



## Continuum of Care Assists Vets in Healing Both Visible and Invisible Wounds

Organization's outcome-driven programming focuses on social and physical well-being, mental health services.

**A**n estimated 500,000 men and women—those who have served in the U.S. military from 2001 through today—are currently living with depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Another estimated 320,000 have suffered the kind of debilitating traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) that impact their lives every day. And all the while, the number of affected troops grows ever higher.

“So many of our warriors struggle to find the appropriate care, finding it difficult to transition back into civilian life and to secure jobs,” says Michael Richardson, Vice President of Independent Services and Mental Health. Richardson came to Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) with 32 years of Army experience. As a medical service corps officer, he was deployed to Iraq, Kuwait, Kosovo, and Bosnia. “Wounded Warrior Project is working to break down barriers and increase access to services and treatments that can make a difference not only to our veterans themselves but to their families, caregivers, and communities as well.”

### A Comprehensive Approach

“Transition to civilian life is a journey,” Richardson remarks. “And we are here for our warriors’ first step and each step that follows, because we believe each should have a future worth looking forward to.”

Recognizing that traditional outpatient care doesn’t necessarily work well for this population, WWP, in collaboration with four nationally acclaimed academic medical centers and the Department of Veterans Affairs, created Warrior Care Network, a nationwide, comprehensive care network that provides clinical and family-centered treatment to veterans living with PTSD, TBIs, and other related conditions.

“Warrior Care Network’s intensive outpatient program requires warriors to remain on-site during treatment for two to three weeks during which time they’ll receive the equivalent of a year’s worth of therapy in about 70 hours,” explains Richardson. “In addition to traditional therapy, Warrior Care Network also incorporates yoga, mindfulness, and nutritional counseling. Approximately 95 percent of the warriors



▲ (second from left) Michael Richardson, Vice President of Independent Services and Mental Health, came to Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) with 32 years of Army experience as a medical service corps officer. He was deployed to Iraq, Kuwait, Kosovo, and Bosnia.



who begin a program finish it, whereas with traditional therapy, completion rates are closer to 30 to 40 percent.”

Before WWP brought its partners together, each was already delivering care to veterans, but with different approaches. One of WWP’s goals for the collaboration is to develop a single cohort-based model comprised of best practices.

WWP mental health workshops, on the other hand, are adventure-based opportunities focusing on building trust, developing coping mechanisms, and finding support. Over the course of a multiday event, warriors participate in activities like hiking, rock climbing, kayaking, and more with goals of forging both strong relationships and rediscovering themselves.

“This particular program, which includes a significant mental health component, is often cathartic for its participants and reinforces that warriors and their loved ones aren’t in this alone,” Richardson says. “Thanks to our donors, warriors never pay a penny for our programs.”

WWP also offers telephonic support that provides guidance, advice, and a non-judgmental ear for vets (and their family members and caregivers as well) who may be particularly isolated. The program is comprised of consistently scheduled weekly calls intended to help develop coping skills and practical plans for achieving realistic and measurable goals.

“The ultimate goal for Wounded Warrior Project,” Richardson concludes, “is to empower warriors to connect with others who understand what they are going through, utilize those connections to achieve recovery, and then become leaders and mentors in their communities, giving a voice and a hand to others in need.”

For more information, to get involved, or to donate, please visit [woundedwarriorproject.org](http://woundedwarriorproject.org) or call 877-TEAM-WWP (877-832-6997).