VETS AND FRIENDS: A UNIQUE TEAM / RETREAT APPROACH

Cultivating Post-traumatic Growth from the Battles with Post-traumatic Stress Injuries and the Ripple Effects

Webinar Outline

I. Background and Definition of Terms

II. Introduction to Vets and Friends
   I. Who are we?
   II. Why do we exist?
   III. What is our goal?
   IV. What is our research project?

III. Vets and Friends Retreat Team Training
   I. Retreat and Group Guidelines
   II. The Value of a Diverse Group
   III. The Value of a Diverse Team Approach to Leadership
   IV. Focus of Team Training
   V. Post-traumatic Growth at Retreats

IV. Back Home – Growth Over the Long Term Continues Through Local Groups
Background

• WELCOME THEM HOME – HELP THEM HEAL
• VETS & FRIENDS RETREAT TEAM TRAINING
Definition of Terms

1. Post-traumatic Stress Injury (PTSI)
2. Ripple Effects
3. Post-traumatic Growth
Post-traumatic Stress Injury (PTSI)

PTSI: An invisible wound of war that veterans and their families continue to battle after the war. PTSI includes:

• Moral Injury
  • War-related guilt and shame from wrongs: things done, failure to act, wrongs witnessed and learned about – even years later.

• Post-traumatic Grief
  • Loss of a buddy.

• Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
  • A formal mental health diagnosis.

• Ripple Effects
  • Aftershocks and negative impacts
Ripple Effects

Ripple Effects: the aftershocks of PTSIs on veterans and their relationships.

- Substance abuse
- Problems getting help
- Marital / family discord
- Secondary PTSD
- Compassion fatigue
- Loneliness & isolation
- Holding a job,
- Legal entanglements
Post-traumatic Growth

Post-traumatic growth: meaningful change that come as a result of joining with others in the battles with PTSIs and the Ripple Effects.

• More confidence
• Deepening friendships
• Greater interest in life
• Spiritual growth

The Goal of Post-Traumatic Growth is not only to Heal, but also to Thrive
Webinar Outline

I. Background and Definition of Terms

II. Introduction to Vets and Friends
   I. Who are we?
   II. Why do we exist?
   III. What is our goal?
   IV. What is our research project?

III. Vets and Friends Retreats
   I. Unique Retreat and Group Guidelines
   II. The Value of a Diverse Group
   III. The Value of a Team Approach to Leadership
   IV. Focus of Team Training
   V. Post-traumatic Growth at Retreats

IV. Back Home – Growth Over the Long Term Continues Through Local Groups
Who are we? A Network of Veterans, Families, and Friends

- **Vets and Friends Retreat Training**
  - For “grunts” and their families
  - Train non-professional, local support group leader teams
  - Provide R&R for veterans, families and friends
  - Week-long and occur twice a year
  - Non-sectarian
  - Not therapy, but supports and reinforces therapy

- **Vets and Friends Local Groups**
  - Long Term Support
  - Autonomous
  - Team led

- **Vets and Friends Motto – Leave No One Behind.**
WHY DO WE EXIST?

ACCENTUATED EMOTIONS

- BIG ANGER
- BIG LOSS
- BIG SHAME
- BIG GUILT
- BIG FEAR
- BIG STRESS
- BIG CONFUSION
WHAT IS OUR GOAL?

Establish a Vets and Friends Community that

• Understands PTSIs and the Ripple Effects
• Has the know-how to cultivate Post-traumatic Growth
• Provide safe places to make mistakes, to learn and to grow

BIG GROWTH over the long haul
What is Vets and Friends Research?

- Community Health Collaborative Grant from UMN CTSI
- Study group training and support procedures
- Data collected through sequential interviews:
  - Master trainers
  - Group team leaders
  - Group members
- Met with four groups – 2 active, 2 inactive
- Analyzing data now
- Results will be used to improve retreats and ongoing support for groups
- Stay tuned!
Webinar Outline

I. Background and Definition of terms

II. Introduction to Vets and Friends
   I. Who are we?
   II. Why do we exist?
   III. What is our goal?
   IV. What is our research project?

