**Washington, D.C. (May 4, 2020) —** The Elizabeth Dole Foundation announced Lyra Helms will join its 2020 class of Dole Caregiver Fellows – 30 military and veteran caregivers who have been carefully selected from across the country to represent those Americans caring for a wounded, ill, or injured service member or veteran at home. The role of these Fellows has never been more important as caregivers are under unprecedented stress due to the threat of the coronavirus.

As a Dole Caregiver Fellow, Helms will serve as a leader, community organizer, and advocate for the nation’s 5.5 million military caregivers – the spouses, parents, family members, and friends who provide more than $14 billion in voluntary care annually to someone who served. They will join the 225 past and present Fellows who are trained by the Foundation and empowered to share their stories and perspectives directly with national leaders in the White House, Congress, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and other government agencies, as well as decision makers in the business, entertainment, faith, and nonprofit sectors. The Fellows will provide feedback to the Foundation, its coalition partners, and government and community leaders on the most pressing issues concerning military caregivers and influence positive change on behalf of these hidden heroes.

“Our eighth class of Dole Caregiver Fellows is bringing a new set of unique voices to our mission, but all share similar stories of strength, resilience, and hope in caring for their wounded warriors,” said Steve Schwab, CEO of the Elizabeth Dole Foundation. “As they care for their veteran, we are grateful for their experiences, wisdom, and willingness to come together and advocate for their fellow hidden heroes. They are the heart and soul of our work.”

**About the Elizabeth Dole Foundation & Hidden Heroes**

Elizabeth Dole Foundation is the preeminent organization empowering, supporting, and honoring our nation’s 5.5 million military caregivers – the spouses, parents, family members, and friends — who care for America’s wounded, ill, or injured service members and veterans at home. Founded by Senator Elizabeth Dole in 2012, the Foundation adopts a comprehensive approach in its support and advocacy, working with leaders in the public, private, nonprofit, and faith communities to recognize military caregivers’ service and promote their well-being. The Foundation’s Hidden Heroes campaignbrings vital attention to the untold stories of military caregivers and provides a network for military caregivers to connect with their peers and access carefully vetted resources. Visit [www.hiddenheroes.org](http://www.hiddenheroes.org/) for more information.

**About Lyra Helms**

Lyra Helms’ job as an occupational therapist gave her critical insights into the condition of her fiancé, Adam, even before she became his permanent caregiver. Adam served in the Army from 2008-2013 and deployed to both Iraq and Afghanistan where he suffered multiple traumatic brain injuries (TBI). Lyra and Adam met at a New Year's Eve party after Adam had left the Army, and early in their relationship her professional training cued her to notice deficits in his executive functioning and memory that had gone undiagnosed for years.

Adam’s mother had been his full-time caregiver until he and Lyra moved from New Mexico to South Carolina.  When arriving for appointments at their new VA for the first time, Lyra noticed that “caregiver” was not a term recognized by the health care team. She felt that they scoffed at the thought of a grown man with no physical disabilities or developmental delays needing to have a caregiver present during medical appointments. The experience only strengthened her confidence as a caregiver, and she spent hours networking and researching federal rules, regulations, and VA directives to better understand the system of care available to Adam.

In her daily role as Adam’s caregiver, Lyra helps him maintain a routine and coordinates all his health care. This includes managing medication, reminding him of daily tasks he needs to do, setting a budget, and making appointments. She also recently became certified in crisis communication and de-escalation, which gives her techniques to calm Adam when he begins to feel stress and anxiety. In addition to her job and caregiver duties, Lyra is the Facebook administrator for an Honor the Troops page, where she posts resources and articles for other veterans and caregivers.

One of the best days Lyra has experienced as a caregiver was when she and Adam joined the Warrior Surf Program in Charleston. She was proud to watch Adam catch waves and succeed at something on his own, understanding how important it is to help him preserve some independence and find fun activities they can enjoy together.