

Episode 00039 - Interview Theresa Hart - Newby-ginnings

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

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So that's why Newby-Ginnings is spelled the way it is. It's a play on his name. I mean, we see between 175 and 200 clients in our shop every single day.

[Tom Faust - Co-host]

Welcome to Veteran Voices, CITREP. With your hosts, Tom and Chris Faust. Welcome to Veteran Voices.

I am your host, Tom Faust. I'm here with my son, Chris. And today we have Theresa Hart of Newby-Ginnings.

This is a veteran support organization in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. And I guess what we should just do is just welcome you, Theresa, and let you kind of give us an introduction to yourself. Yeah, welcome in.

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

Well, thank you so much for having me. Hi, Tom. Hi, Chris.

Yeah, my name is Theresa Hart. I am the founder and executive director of Newby-Ginnings of North Idaho. We're actually in Post Falls, Idaho.

[Tom Faust - Co-host]

Sorry.

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

Yeah, no, that's okay. So we're right next door to Spokane, Washington in Idaho.

[Tom Faust - Co-host]

So can you tell me a little bit about how you got started with this? What brought you to start Newby-Ginnings? And what's it about?

And kind of give us an idea of that.

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

Okay, well, I will tell you that Newby-Ginnings was an accident. I didn't really mean to do this.

But I will tell you how it started.

My son's name is Nick Newby. So that's why Newby-Ginnings is spelled the way it is. It's a play on his name.

Nick joined the Idaho National Guard right here in Post Falls, Idaho in 2008. And then he graduated from high school in 2009. He did all his basic training, advanced training in 2009.

And then he was deployed to Iraq with his unit in 2010. This was a big deployment for this area. His unit did convoy security in Baghdad, Camp Victory.

Nick was the gunner. That was his job. He sat up in the turret.

With the technology, I was able to talk to Nick all the time. I actually carried my phone around on a little holster. So I never missed a call or a Facebook message or anything like that.

I was able to talk to him all the time. Unfortunately, he was never really able to tell me what he was doing over there. It was, I guess there was this thing called operational security.

And I think it's stupid, especially when it comes to mothers. I think mothers should know everything their children are doing over there. But apparently it's a thing.

And he wasn't allowed to tell me what he was doing. But he did say this. He says, Mom, I'm not afraid.

He says, nothing can hurt me here. He said he had all the trust in the world, in the army, in his armor, in his brothers. And he said, nothing can hurt me.

He was having a great time. He did say that there was one thing he was afraid of. And I said, well, what is that?

And I know right where I was standing in the kitchen when he was telling me this, leaning up against the counter. And I said, well, what is that? What are you afraid of?

And he says, well, it's called an EFP, Explosively Formed Penetrator. Are you familiar? Yes.

And he said, he described it to me as a cylindrical shaped bomb. Told me it was full of molten copper. They're detonated.

They're not tripped like a regular IED that you step on or roll on and go boom. It's detonated, meaning somebody's watching. And he said, the good news, mom, is he says they're really, really expensive to make.

They can't make them here. They're very rare. I will never see one.

So I was confident in that. Nick was 10 months into his 12-month deployment. He was out on a mission.

He was not the gunner that day. He and the sergeant had traded places. So he was the truck commander in the passenger seat of the Humvee.

He was the third vehicle in a three-vehicle convoy. And the first two vehicles were MRAPs. So they were up-armored vehicles.

And he was in a Humvee on their way back to Camp Victory. And an EFP, the one thing that Nick said he was afraid of, was detonated right next to the driver's side door of the Humvee that he was in. So it went right through the cab.

We lost Nathan Byers. He was driving the Humvee. And we lost my Nick that day, July 7th of 2011.

[Tom Faust - Co-host]

And so the organization then, so you've named it for him. The whole thing is dedicated to his memory.

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

Right. So I was working for the state of Idaho at the time as a registered nurse. I was a registered nurse.

And I took about two months off. I had to figure out what I was going to do with my life without my son. I did end up going back to work, very, very part-time.

I had medical leave. So I could kind of ease back in a little bit at a time. I think it was around May that my medical leave was running out.

And I was expected to work full-time. And I was still just really, really struggling. And I was having a hard time.

Just, I mean, understandably having a very hard time. And at that point, we made the hard family decision to go down to one income for a little while until I could figure out what I was going to do. And so I left my job with the state.

