

## Wounded Veteran Learning to Lead Again



Wounded Warrior Yolanda Poullard (left) and her family.

Yolanda Poullard looks back on her time in the Army and misses using her leadership skills. While serving, she led more than 150 soldiers on a communications team. They helped connect units around Iraq. But since she left the military, Yolanda has struggled to find that new chance to guide others. Now, she may help lead veterans to the clinical mental health care many need.

Warrior Care Network has been a life-changing experience for Yolanda. She lives with invisible wounds of war.

"My life was full of depression and sadness," she said. "You come back from the war and you're a totally different person. I just couldn't function."

"I needed someone to help drive, cook, sleep, help me raise my daughter. I wouldn't do anything. I tried so many programs, and I wasn't getting anywhere. I still felt the same. I guess this is how I would have to live the rest of my life."

She eventually listened to the suggestion to try Warrior Care Network. She said she started to notice a change as soon as the evaluation process started.

The clinical treatment provided by Warrior

Care Network partner Operation Mend helped Yolanda carefully relive her traumas to find effective ways to cope with each issue. Cognitive treatment retrained the brain, while mindfulness efforts helped Yolanda address stress in her life.

"After my treatment, it brought brightness back into my home, and we could all function as a family."

Yolanda also appreciated how Warrior Care Network stayed with her when she returned home. Clinicians used monthly calls to provide follow-up care for Yolanda. She also had new knowledge to use every day.

"When I came home, it's like 'how do I live?' Warrior Care Network provided the tools and skills to help me."

"It is really what took me out of this dark hole and gave me my life back."

The three weeks Yolanda spent at Warrior Care Network were life-changing, for her and her family.

"I can honestly say Warrior Care Network helped me learn life skills to handle my invisible wounds."

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### MIKE'S MESSAGE



Mike Richardson

As we move into the second year of our current 5-year commitment, I am looking forward to sharing with a broader audience what makes Warrior Care Network so unique. We have a great story to tell about what we are doing, why we are doing it, and our positive impact on warriors, their families, and our partners in the space. Our story provides an innovative model for others to follow and hope for our veterans that recovery is possible.

We are actively changing the landscape, implementing innovative and lifesaving programs in a manner that has never been done before. As many of us travel around the country and engage with different organizations and leaders, I continue to be struck by how our Network is becoming the model for others to emulate. Even internationally this is the case, as proven in June during the initial **International Thought Leader Summit on the Invisible Wounds of War** in London. I'd be remiss if I did not give a shout out to Home Base and the Bush Institute for their work with the UK and Canadian governments in setting up this amazing summit that WWP had the privilege of sponsoring. We know our innovative

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★ **WARRIOR CARE NETWORK** ★

**MIKE'S MESSAGE**

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programs are producing significant outcomes and changing the dialogue by taking action on what could be done. As we continue our holistic approach, we are incorporating other programs and broadening our influence in the mental health space.

I am encouraged by our efforts to improve our approach to mental and brain health. This is a very exciting time for us – and while we have every reason to be pleased, I love that we are never satisfied. In order to take our Network to the next level, we must continue to be comfortable in challenging each other and confronting the brutal facts in a healthy way to ensure we are adopting proven best practices. It's an honor to be part of Warrior Care Network.



Mike Richardson  
vice president of independence  
services and mental health  
Wounded Warrior Project

**AROUND THE NETWORK**

**RUSH REPORT**



RUSH

**MORAL INJURY:  
SCIENCE CATCHING  
UP WITH POETRY**

In the centuries since the Greek poet Homer began his epic poem, *The Iliad*, by describing the warrior Achilles' debilitating rage, which was caused by actions that broke the hero's moral code, poets, philosophers, and military leaders have understood the concept of moral injury: damage done to one's conscience when they act – or fail to act – in a way that breaks their own moral code.

Only recently has medical science really begun to assess the extent of the psychological damage that results from participating in, witnessing, or learning about acts that violate one's moral code. More importantly, in the last several years clinicians and researchers examined whether existing evidence-based therapies that were specifically developed to treat post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can also effectively address symptoms that result from morally injurious experiences.

The Road Home Program's Director of Research Dr. Philip Held is one of the leading experts in moral injury. Dr. Held and colleague Dr. Brian Klassen have published a series of articles in academic journals in the last two years to build a body of medical evidence and help clinicians more effectively treat warriors who are affected by moral injury.

While the majority of the published research is very data-driven and clinically focused, an article published in 2018 in the journal *Psychological Trauma* has been widely read and shared by veterans and their loved ones as its narrative thematic approach vividly captures the realities faced in combat and the resulting struggles veterans faced.

Using a series of interviews with veterans who were involved in morally injurious situations, the article "I knew it was wrong the moment I got the order" is a narrative thematic analysis of moral injury in combat veterans that documents the consequences for veterans who reported acting in ways that were inconsistent with their deeply held beliefs.

While other papers have provided therapists across the country the guidance to treat moral injury – especially how the evidence-based Cognitive Processing Therapy can be used to effectively address moral injury-based PTSD – the narrative thematic paper offers a unique perspective provided by veterans about struggling with "injuries" to their conscience.

