



## Hots & Cots: One Veteran's Mission for Healthy Barracks With Rob Evans

### SPEAKERS

Kendra Seymour, Rob Evans

RE

Rob Evans

00:00

But you know, those in the barracks have been left behind so long that, hey, they need a voice, too. And these are the 18-19-year-old individuals who are new to the military. They're trying to figure out life. They're trying to figure out the military. They're trying to figure out, like, what they just came from in their previous life. Because everyone joins for different reasons, and they just sometimes get forgotten from the bigger lens of the world. And I just want to be able to continue advocating, be their voice.

KS

Kendra Seymour

00:34

Hello everyone, and welcome to Your Indoor Air Podcast, brought to you by Change the Air Foundation. My name is Kendra Seymour, and today we're talking about an issue that's often hidden from public view but deeply felt by the people who bravely serve our country, and it's life inside military barracks. So today, I'm joined by Rob Evans, a former veteran who's created a unique platform to empower service members, and I'm super excited for him to tell you about it. So Rob, thank you so much for being here.

RE

Rob Evans

01:00

Yeah, thanks for having me on.

KS

Kendra Seymour

01:03

Yeah. Before we jump in, though, I do want to take a moment to say thank you so much to our corporate partner and sponsor MV Restoration. It's their generosity and the generosity of our donors and sponsors who really allow us to do the work that we're doing. It keeps our resources free. It allows us to continue our policy work and even fund small scale research. So as a 501(c)(3)

nonprofit, we really do rely on the generosity of our listeners and companies just like MV Restoration. So if you want to learn more about our sponsors or become a sponsor yourself, head on over to [ChangeTheAirFoundation.org](http://ChangeTheAirFoundation.org), and click on our corporate partner tab. So Rob, first, thank you, first of all, for your service and for the countless hours you know, you've poured into really improving the lives of our service members. And so I would love for us to kind of, you know, jump right in.

RE

Rob Evans

01:59

Yeah.

KS

Kendra Seymour

02:01

So Rob, for those who may not be familiar with you, you have created the Hots and Cots app. So tell us about what it is and what inspired you to, you know, kind of put this platform out there for our service members to use.

RE

Rob Evans

02:17

Yeah, so it's a free app on iOS and Android, where service members who live in the barracks can rate their barracks one through five stars with a picture or video and provide some additional details of what their barracks is like. Whether that's good or bad, as well as their dining facilities. They can also rate those one through five. It's very Yelp like type app where if you're new to the military, you're maybe, you're going to your first installation, and you want to know what it's like, you have a resource to see what the barracks are like. And some of your listeners may be thinking, Well, don't they have like, a map of, or a pamphlet? And it's like, no, they don't. They don't have those if you're going to live in a barracks. If you're a family or maybe you're an officer, you have those resources available. But if you're going to be like an E1 through E4 something like that, going to the barracks, you don't have that resource. You just show up to your first duty station and they try to find your room. Sometimes that room may be clean, sometimes it may be filled with mold or dirty. So you don't always have that, and that's the, what I've wanted to create as a tool and a resource for those junior enlisted. Is an app they can go and see, or they can go to the website if they just want to look at content, [hotscots.app](http://hotscots.app). They can go look at the reviews and see what things are like at, say, Fort Bragg, or maybe Fort Carson, or maybe wherever they may be going for their first duty station.

KS

Kendra Seymour

03:44

Yeah, and I think that's super important. People, I don't think, fully realize that they don't have a say in really, you know where they go or where they're assigned to live. So for civilians, so people not in the military, who may not be familiar with how these things work, like, tell us just generally speaking, like, what are the military barracks? You know, who lives in them? How do they typically operate? Just give us a little more background.