I left my job as a nurse and I stayed home. And it was during the time that I was home that a lot of Nick's friends, battle buddies, you know, not just his battle buddies, but guys that were in the convoy with him that day, they were really struggling. And a lot of them were calling me and talking to me.

I was kind of their connection to Nick. And it's a long story. And there was a lot of amazing people involved.

But we thought, well, that's what we can do. We can start a program that helps these young men and women that are struggling after deployment. And so that's what I was going to do.

So I wrote our mission statement, developed our logo, our motto, and applied for my articles of incorporation as a nonprofit in the state of Idaho, which I received on October 15th of 2013. And so I look at October 15th, 2013 as my official day, first official day of business as a nonprofit. So I started from home.

I was just going to do it part time from home and just provide services. You know, I called some veterans organizations, introduced myself, said, my name is Theresa Hart. I'm the gold star mother of Nicholas Newby.

And I just started a nonprofit to help veterans. So if you have a veteran that needs something, please let me know. Well, before I knew it, my four car garage was full of donations.

And we had to move because I was parking my car out in the snow because I couldn't get into my garage anymore. So it took off pretty quick. So we moved into like an industrial unit not too far from my house.

And we were there for five months before we grew out of that. And then we moved to Dalton Gardens, and we were there for two years. And then we moved to where we are now.

And we've been in the building we are now almost 10 years. We've been there about nine and a half years. Actually, nine years in May.

Yeah, so nine years. So what we do is we provide essential items like personal and essential, like personal and household items. Like a thrift store, we accept donations from the community.

So anything a veteran and their family could use. And we provide resources and referrals as well. We have a veterans relief fund.

We can provide emergency financial assistance. We just want to make sure that they're getting the benefits that they deserve. We can give them referrals to other organizations, veteran service officers, things like that.

So right now, I looked right before I got on with you. And we are well over 6,900 veterans, active service members, and Gold Star families enrolled in our program now.

[Chris Faust - Co-host]

Wow, that's really good. That's great.

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

So that's Newby-Ginnings in a nutshell.

[Chris Faust - Co-host]

One thing is, I guess, how would you define success when it comes to serving the veteran community?

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

That is a really great question. I love that question. So how would I define success for Newby-Ginnings would be that they leave feeling like they are better than when they got there.

For whatever reason, they received food, clothing, furniture, maybe a refrigerator, or maybe they received a referral to an organization, or they receive emergency financial assistance, that they leave there feeling like they received something that is going to improve the quality of their life or ease their stress, which is our goal.

[Tom Faust - Co-host]

Can you share a story, it doesn't have to have names or anything, but of a veteran or family that was really deeply impacted from your work?

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

Honestly, it happens every single day. I guess one of the ones that always stands out to me, and this really happened several years ago, it was an elderly World War II veteran that was at Garden Plaza. And he had a power wheelchair.

So we also provide medical equipment too. Medical equipment, as you know, is very, very expensive. The VA does provide it, but sometimes it takes a while for the VA to move and to get our veterans what they need.

So this World War II veteran was at Garden Plaza. His power wheelchair had pooped out. It was no longer working.

His family was working really hard with the VA and with insurance companies trying to get this veteran a new power wheelchair. He had a manual wheelchair, but he did not have the upper body strength to propel himself. And so he was dependent on other people for any kind of mobility until he got this power wheelchair.

We work really closely with Garden Plaza. And finally, someone at Garden Plaza said, well, isn't he a veteran? And the family said, well, yeah, he's a World War II veteran.

And they're like, oh my gosh, call Newby-Ginnings. So they called Newby-Ginnings. I said, bring in his proof of military service and we'll see what we can do.

They came in at noon. They filled out our little enrollment form, provided proof of his military service at noon that day. And by four o'clock that evening, he had a brand new power wheelchair delivered to Garden Plaza for him.

[Tom Faust - Co-host]

Do I understand properly that most or maybe all of the things that people can get at New

Beginnings are no cost to the veteran?

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

100%. Everything at Newby-Ginnings is free. Did I forget to mention that part?

[Tom Faust - Co-host]

I don't recall hearing it. So I just wanted to make sure about that. So I just wanted to make sure it got out there.

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

Yeah. So everything at Newby-Ginnings is free. The only thing that we require is proof of military service.

We don't make a copy of it. We don't keep those kinds of records. We just lay eyeballs on it.

