

REPORT

Sustaining a Purposeful Life

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PTSD Veteran Foundation



The ripple a rock makes when it hits still water is how trauma affects an individual, their family, and society. Often, when a veteran returns home from war, the effects of any trauma aren't visible and slowly begin to unfold, dimming the light from within. Post-traumatic stress is complicated to pinpoint when someone suffers in silence. Life can become unmanageable, causing a feeling of hopelessness, often leading to thoughts of suicide. When a veteran transitions out of the military, the transition is more than just an employment change; it's a significant life change.

The PTSD Foundation of America is devotedly focused on reducing the veteran suicide rate, knowing that if a veteran has been diagnosed with PTSD, the individual will likely have 5 out of the six suicide risk identifiers, significantly increasing the risk of suicide. (Rogers, 2021) Our mission is to

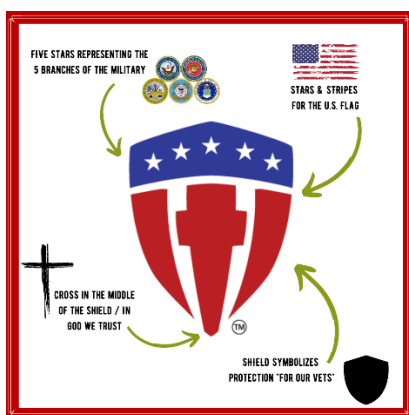
bring hope and healing to veterans and their families suffering from the effects of combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The programs and services we provide are veteran-centric, whole-person, faith-based, and recovery-oriented. This approach includes biological, psychological, social, and spiritual components. It has been said many times, "There is no place like Camp Hope." because of the supportive staff and culture of belonging, ready and willing to help each veteran heal their brokenness and find a new purpose in life.

CURRENT SITUATION

In the 20 years since 9/11, military suicides have been four times higher than deaths in war operations. The Veterans Health Administration estimates that 22 veterans take their own lives daily. We know that this number is much greater. A

joint study from America's Warrior Partnership that included the University of Alabama, Duke University, and the DoD recently reviewed the census death data from eight states over the past five years to examine the accuracy of former military service members' recorded death records and found that a large number of veteran deaths were recorded incorrectly and did not accurately reflect the cause of death as suicide. Furthermore, the study concluded that the number of veterans losing their lives to suicide is closer to 40 a day, nearly doubling the number the Department of Veteran Affairs released last year. (Shane, 2022) This only highlights the critical task and accountability of recording a death and our collective approach to the suicide epidemic.

We believe these numbers will continue to rise. The recent American exit from Afghanistan is presenting itself to be a trigger in military personnel formerly deployed there. The continuing pandemic has also had a devastating impact on veterans and has accelerated the pre-pandemic opioid crisis. We understand that our work has only begun, and we are fiercely dedicated to saving one life at a time.



WHO ARE WE AND HOW WE GOT THERE

The PTSD Foundation of America began as a grassroots effort in 2005 with a group of concerned volunteers who searched for homeless veterans on the streets of Houston with a vision and passion for drastically reducing the veteran suicide rate through programming and outreach services. Over the years, we have remained dedicated to the mission. We have successfully grown into a nationally recognized non-profit known for assisting combat veterans and their families with the complexities of post-traumatic stress, changing the trajectory of their lives, and transforming them into thriving, productive citizens of society.

As an organization, our primary focus is on the combat veteran and family unit of support. In the beginning, the outreach efforts brought veterans together for weekly support meetings called Warrior Group. The national outreach program has now grown to include three states and five chapters serving thousands of American veterans and their families across the country each year. Our staff is trained in working with victims of trauma, addiction recovery, suicidality, and post-traumatic stress. In 2012, we established Camp Hope, a residential treatment facility in Houston, Texas. Starting as a 8- bedroom home that provided interim and transitional housing to veterans working to heal their invisible wounds, our five-acre campus now includes five housing facilities with 82 beds; two buildings for classes, worship services, a meeting facility to hold Warrior Group meetings, Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings; and a unit for hosting family integration programs. Since the inception of Camp Hope, the program has maintained a 24-

hour crisis line that is answered by a trained combat veteran.

The Camp Hope program has five program goals for participants:

- ✓ Completing the six-month residential program
- ✓ Overcoming addiction
- ✓ Decreasing suicide risk factors
- ✓ Acquire coping skills for everyday living
- ✓ Attain a source of hope, forgiveness, and healing for themselves and their families

The Camp Hope program has been helping combat veterans for over ten years. A typical program journey lasts anywhere from five to eight months; every person is different. The mentors at Camp Hope compassionately work with the veterans one-on-one to help them find new purpose and change the trajectory of their lives. All services are provided free of charge to veterans and their families.



WHAT SUSTAINABILITY LOOKS LIKE TODAY

Sustainability for our organization begins with the veteran. Empowering the individual and instilling effective coping mechanisms and life skills so that they have

the tools needed to live a sustainable life. When a combat veteran enters the six-month residential program, he is guided through intensive evidence-based peer-to-peer mentoring, behavior modification, recovery, workforce preparation, and professional counseling with 24/7 support. Through the caring and compassion of the mentors and staff, long-term transformational change begins to take place as veterans find purpose, develop emotional connections, and become spiritually aligned.

