



# PILOT PROJECT

*joining with...*



**A VETERANS-SUPPORTING-VETERANS NETWORK**





## WHY WE NEED VETS CONNECT

Many of America's military are returning from their tours of duty with physical, emotional and relational consequences that are serious and devastating. Typically both they and their families suffer with one or a combination of problems resulting from their service such as:

- Suicide (one suicide every 65 minutes)
- Depression (18% of military on record)
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (20% of military on record)
- Hypervigilance (exaggerated response to stimuli or perceived threat)
- Traumatic brain injuries
- Anxiety disorders and hopelessness
- Sexual trauma
- Chronic pain
- Anger and violence issues
- Eating and sleeping problems
- Inability to concentrate
- Chronic sense of loss and grief
- Drug and alcohol abuse , and
- Relational problems, including breakdown of families
- Unemployment

## WHY OUR VETERANS DO NOT GET THE HELP THEY NEED

The Pentagon allocates \$2 billion annually toward mental health help for military. Yet, less than 45% of those military who committed suicide had received services. Below are some of the reasons military personnel have not accessed the help they desperately need:

1. Stigmas are attached to requesting help and a fear of reprisal that will jeopardize careers exists
2. Services are inaccessible, or there is a lack of awareness of how to access services.
3. Enlisted personnel are constantly mobile taking them out of service range or interrupting therapy.
4. There is a shortage of therapists or a lack of choices for certain therapies.
5. On-hold or busy times on crisis phone lines frustrate already fragile conditions.
6. They distrust therapy in general or the current system of care.
7. They are uninformed about the extent of support required for recovery.
8. Isolation, shame, embarrassment, poor self-esteem or negative self-judgment prevents them from reaching out.
9. Military or personal pride prevents action.
10. Limited funds are available to pay for services.
11. They are already using drugs or alcohol to mediate their pain.
12. Families enable problems rather than encouraging them to seek help.
13. There are very few programs designed which addresses these broad spectrum of issues or additional obstacles.



## HOW WILL WE ANSWER THIS CRISIS?

We propose to create a network of specially trained veterans who will work directly with other veterans at Vets Connect, an online interface that will be:

- Accessible
- Easy-to-navigate
- Confidential and friendly
- Staffed by veterans
- A support for struggling military and their families, and
- A support system for recovery and transition

Using documented research and proven training, it will be our hope that we will establish a trusted and unparalleled support network to help restore the lives of our valued military personnel and their families.

## CONQUERING THE BARRICADES

### ***Confidentiality***

Individuals will typically share 2-3 times more information within a private and safe environment. Confidentiality also reduces stigmas and fears of reprisals. We establish a confidential and private environment at the outset in which participants trust and feel safe.

### ***Relational Trust***

Because military personnel carry a sense of honor to those who have served with them, outsiders can be suspect. We will foster trust by using trained veterans backed by professionals who can relate to veteran's experiences, and who are trained to listen and understand their concerns.

### ***Accessibility***

The Vets Connect network can be contacted no matter where the individual is assigned thereby eliminating the issue of inaccessibility due to time zone constraints or changing mobility.

### ***Normalization***

Our support team will approach relationships without judgment or labeling the military individual, no matter his/her symptoms, so that the person will be more open to seek help to recover. This is where neuroscientific knowledge and trauma-informed research are especially helpful.

### ***Education versus Therapy***

Most everyone finds education an acceptable means to gain knowledge and insight. Therefore, our educational approach cultivates participation and avoids typical therapy stigmas. Further, the process is designed to assist those with varied learning styles and capabilities.

### ***Intuitive Sense of Quality Support***

Military personnel are conditioned to possess good instincts about situations and people around them. Any system of care must be presented in such a way that allows them to feel comfortable and accepted. It must also provide common sense ideas as well as offer participants a chance to be involved in the recovery process, or in helping others in like situations to recover.

### ***The Need for Consistent Employment***

Many of our veteran's are unable to secure viable employment once they have exited the military. Although many employers are making commitments to employ veterans most do not have an understanding of some of the key issues related to PTSD and what that means for an employer. Vet's Connect will offer a place for employers to refer veterans they hire for support. Additionally, there will be streamed sessions designed to inform employers on some of the key neuro-scientific research on PTSD. There will also be practical tools that they can use to train their supervisors and staff in how to deal with veterans in the workplace.



## SPECIFICATIONS FOR VETS CONNECT

### AN ONLINE NETWORK OF VETERANS WHO ARE HELPING THEMSELVES AND EACH OTHER

#### *Overview*

We intend to provide a system of virtual therapeutic education for military personnel and veterans to help them help themselves. The system can be accessed anywhere a computer connects with the Internet. So, enlisted personnel can carry their group wherever they are stationed.