RE

Rob Evans

04:09

Okay, so that's great question. So if you're new to the military, if you're in the Air Force, they're called dorms. But if you're in the different branch, Army, it's barracks. I think Navy might be something different. We're just going to say barracks for now, I wasn't Navy. I was prior Army. But if you're new in the military, you go through your basic training, and then your school training, and then you will go to your new duty station, whatever you pick and got orders for. And then you show up you in process, and then they will send you to your unit, and then your unit will give you a room. Usually, they are managed by barracks managers. Sometimes those barracks managers are great, and they make sure those barracks are taken care of. And barracks managers are usually uniformed or civilian, depending on the branch. Each branch operates barracks and dorms differently. So they're not all going to be the same. So it gets really interesting, and really, you get really in the weeds of how they're managed. It's like, well, how does the Navy do it, and how does the Air Force do it? But for general purposes, you have a barracks manager, and those, their responsibility is to make sure those rooms are clean, safe and comfortable and they're taken care of. But that's not always the case. For various reasons, they're not. I just saw a review come in last night where their first room the service member got was with mold. There was a collapsing ceiling tile. The room wasn't taking, there was a there's an air freshener from a car up on the vent to make sure the room I guess they're trying to make the room smell better. So you have these scenarios where they're joining the military, and they're not getting great quality of life, living conditions. In 2023 there was a government accountability report that talked about this for the Army, but it also paralleled some of the findings in the army to the other branches as well, that they also have these issues with barracks that are not being taken care of.

KS

Kendra Seymour

05:59

Yeah, and, I mean, there's been news reports. I've seen it where, you know, mold starts growing on belongings. We know that can happen for a variety of reasons. Sometimes the humidity isn't managed properly. And so for people who have signed up to serve and sacrifice so much, the least we can do is provide, you know, safe and healthy housing. And so we'll get into some of the things

that you're seeing on the app. But so if someone in service is going to participate, is the feedback they give anonymous? Do they have to worry about, like, retaliation at all? You know, tell us a little

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Rob Evans

06:34

Yeah,

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Kendra Seymour

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About participation. If someone is listening and they want to participate

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Rob Evans

06:39

So that it is anonymous app. So do you download and you don't have, I'm not collecting their name, their, who they are, their room numbers. I want the, it to be very frictionless for them to submit a review. So it is anonymous to submit these reviews, because retaliation is legitimate concern, and that does happen with some leaders that are within the ranks. So and usually they're not, they're usually, like their first line leaders that kind of want to get upset about it. But, you know, I've worked with a lot of officers and senior enlisted and senior officers that have seen the app, and they are very big fans of it, and want to work to address these issues, and not so much focus on how the information came in. So they download the app, they submit a couple pictures, they submit a title, some information, and then they rate it, and they send it off. And then from there, I've been able to work with leaders at installations, and I can reach out to them directly, like, hey, this review came in and you want to be able to try to make things right as best as possible.

KS

Kendra Seymour

07:47

Yeah, and we're going to get into that because I love that. It's not just a platform for people to complain or post whatever like, I love how solutions focused you are, and can't wait for people to hear about that. So let's talk a little bit more about the types of like concerns that you're commonly seen reported on the app.

RE

Rob Evans

08:05

So the common things I see is mold. Mold is a big one. You know, I have seen service members who leave to go on vacate. They go, they take leave, or they go maybe they're go to the field for a week, and they come back in their room is ruined by mold, because the room has just been the mold is just taken over. Now all their stuff is broken and destroyed. AC issues. AC not working. And you may think, what they can open a window? Well, no, not all the windows open. Not every installation has windows that open, and they are not usually. A lot of times they're not allowed to have window units, so they're just having to go and sleep in their car, or they'll like, if you're in Texas, where we just had some issues with AC, they're working outside hot sun, Texas heat. It's not great. And then they go back to their barracks, and now they don't have air conditioning. We've, I've seen issues with water, no hot water, so they're taking cold showers. I've seen issues with locks to their rooms not working. And, you know, some may be thinking like, well, this is the military, you should expect that, and to a certain degree, you should expect you are going to have these challenges when you're deployed, when you go forward and you deploy to overseas, whatever that may be, absolutely, if you're going to the field, absolutely you're I mean, the military is meant to be hard, but that does not mean it needs to be hard 24/7. You know, when you go back to your home, because this is their home, it should be clean, safe and comfortable. It should be a place that they don't need to stress about

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Kendra Seymour

09:41

Yeah. And you know what I find so inspiring about the military families that I've had the opportunity to connect with and work with? You know, this year as Change the Air has gotten more involved into advocating for reform on legislative side for those in the military is that everyone all, they're not asking for anything crazy or above and beyond. It's just a safe and healthy place to live. They want to do their job. They want to serve. These people by and large, they're problem solvers, they're hard working, they're, you know, they love our country, they love the military, and these are basic things that you know, we should be able to provide. And I'm just, I'm so inspired by the grit you know, you I think often to in the military, you guys, they're so often expected just to, like, suck it up, for lack of a better term. But there's a point where we should not expect them to live in, you know, moldy homes, or ones without proper heating and air, or, you know, locks that don't work. You know, I know you've mentioned before, you told me a story about working lights in a parking lot. Do you want to talk about that? Because that is not something I thought about.