We sign off on it. They fill out a short enrollment form that basically just gives us their name, address, phone number kind of thing. And they get them into our database.

And yeah, everything at Newby-Ginnings is free. There's no price tags. We don't have a cash register.

They can come shopping once a week and get food, clothing, furniture. We work with the VA and Goodwill. Both have programs that house homeless veterans.

So those programs will go out and find the homeless veteran, either if they're on the streets or if they're couch surfing or if they're in transitional type housing. Go out and find them, provide case management, get them stable. And then they'll get them into their own home.

Once they're into their own home, they literally have nothing except for maybe a backpack they've been lugging around. So their case manager that just got them housed will bring them to Newby-Ginnings the first time they'll bring them. And we will get them everything they need for their new home so they can make this empty apartment or this empty house a home for themselves.

[Chris Faust - Co-host]

So then that kind of definitely segues into community involvement. Community support is definitely needed and important there. And I'm guessing it's pretty important.

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

I can't even express to you in words how important our community is and how much I appreciate our community. I literally, I think that we have the best community in the world. We don't receive any kind of federal funding.

We don't receive any kind of grants. We will write for smaller grants for specific programs like Homes for Heroes just granted us \$5,000 for our Veterans Relief Fund, which is amazing. And we'll apply for small little grants, but we don't receive any kind of VA funding, federal funding, nothing.

No state, city, nothing. It's 100% this community donations and local fundraisers that keep us not only surviving, but thriving.

[Chris Faust - Co-host]

And I'm assuming it goes out further than local. It's not just the local community. It's anyone who wants to.

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

Absolutely, anyone. Okay, yeah, my family lives in Connecticut. So I guess we have donors from all over the country, but yeah, we don't receive any kind of funding in that regard.

It's all donations and fundraisers that we do.

[Tom Faust - Co-host]

Do you work? Well, I mean, you've mentioned the VA. Do you work with any other veterans serving organizations, partnership in any way with them?

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

We work very closely with the VA. Mostly the VA refers veterans to us that need us. That's one of our biggest.

We don't do any kind of advertising. We certainly don't need to. Most of our clients are word of mouth advertising and referrals from other veterans organizations, such as the VA, the Spokane Vet Center, the American Legions, the VFWs.

We work very, very closely with them. And a lot of like assisted livings and rehabs. If we have a veteran that is in an assisted living or if they're in a rehab facility, they just got a new knee or a new hip and they need things.

We get a lot of referrals from them as well.

[Chris Faust - Co-host]

So how can other people get involved? Whether it's other local civilians, businesses, fellow veterans, how can they get involved to help?

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

Well, I think there's several ways. Of course, we would love to have, we could always use volunteers. We're volunteer driven.

So, I mean, we're like a thrift store, but on a kind of a bigger scale. And so we receive donations from the community and things are always coming in. We need people that are gonna go through and sort things and put it out on the floor and keep things clean and organized.

And so we can always use volunteers. And of course, we could always use donations of things. You know, if people wanted to do a food drive for us or a sock drive or a towel drive, we've had lots of local organizations that have done.

We have the core group did a pot and pan drive for us called Pandemonium. And we got stuff to wear that they couldn't even give it to us all at once. It was truckloads full of pots and pans.

It was amazing. And we've had organizations do sock drives and food drives, all sorts of things. And we always love that.

And that's a great way for our veterans to benefit from that kind of community support. And also sponsorship, like corporate sponsorship, helping us out financially, even if they wanna donate. We have, I would say, four accounts.

We have just our regular operating account, operating funds that people can donate just so we can keep doing what we're doing. We have a new building account because we just launched a major capital campaign. We are looking to move again because we're bursting at the seams.

So we're trying to purchase a new building. We also have our Veterans Relief Fund so we can provide emergency financial assistance to our veterans. I mean, it's Sunday and I've already received a phone call for rental assistance for one of our veterans today.

And our food pantry. So we get a lot of our veterans, families that come into Newby-Ginnings. I would say most, if not every single visitor that comes into Newby-Ginnings on a daily basis leaves with food.

I would say food is our biggest thing. And if our food pantry is running low on things, we have a dedicated account that we can go to Costco or we can go to a grocery outlet and we can get things that we need for our pantry.

[Tom Faust - Co-host]

Mm-hmm, nice, nice. Yeah, that kind of made me wonder, and you mentioned the food. Now you answered part of the question.

