storm hit, Tanya Canty, a Navy veteran and director of Mission United, United Way's new military-focused support system, received a phone call from the VA Medical Center alerting her to Dalton's situation.

In her Mission United role, Canty helps veterans, military service members and their families. After speaking with Dalton, Canty received immediate approval to put the family in a hotel for the week. It was the first step in the process of getting them



Tanya Canty, seated, is the director of Mission United. Standing, left to right, are Michelle Story, lead case manager; Alison Maruca, director of outreach; and Tiffany Zeiner, case manager.



back on their feet.

Dalton is one of 50 individuals Mission United has helped since its soft launch in April.

### *streamlining the system*

There are 1,800 United Way locations in 40 countries and territories around the world, and each one focuses on raising and spending funds on needs in its community. The organization is a unifying force that brings together community leaders, organized labor, faith-based groups, corporations, nonprofits and governments.

The Fleet and Family Support Center, which supports the Hampton Roads naval community, turned to United Way of South Hampton Roads for help in serving the military. The support center faced an ongoing issue: While there are many organizations in Hampton Roads that can help the military, the center was often unsure which one to turn to. Knowing that United Way is connected to many service organizations, the center looked to the nonprofit for guidance.

United Way began the task by conducting focus groups and interviews with 459 people. Participants included admirals, enlisted men and women, spouses, veterans and chaplains. United Way also

conducted a focus group of case managers who serve the military, and spoke with nonprofit and for-profit organizations that give to the military.

“The overarching issue was a lack of ability to navigate the various services available for the military,” said Carol McCormack, CEO of United Way of South Hampton Roads. Born and raised in Hampton Roads, McCormack has worked with United Way for over 30 years and became CEO of the Hampton Roads location six years ago.

“United Way is one of the few organizations you can be a part of that gets things done quickly,” she said. “There is a lot of synergy with people in the community, there are thousands of donors and thousands of volunteers just in Hampton Roads. We can make things happen on a large scale pretty quickly.”

Using the information gathered from the focus groups and interviews, the organization brought together a group of 50 service providers to address the needs within the military community. With 400,000 people who are active-duty, reserve or guard service members, dependents or veterans in Hampton Roads, they knew the scope of needs would be large. The group concluded that a technology-based system would be the most effective answer.

“We came up with the concept that if we could develop technology that connected a variety of different service providers in a manner

Through a virtual one-stop shop, shown above, individuals are able to place themselves in the Mission United system. A profile is made for each applicant and then the system matches that person to the appropriate agencies.

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*Throughout their careers and in their lives, the military have done for others and it's so hard for most of them to ever ask for anything because they feel like it's in their DNA to be the provider. There needs to be a humility and a level of quiet service to what we do.”*

*– Scott Adams, chairman, Mission United*

that would co-manage an issue, then we would solve a lot of the problems the military face,” McCormack explained.

The group began to outline what the system would need. Key components included being HIPPA-compliant, giving service providers permission to create their own profiles, developing a way for users to assess services, giving the military a way to connect to one another and “own” aspects of the website, and organizing response groups. From that meeting, Mission United was created as a “collectively organized network of public, private and nonprofit service providers designed to effectively and efficiently support veterans, military service members and their families.”

After creating a flowchart that detailed how the system would connect individuals to the right agencies and then follow them through their journey, the search for an appropriate system began. It wasn't easy to find, but eventually a usable system surfaced.

Through the virtual one-stop shop, individuals have the option

to call, email or put themselves directly into the system. A profile is made for the individual and then the system matches that person to the agencies available to help meet specific needs. Multiple matches to various agencies can be made. Agencies are then able to deny or accept the claim, which provides accountability and creates a traceable path.

Scott Adams, regional president for commercial real estate company CBRE, came on board in January as chairman of Mission United, bringing with him years of experience serving the military in various volunteer capacities for organizations such as the Navy SEAL Foundation and the Honor Foundation.

“Throughout their careers and in their lives, the military have done for others and it's so hard for most of them to ever ask for anything because they feel like it's in their DNA to be the provider,” Adams said. “There needs to be a humility and a level of quiet service to what we do.”