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MENTAL HEALTH FACT

**91%**

**OF VETERANS EXPERIENCED MENTAL INJURIES THAT ARE CONSIDERED SEVERE – MOST EXPERIENCING MORE THAN ONE.**

WE'RE LEADING A NATIONWIDE  
★ **BATTLE AGAINST THE** ★  
**INVISIBLE WOUNDS OF WAR**



WOUNDED WARRIOR  
**BILL GEIGER**

## AROUND THE NETWORK

★ ATLANTA

### EMORY EVENTS



EMORY  
HEALTHCARE

Veterans Program



## Using Virtual Reality as Therapy for PTSD

Emory Healthcare Veterans Program uses Prolonged Exposure therapy and Virtual Reality Exposure therapy to heal invisible wounds. Our highly skilled team of professionals is led by world-renowned clinical psychologist Barbara Rothbaum, PhD, who pioneered Virtual Reality Exposure therapy as a treatment for PTSD in veterans and service members.

There are many approaches to treating PTSD, and after several decades of research, our program has determined Prolonged Exposure therapy to be the most successful in healing invisible wounds. This process treats PTSD by asking the patient to recall the memory repeatedly in a therapeutic manner so that he/she will feel more comfortable with the memory and gain a sense of mastery over the experience, rather than experiencing anxiety and avoidance. Avoidance is a common behavior for those suffering from PTSD, and although facing the memory head-on seems intimidating, revisiting the wound is the only way to heal it.

"This form of treatment is successful because the trauma needs to be emotionally processed so it can become less painful. The process is like the grief process. When a loved one dies, it is extremely distressing, but by expressing that hurt (say, through crying), it gradually becomes less upsetting. Eventually, we can think about that person without crying, although the loss will always be sad. Those with PTSD devote

much effort to avoiding thinking about the trauma because they mistakenly view the process of remembering as too agonizing to tolerate," said Dr. Rothbaum.

Sometimes recalling the memory is difficult because it has been locked away for so long. Virtual Reality Exposure therapy, an extension of Prolonged Exposure therapy, immerses the patient in a virtual world that is reminiscent of his/her traumatic memory. As the patient describes the memory to



Virtual Reality Exposure therapy, an extension of Prolonged Exposure therapy, immerses the patient in a virtual world that is reminiscent of his or her traumatic memory.

the therapist, the therapist can recreate scenes of the memory for the patient to see through the VR monitor and headset.

"We wanted to see if the Virtual Reality Exposure therapy would have anything to offer them — as another treatment alternative. And it did. They got better," said Dr. Rothbaum. "Patients reported

that experiences that have haunted them for decades don't bother them anymore."

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brainline.org

Visit [brainline.org](http://brainline.org) to learn more about TBI and PTSD



Visit [rand.org](http://rand.org) to learn more about studies to identify treatments for SUD and PTSD

★ **Informing the Practice of Effective Substance Use Care for Post-9/11 Veterans.** The RAND Corporation is conducting a new study to identify effective and quality treatments for post-9/11 veterans with substance use disorders. Within this veteran population, there is a particularly high risk for co-occurring substance use disorders (SUDs) among those struggling with PTSD and major depressive disorder. Although veterans with co-occurrence of SUDs and these mental health disorders report poor functioning in multiple areas of their lives, such as poor relationships and physical health complaints, they are not likely to pursue behavioral health treatment, often due to not knowing where to seek quality care. Also, some treatment centers may require veterans to complete SUD treatment prior to receiving care for mental health problems, which can be difficult for veterans who use alcohol and other drugs to manage their symptoms. Discontinuation of substance use may exacerbate mental health symptoms, making it important for veterans to have access to care that addresses both SUDs and co-occurring mental health disorders simultaneously.

To improve treatment outcomes and increase access to evidence-based care for veterans, RAND and the Wounded Warrior Project have partnered in a study to identify effective substance use treatments that can be used in practice with post-9/11 veterans who struggle with SUDs and co-occurring PTSD and depression. The study involves a literature review of the efficacious treatment approaches for SUDs, an analysis of data on the current treatment centers offering SUD care for veterans, and a series of interviews and site visits with treatment providers. Based on these methods, RAND will make recommendations on how to determine quality of care among the available treatment centers.

# ★ WCN ON THE HILL ★

## Advocating For All Veterans



Following a customary tradition, members of Congress returned home for their annual district work period in August. When members return to Washington, DC, after Labor Day, a busy agenda awaits. While significant focus will shift to annual budget and spending bills, September is also National Suicide Prevention Month, which may bring attention to pieces of legislation that have emerged from the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

**The Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act (S. 785)** is a sweeping proposal that addresses the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) mental health workforce, access to care in rural areas, and new alternative and local treatment options like animal therapy, outdoor sports and activities, yoga, and acupuncture. WWP's Mike Richardson provided favorable testimony on several portions of the bill during a May 2019 congressional hearing, including proposals on community grants and precision medicine initiatives. The Incorporating Measurements and Providing Resources for Outreach to Veterans Everywhere (IMPROVE) Wellbeing for Veterans Act (S. 1906) is a complementary bill that would create a new grant program to enable VA to partner with veteran-serving non-profits and state and local organizations to align efforts to reduce veteran suicide.

