



**WARRIOR™
INSTITUTE**

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**Non-profit to offer free rehabilitative services to
service members and veterans with traumatic brain injuries
and post-traumatic stress disorder**

**Warrior Institute to target the whole family,
combining recreational therapy with biofeedback**

Gainesville, Fla. – With the rise of post-traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries among America’s service members and veterans, government agencies are overwhelmed and looking for private, non-profit community-based programs like the Warrior Institute to help close the gap.

More than 2.5 million service members have been deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001, and many return to find inadequate support for such complex health issues as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injuries (TBI). The Warrior Institute for Rehabilitation and Optimal Conditioning is ramping up to provide a unique service that integrates outdoor activity-based therapies with biofeedback training – using technology to teach participants to recognize and control patterns of physiological functioning. Combined, the training helps service members and veterans find recreational activities that reduce stress and promote relaxation to get back in balance.

“This is a crisis. We want to help these men and women successfully transition back into society,” said Jeff Zyburt, co-founder and president of the Warrior Institute, a non-profit organization located in Reddick, Fla. “There are several troubling trends – increasing rates of suicide, unemployment, divorce, homelessness, substance abuse and depression – so we don’t have any time for guessing. We’re asking them, ‘what do you need to readjust to civilian life?’”

The answer is the outdoors. Unwilling to sit in an office or a confined room for long, many are looking for tools they can use in their every lives.



The Warrior Institute is a Florida 501c3 public charity that was established on July 20, 2011. What started as a “what if” brainstorm between father and daughter – entrepreneur and recreational therapist, respectively – soon developed into a unique program with such partners as the East Carolina University (ECU) psychophysiology and biofeedback lab. Jeff, and Tonia Zyburt, co-founder and program director, envisioned integrating outdoor activity-based therapies with biofeedback training.

“By ramping up in stages and gathering feedback along the way, the result will be a more robust plan and proven program,” Tonia said.

The Warrior Institute team has created a customized 10-day training program designed to improve individual and family performance, resiliency, and quality of life. As funds are being raised for the 10-day program, the Warrior Institute will start with small activities such as family outings, such as an upcoming six-day paddle trip in the Florida Everglades with veterans and their spouses as part of a joint partnership with Outward Bound.

“Our recreational therapy and biofeedback centered programs are designed to improve emotional, psychological, cognitive, and physical symptoms associated with combat and military services,” said Tonia. “The inclusion of the spouse or partner in this experience will help military couples and increase the bio-psycho-social health in families.”

Other elements integrated into the 10-day program include:

- Positive Psychological Treatment
- Medical Family Therapy
- Essential Life Skills for Military Families
- Substance abuse and Mental Health Rehabilitation Services
- Vocational Counseling Services

The Crisis

The RAND Corporation (a nonprofit, non-partisan institution that creates major research findings that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors) conducted a study in 2011 that found 19 percent of combat veterans experience TBI, and 18 percent suffer from TBI and PTSD or major depression. Many experts believe this percentage may be much higher. In fact, U.S. Surgeon General Regina Benjamin announced late last year an updated national strategy for suicide prevention, following an all-time high of Army active-duty soldiers committing suicide.



The Veterans Administration (VA) suicide hotline currently receives 17,000 calls a day with a staff of only two dozen professional counselors to assist – a scenario that’s proven to be a challenge at best. With a divorce rate three times higher among veterans, and difficulty transitioning military skills in to civilian employment leading to a 30 percent unemployment rate among that population, the need for wider support couldn’t be more evident, said Jeff.

Many veterans requiring services from the VA and similar government service providers often battle against a never-ending stream of bureaucratic set-backs, unclear policies, delayed results and red tape when trying to receive services they desperately need.

“Our military personnel and their families have made a significant sacrifice for our country. They deserve to have a chance to rebuild their lives and restore their overall health and well-being with the very best that nature and technology has to offer,” Jeff said.

“The Warrior Institute will also open up jobs for veterans at the center itself. We plan to create relationships with local groups and businesses to help graduates of our program find jobs in the community.”

For more information about the Warrior Institute’s programs visit our website at www.warriorinstitute.org.

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