I was gonna ask, what are the most important things that people could donate that would serve the best? What kind of items?

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

We fly through food like you would not believe. Yeah, so I would say food is number one. Really, we accept anything useful.

Clothes, we do limit at this point just because of space constraints, two bags of clothes at a time. But if people have gently used, new or gently used clothing, shoes, of course, anything useful, any kind of housewares. So anything for their kitchen, their bedroom, their bathroom.

You don't even think about like little trash cans. If we have a veteran that's moving into a new place, shower curtains and those things that we buy one time and we never think about again and we kind of take for granted, they're very expensive when you're just starting off. So especially for our newly housed veterans, we like to have all of those things available, laundry baskets and those kinds of things so they can start off their new life in their new home.

I think the list of what we cannot accept is a lot shorter. And so let me say that. So what we cannot accept is like building materials, like wood, carpeting, anything that's gonna have to be wired in like lighting fixtures or sinks, toilets, things like that.

Because a lot of our veteran families are renting. They don't have the need for those kinds of things and they take up a lot of space in our shop. So building materials, car parts, so we can't accept tires or things like that.

They're just so specific. Large entertainment centers that the big entertainment centers that have the square hole because we don't have square TVs anymore. So we ended up sitting on those for a long time.

And the big L-shaped office desks. Again, the computer desks, we always need those, but the larger desks, we just can't accept. So like the really big things we just don't have the room for and neither do our families.

[Chris Faust - Co-host]

Okay.

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

Yeah.

[Chris Faust - Co-host]

It might be the same things.

[Tom Faust - Co-host]

It might be. I don't know. I was gonna say, what do you have like goals?

I mean, you mentioned your building fund. What are your goals for the next year or two getting into this, getting a new building?

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

Honestly, that is really what we're trying to do right now. That's our big goal. In the 11 and a half years that Newby-Ginnings has been in operation, we have expanded five times.

We just keep kind of growing in response to the need in the community. And we at this point are bursting at the seams again. And we currently are leasing a, it's almost, it's about 9,200 square feet.

So if we round up, we'll say 10,000 square feet. So we really need to at least double our space or even more than that, a 20 to 40,000 square foot building to make a move worth it. But we really, we have to, at this point we're limiting what can come in and we're limiting even our families that can shop at one time.

We have nine carts and we allow nine families to shop at a time because our shopping space is so small. It just wouldn't be safe to have more than that at one time. So a lot of our families, they'll have to wait.

Sometimes they will wait hours in our lobby for their turn to go shopping. So we really are in desperate need of a bigger space. So we're really looking for a new building right now.

That's our biggest need.

[Chris Faust - Co-host]

So for our listeners, especially those in the area there, how can they get in touch with you to if they wanna donate something or if they wanna help contribute?

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

Oh, I would love for anybody to give me a call. Our website is newbeginnings.org, all one word, newbeginnings.org. All of our contact information is on there, but I would love for people to come visit Newby-Ginnings, see what we get to do every day.

I mean, we see between 175 and 200 clients in our shop every single day. And it's more, we would enroll probably 15 new clients a week, but lately we've been enrolling probably 10 to 15 a day is how many. I mean, we're just growing and growing and growing.

[Tom Faust - Co-host]

And that implies that there is a major need for this kind of thing.

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

Well, there really is. I remember when I started Newby-Ginnings, I actually had somebody, not just somebody, but more than one person actually say to not do it, that no one will come. And I thought, well, I think that people will come.

I think it'll be important, but I had no idea. So I kind of started off saying that Newby-Ginnings was an accident. And it really was, like I said, we just keep growing in response to the need because I had no idea that this was gonna happen, that the need was going to be this great.

[Tom Faust - Co-host]

So if, and this may not be an easy thing for people to do, but let's say, I mean, we're only talking about the need in the Post Falls, Coeur d'Alene, Spokane area right now. But I mean, there's Seattle, there's Denver, Los Angeles, the places all across the country. And it sounds, my understanding is that yours is pretty much the only place that's like this with a free thrift store for veterans.

If others wanted to start something like this, which I'm sure will not be a small endeavor, but if they wanted to start something like this, do you have any advice or anything that might help somebody get started?

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

Well, first of all, I agree. I think Newby-Ginnings or the concept of Newby-Ginnings would be accepted. And I think it's necessary, needed everywhere.