We will train and certify recruited veterans as group leaders. Through a training and certification process they will be equipped to mentor and lead veterans (and families) through actual or virtual (online) support groups. Leaders will not administer therapy but will discuss pertinent topics and promote open sharing.

Sessions will use video-streaming for up to 12 individuals. Sessions are research-based, geared toward specific issues that are related to military group needs and presented in an easy-to-understand format. Guided exercises will be integrated into each session to spur relevant discussion.

This safe and confidential environment encourages processing of issues which will help participants discover information that will lead to their recovery. We hope the system will create more leaders as they realize how they are helped and the impact they can have for others using the information offered.

#### *Groundwork*

In order to create this network effectively, the plan will be to establish a pilot program that will allow a process of trial runs, feedback and researching the varied aspects of this program. Once the pilot is completed and lessons are learned and integrated, a larger national model will be offered on a broader scale. For the pilot, the groundwork to be laid will be as follows:

- Recruit group leaders and train them in the values and processes of individuals and healthy groups as well as the logistics of using on-line education. Certify them in one-on-one facilitation and group leadership.
- Ready the Web site. Vets Connect will be the primary entry and contact point for enlisted personnel or veterans to participate in a group. They can click to access a video which will explain in simple terms how the therapeutic education process works. If they choose to continue, they can request a group leader to contact them in whatever way guards their confidentiality.
- Depending on topics and location of groups, the leader will publish schedules for the group to meet virtually or in person or a combination of both. Group meetings will then be scheduled, streamed and implemented.
- Post session, the group leader will provide feedback to the Educational Coordinator who logs in the research content for evaluation. Feedback documentation will occur as long as the group meets. Our experience is that groups can morph into other groups, but it will be important to establish a level of commitment no shorter than three to six months before someone migrates to another group. Solidarity and relationships need to be established.



## SPECIFICATIONS FOR RESTORE VETS NETWORK (CONT.)

### ***Groundwork***

- Because these groups will be involved with each other regularly, support and accountability will become valuable to them. In that reality, it will be assumed that the investment in each other will minimize the risk that they will not take drastic measures such as suicide or drug abuse to resolve their problems. Our goal will be to establish a well-trained system of support where no veteran is ever left behind.
- Vets Connect arises from a plan that has the confidence and willingness to collaborate with other sources. Therefore, consistent and reliable feedback will ensure its growth and other networks of support will be included in the Web site for referral to more intensive services for veterans.

### ***Infrastructure: Who We Are***

In order to be effective, there will need to be a number of collaborative partners. This project will eventually create a broad network of military leadership, veterans, service providers and sponsoring funders. In order to launch the pilot program two organizations will work together to design, create and implement this vital project.

Lakeside Educational Network (Lakeside) has served over 50 years in the sphere of therapeutic education with schools and programs for at-risk children and professionals who serve them. Though located in Fort Washington, PA, a suburb of Philadelphia, Lakeside reaches 25 regions to provide a host of holistic solutions to difficult clinical, behavioral, emotional, relational and educational issues.

In its last 10 years, Lakeside created 22 professional development courses covering a range of topics including understanding anger, preventing violence, trauma-informed care, one-on-one facilitation, group facilitation and more. Professional development courses are delivered via Lakeside's Institute for Family Professionals [IFP], a program sponsored by United Way of Greater Philadelphia and Southern New Jersey and St. Josephs University. Currently, IFP is providing online trauma training through Arcadia University.

Lakeside is known as a resource that provides well-researched information as well as a training organization that creates safe environments for participants to process what they have learned within a nurturing environment.

Partnering with Lakeside will be the American Veteran's Tribute Organization [AVT] which will be the primary source for fund-raising and support for this program. This organization has had a history of sponsoring events that have supported veterans and will align with Lakeside to provide the



## SESSIONS FOR MILITARY, FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND EMPLOYERS

Our vast research and curriculum will be modified to apply to military in an ongoing process that addresses their contextual needs. Further, we plan to provide a comprehensive set of streamed sessions as resources for parents of military personnel, their spouses and children. Additionally, select videos will explain our programs to military leadership, potential sponsors, funders and employers, and the public. Tables of contents follow.