III. Vets and Friends Retreats
   I. Unique Retreat and Group Guidelines
   II. The Value of a Large Diverse Group
   III. The Value of a Team Approach to Leadership
   IV. Focus of Team Training
   V. Post-traumatic Growth at Retreats

IV. Back Home – Growth Over The Long Term Continues Through Local Groups
Vets and Friends Retreats – 5 so far

Camp Vermilion (2x)
Fortune Lake
Luther Point & Camp Knudsen
Next Retreat: Lutherdale, an hour north of Chicago
Camp Vermilion Retreat, 2015

Insert Video Clip called Vermilion Short. If we use this slide we delete the previous one.
VF Retreat Wellness Guidelines

• Be gentle and take care of yourself.
• Rest or nap when you feel tired.
• Eat healthy, sleep in, and get plenty of exercise and fresh air.
• Take a walk; Listen to some favorite music.
• Hug your children; Play and explore.
• Attendance at any session is optional.
Group Meeting Safety Guidelines

- Just sit back and listen for as long as you want.
- Don't feel you need to talk.
- Take your time.
- Go at your own pace.
- Maintain your boundaries. For example, when in doubt, don’t share confidential stuff until you figure out who you can trust.
- Don't get in deeper than you are comfortable.
- Feel free to leave if you get stressed.
- Give others a chance to speak.
- Maintain confidentiality.
Vets and Friends Diversity

- Intergenerational
- Military / Civilian
- Different branches
- Different wars
- Racial / Cultural
What is the value of a Team-Approach to Leadership?

I. Different “energies” and “voices” connect with different people in the group
II. Models connection rather than isolation
III. Provides safety
IV. Divides the work load (administrative tasks)
V. Offers a back-up in case a team leader gets sick, becomes symptomatic or gets triggered
VI. Increases sense of camaraderie, fun, and laughter within the group
The Focus of Team Training

- PTSI, a normal reaction to abnormal events
- Build trust and relationships
- Assume folks want to improve
- Reinforce positives
- Advocacy
- Teach vulnerability & admit mistakes
- Family component to address ripple effects
- Vernacular and metaphors
- How to back people off when they dominate group
- Educate, reinforce and problem solve
Post-traumatic Growth

- Increased friendship connections vs loneliness and isolation
- Better sleep (naps), 3 good meals and snacks, fresh air, exercise (good R&R) vs sleep deprivation, poor eating habits, etc.

Spiritual Growth
- More peace
- More hope
- More love
- More joy
- Interest in life
Webinar Outline

I. Background and Definition of terms
II. Vets and Friends
   I. Who are we?
   II. Why do we exist?
   III. What is our goal?
   IV. What is our research project?
III. Vets and Friends Retreats
   I. Unique Retreat and Group Guidelines
   II. The Value of a Diverse Group
   III. Team Approach to Leadership
   IV. Focus of Team Training
   V. Post-traumatic Growth at Retreats
IV. Back Home – Growth Over The Long Term Continues Through Local Groups
POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH . . .
The Journey Continues Back Home

- Deepening friendships
- Learning to “reach out and call or text” rather than isolate
- A safe place to keep sharing with people who “get it”
- Increased self-compassion
- Improved communication, acceptance, and patience with self and loved ones
- Calmer chemistry, more hope and healing
VETS AND FRIENDS

Website: vetsandfriends.com

Next retreat: April 22-27, Lutherdale, Elkhorn, WI (Just North of Chicago) Register at: http://tinyurl.com/vetsandfriendslutherdale

Resources:

- **Welcome Them Home – Help Them Heal** by John Sippola, Amy Blumenshine, Don Tubesing and Val Yancey
- **Blind Devotion** by Sharlene Prinsen

POCs for retreat information: Cindy Macaulay at macaulay@cpinternet.com; Donna Rutten at drut10@gmail.com; John Sippola at johnsippola2@gmail.com