

# The Healing Touch for Military Personnel

Healing Warriors Program to Launch in Spring of 2013

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*Founded in 2012, Healing Warriors Program is a new nonprofit organization dedicated to providing complementary care services and education to the veteran community and their families.*

*Here, one of the founders of Healing Warriors Program, Ana Yelen, describes the vision of the Healing Warriors Program, and how the program's new model will address PTSD and pain management in our soldiers.*

**T**he headlines say it all: **2012 Military Suicides Hit A Record High Of 349** (The Associated Press<sup>1</sup>, January 14, 2013).

What makes this number even more astounding is that it represents 54 more deaths than the 295 Americans who lost their lives fighting in Afghanistan during the same period of time. How can it be that we are losing so many to suicide? Certainly, there are a host of factors to consider, but we believe one of them is pain-- and pain is difficult to manage. Why would we have such a problem with pain? Technological advancements have helped increase survival rates, but often the quality of life of that survival is poor. Wounded service members often remain on pain killers for long stretches, sometimes permanently. While pain killers are an important tool (giving the body much needed relief and rest so that healing can occur) they pose some big challenges. The effectiveness of medication wanes over time, and it impacts key organs like the liver. Addiction to painkillers becomes an issue in and of itself, affecting individuals and their families with everything that accompanies the disease.

The problem, according to what Secretary of the Army, John McHugh, told the United States House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations Defense Subcommittee, is that many soldiers have an ongoing need for pain relievers because they are suf-

fering from wounds that likely would have caused loss of life 15 years ago.<sup>2</sup>

However, pain is not the only problem here. The effects of trauma, such as increased anxiety in group situations, anger and depression, wreak havoc with the service member's ability to re-enter civilian life in a healthy way because every aspect of life (home, family, work, relationships) is affected.

The Department of Defense knows there is a problem that needs to be fixed and to the department's credit, the Army Surgeon General and his team are recommending complementary care therapies and are working with the Bravewell Collaborative<sup>3</sup> to bring more integrative care into military healthcare. Due to the recommendations by the Pain Management Task Force back in 2009 to incorporate yoga, acupuncture and other mind body practices into standard care practices, we are seeing initiatives springing up across the country in military health and wellness facilities.

However, the wheels of bureaucracy often move slowly. Sometimes, what is needed is a fast, low risk way to test drive an idea and prove that a concept works. Sometimes we just need to passionately believe that an idea will yield great results. Sometimes we simply have to step in, and say, here it is.

#### **Enter Healing Warriors Program.**

Healing Warriors Program was started by three Healing Touch practitioners - Shelley Poland, Jane Trexler and Ana Yelen. Having worked together in other nonprofits, and at various veterans and Veterans Affairs (VA) events, there is a history of teamwork already in place. Jane's parents were both marines and when Jane's father passed away last year, she asked that memorial contributions be sent to Healing Warriors Program. These first donations covered the non-prof-



it status filing. We clearly felt the presence of Spirit! Shelley and I have a long history of partnering for various outreach efforts. So assuming the role of Co-Executive Directors was comfortable and logical. After six years of organizing volunteer events and seeing veterans from various wars - some POWs, some disabled, some with brain injuries, and some amputees - benefit from the various therapies, we knew it was time. We knew we needed an ongoing clinic, not only for our veterans, but also for their families. Also, we knew that we could not operate something of this scale on a volunteer basis alone.

Healing Warriors Program was founded in 2012 as a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing complementary care services and education to our veteran community and their families. The program integrates the principles of Mind Body Therapy to assist veteran and active duty members with PTSD and pain management.

Those of us in the Healing Touch community know that Mind Body Therapy works. We see it in our practice, our clients tell us, and we directly experience it ourselves. One of the visionary pieces that Janet Mentgen wove into her Healing Touch certification process, and which she herself practiced throughout her life, is to work in collaboration with practitioners of other modalities. Our certification process requires that we experience 10 holistic therapy modalities. That practice equips us with experiential knowledge of how these modalities influence body, mind, emotion and spirit.

Healing Warriors Program clinics will offer a variety of evidence based mind-body therapies. Phase One will include Acupuncture, Cranio-Sacral therapy, and Healing Touch. All practitioner staff for Healing Warriors Program will be certified in their respective modalities and will have standardized documentation forms.

In addition, each specialization will have a manager to provide oversight to ensure standards of practice and quality assurance for each service. Our service member community is heavy with trauma and we

need to provide the best we can offer.

It is our vision to have integrative care services be a part of every service member's health plan.

### **Where can I find a clinic?**

So where are we in the process of establishing our clinics? This past November, Healing Warriors Program received 501(c)3 status, launching us into a flurry of planning and implementation. At the end of 2012 we submitted our Pilot Clinic proposal to the Denver and Cheyenne, Colorado VA, with implementation discussions currently underway. While we wait for engagement with our local VA, we are moving ahead with the next steps in launching our clinic.

Our Phase One vision includes a clinic site in Denver and one in Northern Colorado. We have already received referrals from local veterans offices and it is clear that we need a clinic presence as soon as possible. As you would guess, there is a lot of planning and organization that goes into structuring something for success.

Our planning team has been defining roles and responsibilities, processing flows and operational guidelines. Data collection is a big part of this, which brings us to technical and logistical considerations. This is big. We know it is - and - we could not be more excited.

### **Funding?**

The big question for any non-profit is funding, and we are working on it. We have a list of grants we will be submitting. Grants of course, have a set of requirements and dependencies that require us to have various internal structures in place. Did I mention data collection? Metrics are key.

Our newly assembled fundraising team has already started planning a few important events that we hope are both fundraising opportunities, as well as, fun opportunities to meet with like-minded individuals in our community. I love that we are building enjoyment into these events. Laughter and fun are



their own healing specialists!

### **Gratitude**

We are very excited about the team that is assembling around this effort. They are passionate, skilled and heart-centered people. We are so thankful for the support from our community. Each day we hear from someone who wants to help, or who wants to watch our progress so that they can launch something in their own geographic area. We are meeting many wonderful people who have service members in their families and who want to do something to help.

Always we say thank you, and thank you for your service.

### **How can you get involved?**

Sign up for our mailing list so that you will receive our monthly updates. Like our Facebook page. We post some really interesting articles that we find on PTSD, pain and working with veterans. If you want to be in a volunteer pool, let us know. We have events planned that can always use an extra pair of hands. Of course, if you know someone who would be interested in the work we are doing, please pass along our contact information. This really is about community - with each of our talents and gifts shining. One last thing -- please keep us in your prayers. This work is so needed - and - the time is now!! €

You can add yourself to our mailing list by going to our website at: [www.healingwarriorsprogram.org](http://www.healingwarriorsprogram.org) or by sending us an email at [info@healingwarriorsprogram.org](mailto:info@healingwarriorsprogram.org)

You can also reach me or Shelley directly at [ayelen@healingwarriorsprogram.org](mailto:ayelen@healingwarriorsprogram.org) and [spoland@healingwarriorsprogram.org](mailto:spoland@healingwarriorsprogram.org)

1. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=169340558>
2. <http://www.usmedicine.com/articles/walking-a-tightrope-military-tries-to-balance-appropriate-pain-treatment-with-growing-misuse-of-prescription-drugs.html#.UQnZO2dCp8E>
3. <http://www.bravewell.org/>