## SESSIONS OFFERED FOR ENLISTED PERSONNEL AND VETERANS

- Needs awareness for self, parents or spouse, and children
- Values - what happens when you experience values conflict during wartime, acknowledgment that values are different in battle
- Emotions - recognition of emotions, self-regulation, emotions vocabulary, emotional first aid kit
- Anger - anger with self, family, military, situation, society
- Amygdala Hijacking - how anger happens in your brain
- Communication skills to better state needs and emotions, then restoring/building relationships with parents/spouse, children
- Brain Basics - this is your brain at war / this is your brain at home / this is your brain during transition
- Stress
- Loss and Grief
- Fear
- Self-esteem / Power - including permissions
- Trust / Betrayal - relationships
- Guilt -who I am, what I had to do/did, that I survived
- Safety - physical, emotional, relational
- Process of Healing - Rh Factors
- Narratives - personal and life / value and importance of telling your story
- Messages to self, family, others, healthy messages, toxic messages
- Expectations - images versus realities for individual life, family life
- Addictions
- Suicide / Depression
- Adaptive and Maladaptive Coping - signs, symptoms, management
- Hippocampal Malfunctioning and Mirror Neurons - contagion
- Allostatic Load
- Flashbacks
- Triggers / Sensations
- Reenactment
- Memories
- Brain States
- Risk and Protective Factors
- Integration - Shattered inner self
- Resiliency
- Shame
- Oasis/Anchor/Safety Plan



## SESSIONS FOR ENLISTED PARENTS, SPOUSES OR PARTNERS

- Child Development
- Needs Awareness
- Values
- Emotions
- Anger - response as well as parent/spouse and family anger issues, anger of military individual as well as anger of parents/spouse, children
- Communication within family dynamics, families as systems, parenting styles, roles in families
- Brain Basics
- Attachment
- Legacies / Loyalties
- Safety
- Fear
- Self-Esteem/Power/Authority
- Trust
- Safety - Emotional, relational, physical
- Problem Solving
- Gottman's Four Attitudes
- Five Love Languages
- Messages - discounts, denial
- Practicality of managing life when family member is in military/deployment
- Expectations - images versus realities
- Change/Process Orientation
- Violence
- Compassion Fatigue
- Vicarious Trauma
- Forgiveness
- Brain States
- Resiliency
- Healing
- Shame
- Adaptive and Maladaptive Coping
- Suicide/Depression
- When Your (Spouse/Son/Daughter) Comes Back: transition/reentry
- Blended Families
- Death



## SESSIONS FOR FAMILY ISSUES SPECIFIC TO THOSE MILITARY WITH CHILDREN

- Healthy and Effective Discipline
- Consequences
- Nurture/Structure Highway
- Parent Report Card
- Bullying
- Team Parenting
- Wise Rule Making
- Handling Protests

## SESSIONS FOR FAMILY ISSUES SPECIFIC TO THOSE MILITARY WITH TEENAGERS

- Development of Adolescents
- Typical Adolescent Issues
- Relational Bridges
- Adolescent Brain

## SESSIONS FOR CHILDREN WITH A PARENT/CAREGIVER IN THE MILITARY

- Emotions
- Anger
- Communication
- Brain Basics
- Safety
- Fear
- Trust
- Five Love Languages
- Messages
- Practicality of Managing Life with a Parent in the Military
- When Your Parent Comes Home
- Disability or Death

## SESSIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

The benefits of hiring veterans, complemented by trauma-informed employment practices:

- Brain basics
- The brain on trauma
- The impact of unresolved trauma
- What to do when an employee is trauma-triggered
- Belief systems of traumatized people
- The trauma vortex
- What can promote healing for trauma
- Developing fair and reasonable expectations for traumatized employees
- How to design a trauma-informed interview
- Tools for partnering with veterans
- How to provide targeted support for veterans
- How to support staff who are working with veterans



## INITIAL STEPS: THE PILOT PROGRAM

We propose to launch a pilot program that will include 15 - 20 trained leaders who will create a network of up to 200 individuals who will participate in groups for approximately three months. We will monitor the groups through feedback and direct dialogue with the leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of the groups while adapting more sessions during this three-month period.

## PILOT REQUIREMENTS

To run an effective pilot, we will attempt to collaborate with a group or organization that can help locate military personnel who will both lead and be a part of the pilot.

We will seek funding for the pilot program which will include design, editing and streaming costs for the three month's actual sessions.

We will also develop the Vets Connect Web site and appropriate PR materials. Videos to be developed will include those for military leadership, corporate and foundation sponsorships, veterans, family of veterans and those who may wish to be group leaders.

## RESEARCH

An extensive research matrix will be designed to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of the pilot. The measurable outcomes will include numbers of veterans in the pilot, ease of engagement for veterans, the effectiveness of the leaders, feedback from veterans in the program, attendance, group member participation, technology effectiveness, relevancy of topics and evaluations from veterans as to the information that has been transformative. This research will shape an expanded program that will be utilized to the broader veterans community.

## PRELIMINARY BUDGET

Redesign, development of curriculum	\$20,000
Web design	\$10,000
Streaming costs	\$20,000
Filming costs	\$60,000
Editing	\$30,000
Promotional materials	\$10,000
General equipment and supplies	\$10,000
Research	\$15,000
Administrative and fund-raising expense	<u>\$55,000</u>
Total Pilot budget	\$230,000