RE

Rob Evans

10:51

Yeah, absolutely, and something I didn't think about either when I first started Hot and Cots. So part of the what you can do also in the app is you have the basic information you want, I want to collect, but then there's, like, optional questions you can ask, you can fill out. Like do your locks work? What's the interior lighting situation? Are they, are all the interior lights working or the exterior lights working? And those are things that I didn't think about, to be frank, as a man, I don't think about, hey, are the lights working? But, you know, I was chatting with a woman who was in the military, and she said, you know, you need to, these are concerns that, as a woman that I think about, you know, I can go to a Target parking lot or a Walmart parking lot and there's lighting, every such feat, and it's working like there's usually lights that are working. You don't always have that in the barracks. In a barracks footprint, lights may not be working, they're out like. There was an installation I looked at not too long ago, and I was there one night, and all the lights were out on one of the buildings, like there was no lighting in one place of the building. So it's like these little things like these are may seem little, but they are important to keeping people safe. There was an issue not too long ago at Fort Hood, where there was a service member going around breaking into rooms and assaulting women. So these are the legitimate things that do happen on a military installation, just because military does not equate safe. They also, you have these unsafe areas as well.

KS

Seymour

12:23

Yeah, yeah. And again, I think these are just very, you know, basic things that people should come to expect, that taxpayers should expect their money to provide, you know, decent locks and lighting that works so you know you're walking through a parking lot that isn't pitch black, and that, you know, at night, you can feel safe doing so. So what I love about when we first met is you were talking about how you've been able to actually, like, solve and fix a lot of these problems. So can you tell us about, like, some of the things that have been solved because of your app and the work that you're doing?

RE

Rob Evans

12:57

Yeah, I wish I could say I fixed all the issues, but I have not, but I do get these little moment, these little wins that do help service members. And I remember, I still remember, to this day, the first one I helped with, and I launched the app, and then maybe a month later, I was able to work with installation. And a service member came back from, I think, somewhere overseas, and they went to their room, and it was, there was bugs all in their room, and I think there's some mold, and they left a review. And through my partnership with this installation, I was like, able to go to

them like, Hey, this is the room. The service member just got back, and it just got assigned to them, and within 24 hours, the service member was moved out of their room to a clean room and taken care of. And there are processes in place. I don't want to say that I am trying to replace any existing processes to get these issues resolved, but they get bogged down in the system of submitting a ticket, waiting a week for someone to look at it, and then they got to go and look at it, and then they need to figure out what it could take up to two weeks, three weeks, a month before an issue is actually resolved. But I've been able to use Hots and Cots to cut through that red tape, work with leaders that may not necessarily be aware of some of these issues, and get issues resolved a lot faster than they would going to the normal channels.

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Kendra Seymour

14:16

Yeah and you know, I was so pleased to hear I think sometimes we hear just the negative, oh, they didn't want to address the issue. They covered it, you know, up. But you've actually had some good, you know, relationships with commanders and installations and other decision makers, of people who really like engage with the data and welcomed your feedback. Do you want to speak to that at all anymore? You kind of touched on it already.

RE

Rob Evans

14:38

Yeah, I have touched on it. So there's a couple ways I've been able to do that. So I've been able to meet with Secretary of the Army to chair with like the work I've been doing Hots and Cots. I've been able to be part of the barracks task force that Secretary of War announced. But even before that, I've been working with leaders at different installations across the globe on these issues. I'm talking Washington over, Washington state, all the way to Korea, like all these different installations, I've been able to work with leaders to get this issues in front of them, but also I've been able to create mechanisms within the app where these leaders can respond to reviews and let them know in a constructive way that they are being heard. Because that's the other part of this. Is like service members don't feel like they're being heard. And I'm gonna, I'll circle back to that, because there's actually I wanted something I wanted to touch on. But leaders can engage with the review and reach out to them, and while the service member who left the review can still remain anonymous and feel like there's not going to be retaliation on issues. You know, there was an issue at Fort Hood where there were flies in one of the drinks, like there were flies in the dining facilities, and someone left to review, and within five minutes, somebody responded at the leadership level was like, Hey, we're going to take care of this. We're going to close the dining facility down and address this issue. And it was within five minutes, and if that service member would have went through the proper channels, it would have been months, or maybe not even been heard. So back to the part about being heard, because that's the other thing. I've talked to many service members, and they like Hots and Cots because they feel like they have a voice to say

what's going on and actually being public. And I think there's that public accountability part where you can submit something internally, and it just kind of gets swept under or forgotten about, because I'm sure many don't even aware of a government accountability report on the barracks?

