

The Healing Power of Nature

Retreat Reveals Hidden Struggles, Coping Tools for Injured Veterans

DESTIN, Fla., April 21, 2016 [/PRNewswire-USNewswire/](#) -- A group of twelve injured veterans exchanged stories and shared personal coping mechanisms during a recent three-day fishing retreat at Mid Bay Shores Cabins in Destin, Florida. The outdoor therapy was offered through the Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) Alumni program, which brings injured veterans together to build camaraderie and bonds through events and programs.

This specific event served two purposes: to place injured veterans in a relaxing environment that is close to nature and removed from outside influences, and to identify how the warriors could benefit from each other.

"While I enjoyed the fishing very much," said Alexander Hernandez, U.S. Marine Corps and Army injured veteran and WWP Alumnus, "I learned there are more people out there that go through what I go through."

Peer support plays an important role in the recovery process as injured veterans rely upon each other's learned experiences when managing day-to-day challenges. All WWP programs and services have an aspect of this support structure, while one specific program, the Peer Support program, is dedicated to ensuring every injured veteran, family member, and caregiver support one another in recovery, thus embodying the WWP logo of one warrior carrying another off the battlefield. In February 2016 alone, more than 180 wounded veterans took part in the program. <http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/programs/peer-support.aspx>.

Alumni events provide a safe and comfortable atmosphere that encourage wounded veterans to rely on teamwork, trust, and communication to build an effective network of support through each other and the Peer Support Group facilitators. With an equal mix of Alumni and group leaders, the retreat brought forth a deeper awareness and understanding of invisible wounds and their impact on injured veterans' lives.

"I learned that I have more damage than I initially realized," said Alexander who deployed five times in his military career, including multiple tours in Afghanistan and Iraq. Alexander, like many injured veterans, coped with his injuries through isolation but has since learned that the road to recovery includes getting off the couch, being engaged, and staying active. In order to serve the unique needs of more than 100,000 injured veterans, their caregivers, and families, WWP offers 20 direct programs and services, all free of charge.