I think our donors, every single day we get calls saying that they want to donate to Newby-Ginnings. It's important to them to know that what they donate to Newby-Ginnings is going to go to a veteran family at no charge, that we don't charge for anything, it's free. And it means something to them.

And I feel like for our donors, it's a way for them to show their appreciation for their service. And of course, it's very helpful for our veteran families as well. So I think it would be well supported in any community.

And I would love for it to thrive. I mean, we do have, I can't say that we don't have a Newby-Ginnings anywhere else because we did have one of our clients move to Tennessee and her husband's a combat vet. They moved to Tennessee.

She called me and said, Theresa, I want to start a Newby-Ginnings in Tennessee. And I said, I would love that. What can I do?

I sent her my 501c3 application. I sent her all of our forms. I sent her our bylaws.

And I said, please make it your own. It can't be Newby-Ginnings. But I didn't want her to have to reinvent the wheel.

So I just sent the concept to her and she started Operation New Hope in Tennessee. That's modeled after Newby-Ginnings and she's doing really well.

[Tom Faust - Co-host]

So it's two now. That's good.

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

Two, yeah.

[Tom Faust - Co-host]

That's great. Because I think, like you said, I mean, this is really needed everywhere. So much need out there.

So I'm hoping people will hear this and be encouraged to start their own and maybe contact you for a little helpful information to get started if they need it, I guess.

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

I would be so happy to do that.

[Chris Faust - Co-host]

That'd be great. So do you kind of have any like, any words of encouragement for veterans listening who might be struggling, unsure where to turn, or might even not want to? They feel like they don't want to push their problems on other people.

Do you have any words of encouragement for someone?

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

I would encourage them to come visit Newby-Ginnings. Because Newby-Ginnings isn't just about the stuff that you get there. It's not just about the food and the clothes.

It's a place, I mean, when I say that we're seeing 175 to 200 people in there a day, the lobby can be very busy sometimes. But they know this when they come in there. They know that they're going to have a chance to talk to other veterans.

That's one of my big goals is to have a bigger lobby, have some places where our veterans can sit and talk to each other and offer that peer support to each other. Because that's what they want to do. They don't mind sitting in the lobby because they get to meet other veterans and they're talking to other veterans and they're telling stories.

And when I see two veterans meet in our lobby, our very small lobby, and have a conversation, I feel like that my work is done for the day. And I feel, like I said, I feel like they, I just want them to leave feeling better than they did when they got there. And sometimes maybe that means they're not even leaving with anything.

Maybe they just met somebody.

[Tom Faust - Co-host]

All right. Well, I just want to thank you for being on with us and for sharing this information. This is very touching and very helpful, I think.

Certainly for the local veterans here and then the other group in Tennessee. And I hope others will start organizations similar to this because they're, like we said, there really is a need for it.

[Chris Faust - Co-host]

Yeah.

[Tom Faust - Co-host]

So yeah, I just want to thank you for being here and for talking with us today.

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

Well, thank you, Tom. Thank you, Chris. I really appreciate it.

I like being able to spread the word about Newby-Ginnings. And again, I would love and encourage anyone who's never been there to please come see, come see what Newby-Ginnings is. I would love to show people around, give them a tour, and see if anybody would like to be involved in any way.

[Chris Faust - Co-host]

Very cool. Yeah, well, we thank you for what you're doing, not just talking to us, but just in general for the program that you created to help support veterans. We also, well, thank you and your son for the sacrifice that he made.

I know that I've lost friends and everything, so it's not an easy thing to go through. And yeah, we just really appreciate that sacrifice that helped launch this here. So he's still doing good and serving his country by helping to launch this here.

So really appreciate everything.

[Theresa Hart - Guest]

Thank you. I love that I get to talk about Nick every day. So thank you.

Thank you so much for having me. Okay.

[Chris Faust - Co-host]

So for all of our listeners too, thanks for watching here, tuning in, giving up some of your time. Please reach out if you have any questions. We're going to put links to all this stuff in the section, the audio and all that.

And yeah, just thank you for taking the time here. And click like, subscribe, spread the news, share the word, get the word out. Word of mouth is huge.

And we just want every one of these programs that we talk about to get out there and do more.

[Tom Faust - Co-host]

Yeah. All right. On that, it's been great talking with you.

And for everyone else, we'll talk to you the next time.

[Chris Faust - Co-host]

Catch you in the next one.