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Kendra Seymour

16:23

Yeah, yeah. And one of the things that I forgot to mention, we're going to link to your Hots and Cots app, like in the show notes and on our website, that people can easily find it, because it really is such an incredible thing that you've created. Because you're not even active military right now. You're retired, and this is something you did after getting out correct, like correct that is, that is, you know, inspiring, that you wanted to continue to step up and help the men and women who are continuing to serve. So, you know, since launching the app, because it's only a few years old. So what has surprised the most, like either issues you didn't anticipate or patterns that have kind of emerged, has anything kind of started to stand out to you now?

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Rob Evans

17:07

Yeah, one that I'm still doing this, I think, is a big thing that kind of stood out, has stood out for me. I thought for sure that somebody would have asked me to stop doing this from the government. I thought for sure I'd be getting a knockout or something in my mail saying, hey, you need to stop doing this. You're not, you're airing our dirty laundry. But it's really been the opposite, going back to the leaders wanting to engage. That's one, I think the other thing is just how much service members are just trying to get issues resolved. That's they want to get these issues addressed. And they're not trying to be bad actors and just air dirty laundry. But, you know, that's what they want to but the big thing is just how big mold is across installations, and across like this definitely is southeast, but all just in general military installations on how bad the mold is. And I really wish we could get that address and get a handle on,

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Kendra Seymour

17:58

Yeah, because I think the challenge with mold, and it's complicated, and we recognize that. Is that mold is a symptom of moisture, and so you have to correct and address the underlying source of moisture, which is not always easy to determine, and when the underlying source is tied to something like HVAC, that is, you know, can get expensive to address or ventilation issues, building structural issues. You know, I think when you start to acknowledge mold, you start to realize just how far reaching the fix needs to be in order to get to a meaningful solution. Because what we don't want to see and and what we see happening too often, though, is like, we'll throw

some bleach on it, just clean it off, like service members, or even just the public in general, being told, like, this is something you can just, you know, remove and clean yourself. Which one, it can be a health hazard in and of itself, but two, fails to address, like the underlying reason for the mold growth, and it's basically these band aid fixes, right? So, yes, committing resources as a country and saying, Hey, like, we need to commit to fix this for real. You know, my dad used to say, do it once and do it right? Yes, I think is super important. So I know you talked about some of the command and decision makers being responsive and open to this. What has the response been from the military community itself? So the users you're helping, have there been any stories or anything that have kind of just really stayed with you?

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Rob Evans

19:30

You know, I get issues sent up to me through different, mean, different channels of social media, and usually it's like public, so, like, in case, like a Reddit I will, somebody will post something on Reddit, and somebody will tag me, and I'll jump in, or sometimes I'll just jump in the comments before someone even tags me in. And there is this expectation, which is a heavy load to carry, but they see that I engage, and they say, like, oh, we know this is going to be taken care of, and this is going to be addressed. So it's like. I've kind of built this following of folks who see me as kind of the voice of those to live in the barracks, because I've been able to kind of get these connections with leaders at various levels. But I think just they are happy that somebody is advocating for them and speaking on their behalf. You know, there's a lot of great organizations out there who focus on the families, and I that is amazing that we have so many. But you know, those in the barracks have been left behind so long that, hey, they need a voice, too. And these are the 18, 19 year old individuals who are new to the military. They're trying to figure out life. They're trying to figure out the military. They're trying to figure out like, what they just came from in their previous life, because everyone joins for different reasons, and they just sometimes get forgotten from the bigger lens of the world. And I just want to be able to continue advocating, be their voice, and be like, Hey, these are they have these issues too in the barracks. It's not just housing, and we need to make it better across the board, like we need to. We can do two things at once. We can focus on housing and barracks. We don't need to separate them.