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MERIDIAN  
GROUP



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*— Carol McCormack,  
CEO, United Way of South Hampton Roads*

“Our premise was how do we become a truly military-friendly community,” McCormack said. “If you are new to the area and don't know where anything is or you're not used to asking for help or you have a variety of different needs and you can't figure out where to go, you now have one place you can call or one website you can go on.”

A soft launch allowed for the system to be tested and for the team at Mission United to train.

“The neat thing about it is taking a problem from inception, from identifying it and figuring it out, and then finding a system that can offer a solution,” McCormack said. “It's about what people need and resolving that need.”

Because needs vary from one individual to the next, the partnership of multiple agencies is necessary. In Dalton's case, getting the family into a hotel during Hurricane Matthew was just the beginning. In order to qualify for a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) voucher, an individual has to first be in a shelter or a hotel paid for by an agency. For Dalton, the process for housing began with Mission United.

After the first week, the Veterans of Foreign Wars got involved

Canty, far right, the director, is a military veteran, as is Story, second from left, lead case manager. They are pictured with colleagues Maruca, far left, and Zeiner.

and paid for a second week at the hotel. During that time, the family was identified for a voucher and the Department of Social Services stepped in to pay for the third week at the hotel. Without a job, Dalton was spending all the money he had on food for his family, including the money he needed for his medicine. Mission United connected him to the local foodbank so that he could continue his medication and focus on getting healed in order to find a job.

“This system puts together what we call unlikely partners,” McCormack said. “We had five agencies working together for one family because each of us does something different.”

As a result of a collective effort, on Oct. 24 the family was off the street and into housing.

“It’s a matter of getting people stable,” McCormack said. “They now have housing, but as he heals he won’t be able to go back to work, so we have to ask what is the next job.”

As a part of the system, individuals are tracked during their journey, guaranteeing that they are being helped by the right agency every step of the way.

### *recognizing specific needs*

Canty, Mission United’s director, and lead case manager Michelle Story are both veterans, which creates a sense of comfort for those who call for help. Knowing they are talking to someone who knows the military lingo and understands their needs on a personal level helps break down barriers.

“It has been eye-opening for me because I hadn’t really thought about all the issues the military have,” McCormack said.

While researching and coming up with a vision for Mission United, its team began to recognize specific needs within the military community. Among those were issues concerning the children and spouses of military members.

“Spouses and children of service members are serving our country as well,” Adams said. “A lot of people don’t stop to think about that, but their sacrifice and contributions need to be respected and appreciated.”

“When the military comes to a new community, they lose a lot of family structures and they have issues like the rest of us, yet their

job is serving and protecting others,” McCormack said. “What I have found is that most people are of great good will and they want to help the military, they just don’t know how. Putting together a system that is beneficial to them has been an honor.”

On Nov. 11, Veterans Day, Mission United conducted its formal launch.

“We will begin to have data of who is calling and what their needs are, and we can evolve the ecosystem of help to build resources where there is demand,” Adams said. Getting the system up and running and making it available to everyone is just the beginning.

“Helping those who need help is tier-one,” Adams explained, “but there are two other phases of progress that can’t happen overnight.”

One of Mission United’s future goals for those transitioning out of the military is for them to consider Hampton Roads for their long-term home.

“Our goal is for Hampton Roads to be the most military-friendly community in the nation,” Adams said. This goes beyond providing an emotional connection, and includes providing employment and education opportunities that will help individuals advance in their post-military careers.

The third-tier goal is for Mission United to become a thought leader and a contributing change agent for the most complex and pressing problems facing the local military community.

“This is going to be customized to what the Hampton Roads community needs, and that’s the only way to be effective to help those who need help,” Adams said. “We are going to have to work hard to earn trust and deliver what people expect.”

Through Mission United, Hampton Roads’ proven pride in its military population can transition into active and effective support.

“Mission United is going to create ways for every citizen to make a difference, not just because it’s the right thing to do but because if we do this right together we are going to capture the spirit of Hampton Roads in a way that has never been captured before,” Adams said. — **IL**



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Scott Adams, regional president of CBRE, became chairman of Mission United in January.