Once graduated from the program at Camp Hope, the veteran can transition into our After-care program which promotes healthy social interactions and peer relationships through monthly team-building and recreational outings that include equine-assisted psychotherapy, horticultural therapy, kayaking, bowling, golfing, paintballing, and fishing. These activities reinforce social bonds among participants and increase the likelihood that participants will seek out engagement through our support groups.

Possibly the best measurement of success is every life that is saved. A Georgia resident and US Army veteran, James Hyun, was a combat specialist who deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. He shared his story in a video for Southwest Airlines:

<https://community.southwest.com/t5/Blog/Honoring-Our-Veterans-amp-Spreading-Hope/ba-p/132677>

As we align our organizational goals with our sustainability goals, we are inspired to continue growing our sustainability initiatives. The Garden of Hope, located at Camp Hope is an example of our sustainable efforts. Our heartfelt vision for the garden is that it will be an all-encompassing, high-impact project that

will provide generational benefits to the Veteran who chooses to add this alternative therapy to their daily lives. Our program at Camp Hope utilizes various holistic interventions that encourage a growth mindset and independence toward a more empowered and intentional life. We believe the Garden of Hope will have a positive impact on the mental health and well-being of those who participate, providing the opportunity to learn how to grow in the practice of therapeutic gardening. We want to give our veterans the chance to connect with the earth and the dirt, cultivate a relationship with the garden, and begin building self-reliance at the same time. The garden has been built to provide the maximum amount of harvest the space can produce and will also be used as a The Window of Tolerance resource focuses on sight, sounds, smell, taste, and feeling. Improving health and healing through nature. The on-site Chef utilizes the vegetables harvested from the garden in the daily meals prepared for the residents and staff at Camp Hope.



WHAT MAKES US EFFECTIVE

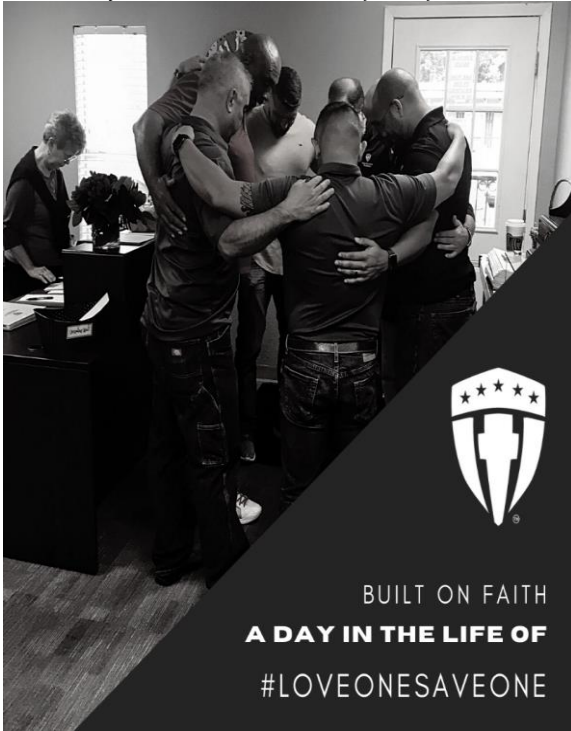
We avoid mission creep while staying relative and addressing the changing needs of the veteran community

as we address the PTSD in combat veterans and their families.

We are always looking to improve the way we approach and deliver overall care for combat veterans. If a current policy or process is inhibiting the veteran from receiving the care they need, we adjust it to meet the needs of the veteran. Recently we asked a graduate of the program what the organization means to him, and he graciously replied,

“When I think about what the PTSD Foundation of America and Camp Hope means to me, I first must reflect on how my life was before. A combat veteran from Operation Desert Shield in Iraq, I have struggled to reintegrate ever since I was discharged. I spent many years trying to live a normal life, but nothing worked. Having spent a combined prison time of 17 years... failed marriage... failed in fatherhood... and failed in life—I was ready to quit it all. My wife heard about the PTSD Foundation of America and told them my story. Someone from the foundation found me and immediately reached out. They told me there were others like me and that I was loved. They told me of a place called Camp Hope where other hurting combat veterans were healing their invisible wounds of war. As soon as I got there, I could feel the love and started healing and finding the solution in my faith. After 6 months at Camp Hope, I returned to Georgia and found the foundation waiting for me at the local PTSDUSA chapter. I attend all the Warrior Groups offered in my area. I volunteer for any opportunity to help the foundation and continue the mission to reach out to people who are suffering in silence.

The journey isn't over. I continue to heal. I continue to work towards a life worth living. Simply put—I wouldn't be here, reasonably happy and being a productive citizen, were it not for the caring people at the PTSD Foundation of America and Camp Hope." MacClean



OUR SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Looking forward through our sustainability lens, our goal is to become an organization of excellence in the programs and services we provide and create a safety net for the veteran community. Our focus will remain on improving the overall care the combat veteran receives to ensure long-term success after leaving our program. We can not do this alone and understand the value of our community partners, and their part in helping to improve the overall level of care combat veterans receive. Capacity building is a top priority, as we look to expand our footprint with additional outreach locations and residential treatment facilities located in areas where we can make the most impact.



References

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