KS

Kendra Seymour

21:09

Yeah, and that's one of the reasons when when we all connected, I was like, you have to come on. You have to talk about this, so that we can really bring that voice and that piece to it. Because I think you're right. I think some of the resources out there focus on families and children, which is wonderful, but there are our service members where that's not where they are in life, or that doesn't apply to them, and they still deserve to have their voice heard, and, you know, a right to safe and healthy housing, and some of these other issues that you address. So we didn't talk

about this, but is the you said the app was free to use. So how do you sustain and fund the platform?

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Rob Evans

21:48

It's pretty much self funded, and, you know, I sell some merchandise every here and there that will help fund it. But, you know, I've, I'm the developer, so I kind of have a little cheat code there that I don't need to spend a ton of money on getting people to develop the stuff. I just need to invest a lot of my time, which means a lot of late nights. But I've been self funding this primarily, and folks can contribute to the app. There's avenues within the app where they can send, like a contribution to help, which has been very beneficial and helpful at times. But that's pretty much how I fund it. It's all it's self funded in Denver that I've been on.

KS

Kendra Seymour

22:25

I so appreciate that as someone who I still run. It's been almost four years since I co founded the foundation, and I still run it full time for free as a volunteer, and invest a lot of my own money and time, because you believe so much in it. But I also know how meaningful it is, and I hope people who are moved by what you're doing. I think I saw there is a donate button on it, right? Yes, that people can support that. I know how much sometimes you know even that 10 \$20 can mean people think, oh, it's only a little bit, but it can mean so much, and it can really go a long way to helping people and can. Yeah, thank you. Thank you for that and and continuing to do that work. So tell us a little bit. What's next for Hots and Cots, like, Are there features or expansions, or anything you see in the future? Where do you see?

RE

Rob Evans

23:16

Yeah, so, so I'm finishing up, so we're coming up on the holiday. So I'm trying to finish up a couple features that I want to release, and then take some time off from development, spend with family. But I have some features that I'm kind of working on. Like I said, I have features I'm working on. I just released the ability to do like a cots satisfaction, where you can rate your how satisfied you are with your with your living conditions, whether it's barracks, housing, dorms over time, because reviews are great in their snapshot in time. But maybe you want to track how satisfied you are over time, so that's a feature I just released. For and that's private for them to manage and track. But also, like I want to be able to partner more with either this Army or the branch specifically, or even as a DoW, DoD as a whole, be able to partner with them because, you know, and many different reports out there and avenues I've seen, like, there is this, these data pieces missing on what quality life is like in these barracks. I think a lot of leaders think and have an idea of what's

going on, but I think Hots and Cots kind of bridges that gap of what's actually happening in the barracks and what the quality of life is like, yeah, to make more informed decisions. And so that's big picture of what I would I want to get to,

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Kendra Seymour

24:28

Yeah, and we'll have to have some conversations later about how we can help support you with that, because it's something that we believe in, and is very mission aligned with the work that we're doing, and so tell us one more time, because I'm going to link to it on our website and the show notes. How can we download and find your app? If someone's interested?

RE

Rob Evans

24:48

So you can, yeah, you can find it on iOS and Android for free. It's out there. Like I said, No subscriptions. It's all free. Or you can go to the website, H, O, T, S, C, O, T, S hotspots.app, and you can view content there, but if you want to do any reviews, you need to download the app and then, yeah, and you can get in touch with me through social media, and all the links are on the website.

KS

Kendra Seymour

25:11

Yeah, wonderful. Well, thank you so much. You know, Rob, really appreciate everything that you're doing and continuing to shine a light and help those who are sacrificing so much for us. It's so important. I really appreciate it.

RE

Rob Evans

25:25

Thank you so much for having me on and chatting about this,

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Kendra Seymour

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And for everyone else listening, we have a military support page if you're active military or former military. If you're just interested in learning more, you can head on over to [ChangeTheAirFoundation.org](http://ChangeTheAirFoundation.org), and we have a military support tab. If you are finding that you're dealing with mold and water damage, and you don't know where to start, whether you're military or civilian, you can head on over to our resource tab and click start here at the very first thing

you're going to see. And you can select mold in the military, mold in the home, mold in the workplace and coming soon, mold in schools. So we're going to have a lot of resources there to support you. We're going to link to Rob's resources on that military support page. But if you never want to miss an interview like this or a free resource, head on over to our website, [ChangeTheAirFoundation.org](http://ChangeTheAirFoundation.org), and sign up for our newsletter, because it really is the best way to get information like this delivered directly to your box. Thank you so much, everyone. We'll see you next time.