In August, Warrior Care Network partners offered guidance to the President's Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS) Task Force — a federal panel tasked with aligning federal, state, and local efforts to end veteran suicide. The PREVENTS Task Force is developing a health research strategy, and Warrior Care Network offered perspective on notable topics like evidence-based clinical treatments, reimbursement/value-based care, precision medicine, and improving transition from the military. The strategy will be submitted to the President in 2020.

# AROUND THE NETWORK



★ LOS ANGELES

## UCLA UPDATE



## Operation Summer Camp

This summer, UCLA Operation Mend took another step toward removing barriers to care. Operation Mend gave the children of its warriors the chance to travel with their parents to Los Angeles and attend UCLA Recreation Summer Camps for three weeks this past July so their parents could focus

In addition to covering the airfare, hotel rooms, food, camp fees, backpacks, and supplies for all of the warriors' children, the funds raised by the Spark Campaign were also used to cover the cost of weekend outings for all families and other program participants to the Automobile Driving



on what they truly needed to do to heal — participate in Operation Mend's Intensive Treatment Program for PTSD and mild TBI — without worrying about their children's safety or well-being.

Finding childcare can be a serious barrier to warriors seeking intensive treatment. For our warrior families without childcare resources at home, or who do not feel emotionally able to be away from their children, providing a quintessential summer camp experience for their children was a perfect solution. Thanks to UCLA Spark, UCLA's official crowdfunding site, Operation Mend was able to reach into its online community and explain that with their support, we could raise enough funds to help these warrior families heal together in Los Angeles.

Museum and to the Natural History Museum. It was so gratifying to see the children build their own community alongside their parents.

**The Operation Summer Camp campaign exceeded its goal by \$20,000, thanks to the generosity of 81 donors in 13 states. The remaining funds will be used to continue providing opportunities like Operation Summer Camp that ensure our warriors' children's needs are met so their parents can get the treatment they need.**



# AROUND THE NETWORK

★ BOSTON

**MASS GENERAL NEWS**



## Strength and Sacrifice: 10 Years Running



Run to Home Base 5K/9K start line.

This summer, Home Base, a Red Sox Foundation and Massachusetts General Hospital program, hosted its 10th annual Run to Home Base presented by New Balance 5K/9K fundraiser. This year marked an important milestone for the organization as Home Base celebrated the 10th anniversary of its largest fundraiser.

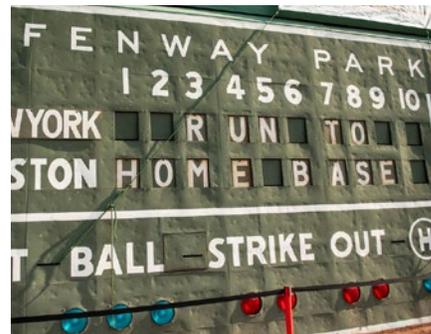
A total of 2,464 participants from 41 states raised \$2.3 million in support of Home Base's mission to heal the invisible wounds of war for veterans and their

families. Included in the 2,464 participants were more than 700 veterans, active duty, guard and reserve service members; 88 participants who raised \$2,500 or more individually; and 59 10-year participants.

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**“Home Base provided a path to healing I struggled to find on my own. Home Base gave me hope.”**

— Chris Gemmer

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The Run to Home Base's “10-Year Runners” were recognized during a special pre-race ceremony, which featured Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker; Boston Mayor

Marty Walsh; Peter L. Slavin, MD, Mass General president; and Boston Red Sox Chairman Tom Werner.

Chris Gemmer, a Navy SEAL and Home Base veteran, spoke about the impact Home Base has had on his life.

“Along with the exceptional care I received, and with the support of the other veterans and active duty service members in my treatment cohort, I was able to look into the mirror, face many of my issues, and begin to deal with them,” he said. “Home Base provided a path to healing I struggled to find on my own. Home Base gave me hope.”

Held before a Red Sox vs. Yankees game at Fenway Park, the ceremony recognized veterans and military families who have benefited from Home Base, first responder champions, community and national partners to include the Warrior Care Network, and Home Base staff.

“Home Base is truly the product of a grateful nation,” said retired Brig. Gen. Jack Hammond, executive director of Home Base. “We are continuously growing and expanding our boundaries, both geographically and intellectually, to reach new heights in offering innovation and rigor to help veterans and their families facilitate successful transitions to civilian life. As we celebrate this significant milestone, we look forward to many more.”

Sometimes the most painful injuries are not physical. Working with veterans and their families makes us acutely aware of the statistics related to veteran suicide and how it affects the population we work with daily. Being able to recognize the signs is important.

Contacting the right support is crucial.



**ARE YOU A VETERAN IN CRISIS OR CONCERNED ABOUT ONE?** Connect with the Veterans Crisis Line to reach caring, qualified responders with the Department of Veterans Affairs.