

A Resilience Resource For All Who Serve Country & Community
First Responders – Military & Veterans – Medical & Mental Health Professionals
Educators – Community Leaders

PROJECT COHORT – MEETING AN URGENT NEED TO SUPPORT VETERANS MENTAL HEALTH

Only a small fraction of our Nation's military heroes who qualify for professional mental health care utilize the services available to them. The current approach requires Veterans to participate in group therapy programs at their local VA. This means Veterans are expected to discuss difficult personal challenges in a group that has not developed camaraderie, trust or team spirit. Combining successful mental health and resilience programs with a strategy to best leverage its Partners' core skills and assets, Project Rebirth has launched Project Cohort to create sharable, scalable programming built on the success of each partner's existing work with Veterans.



Early days of Project Cohort: Project Rebirth & the Sierra Club Military Outdoors with Soldiers from Fort Bliss, Resiliency Training at Caldwell Ranch in October 2013

A SHARABLE, SCALABLE APPROACH TO MEETING AN URGENT NEED

Project Cohort will team up Veterans who qualify for services at the same VA centers and, through a multi-day transformative wilderness experience, build a Cohort who will encourage and support each other's effective use of mental health services through the months and years ahead. Project Cohort research will track – and share with a growing number of partners – the key elements of the progress of the Cohorts as they emerge over the three year

period. The result will be a practical template that will be used by a growing number of existing Veteran support resources – wilderness experiences are but one way to form a Cohort – and an opportunity to transform a well-meaning but highly inefficient support system for Veterans' Mental Health.

PROJECT COHORT'S PARTNERS: BUILDING ON SUCCESS, COMMON SENSE AND COMPLEMENTARY MISSIONS AND SKILLS

Project Rebirth and its Partners have created a three-year pilot designed to dramatically increase the number of Veterans that commit to and successfully utilize existing mental health services and Veteran Support Organizations.

Project Rebirth is building on successful, close relationships with **Outward Bound for Veterans, Sierra Club Outdoors, Georgetown University, Veterans Affairs VISN 17 Center of Excellence** and **Vet Center Program, and the Military Veteran Peer Network** in Texas.



L to R: The Sierra Club's Josh Branden and Stacy Bare, *Rebirth* Film Participant Tim Brown, Outward Bound for Veteran's Chad Spangler, and Project Rebirth Team Member Kathleen Koch presenting Project Cohort on Capitol Hill

Project Cohort

The project will develop a scalable **continuum of care model** integrating **veteran peer support**, **experiential learning** and **evidence-based therapies**, while communicating key findings as they emerge over the life of the project.

Nearly 37% of Veterans returning from the wars of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) have been diagnosed with mental health disorders (Seal et al., 2009). Existing research and participant feedback makes clear that Veterans experience numerous positive benefits from attending Outward Bound and Sierra Club wilderness programs (Scheinfeld, 2014):

- 1) Improved overall mental health (including lessened symptoms of depression, anxiety)
- 2) Increased resilience
- 3) Increased sense of social connection and reduced loneliness
- 4) Increased motivation to seek mental health support.

Project Rebirth films have proven to be powerful educational and resilience tools in the Military and Veteran communities. The intimate and unscripted interviews and personal moments of the nine participant's span eight years following the loss they suffered on 9/11. With a commitment to service usually linked to the 9/11 attacks, Veterans viewing these journeys of recovery from mental and physical injury are more open to discussing and better understanding their own physical, psychological and emotional challenges, including reintegration into the civilian world represented by the film participants. Project Rebirth's films have been used successfully as part of numerous Veteran service organization programs across the country.



150 Veterans attend Project Rebirth Night in September 2014 with Ride 2 Recovery, a Veteran's service organization that uses cycling to promote wellness

Georgetown University and **Project Rebirth** have worked closely together since its founding just after 9/11. With numerous GU alums as past and present Project Rebirth Board Members (including GU President John J. DeGioia) Project Rebirth's links to GU are deep and durable. Project Rebirth Director of Research, Dr. David Scheinfeld, who is conducting his postdoctoral research and clinical practice at the VA's VISN 17 Center of Excellence, will work with the Georgetown Community Research Group headed by GU Psychology Professor Dr. Jennifer Woolard, who has been collaborating with Project Rebirth for over seven years. Georgetown will serve as the academic home for the research component of Project Cohort and Georgetown students will participate in data collection and analysis.

PROJECT COHORT: MILESTONES TO SUCCESS

Recruiting and Education: Identify a Veteran Peer Coordinator (VPC) as the Cohort leader, and recruit Cohorts of 8-10 Veterans who qualify for services at their Vets Center.

Cohort Phase (one week): Each Cohort attends a 6-day Outward Bound for Veterans course.

Intervention Phase (8-12 weeks): Each cohort enters a group therapy intervention at their Vets Center, a Veterans Affairs program that streamlines access to mental health care.

Project Cohort

Maintenance Phase (12+ weeks): The Cohort moves into a maintenance phase lead by their Veteran Peer Coordinator.

Sierra Club Military Outdoors (SCMO): SCMO provides wilderness excursions, concurrent to the intervention and maintenance, designed to build upon skills taught during the Outward Bound phase.

Corporate Sponsor: A corporate sponsor provides mentorship and invites the cohort to learn more about their business and the potential for job placement. The sponsor can also provide a powerful communication platform to help communicate the replicable, scalable components of Project Cohort.

VISN 17 Centers of Excellence-Waco: Leads all research components in collaboration with Georgetown University: research design, data collection, data analysis, presentation of data, and publication of data. Longitudinal, experimental designed research will measure the following outcomes: 1) Overall mental health (symptoms of depression, anxiety, PTSD), 2) Resilience, 3) Social Connectedness/Loneliness, and 4) Rates of attrition/motivation to continue treatment.

References

Scheinfeld, D. (2014). From Battlegrounds to the Backcountry: The Intersection of Masculinity and Outward Bound Programming on Psychosocial Functioning for Male Military Veterans. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Texas, Austin.

Seal, K., Metzler, T., Gima, K., Bertenthal, D., Maguen, S., & Marmar, C. (2009). Trends and risk factors for mental health diagnoses among Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans using Department of Veterans Affairs Healthcare, 2002–2008. *American Journal of Public Health*, 99, 1651–1658.