

# Injured Veterans and Families Enjoy Safari Sleepover with Wounded Warrior Project

## Warriors Tour Exhibits and Camp Out at San Diego Zoo Safari Park

SAN DIEGO, Aug. 19, 2016 /[PRNewswire-USNewswire](#)/ -- Nearly 150 wounded warriors and their family members recently spent the night with cheetahs and elephants at a Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) program gathering at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park. The outing allowed injured veterans to experience firsthand what is possible when offered opportunities to get out of the house and engage with their service brothers and sisters.

"I was so happy to meet new warriors and their families," said Army veteran Sonia Gonzalez. "I don't get out much to associate with others, and this was an awesome experience for myself, my daughter, grandkids, and nephew. We were able to really bond, and I truly look forward to more experiences like this with WWP."

Immediately upon arrival, participants were able to watch an animal presentation, and afterward warriors and their families mingled with each other in the campground as they found their tents.

"This WWP gathering is great because I could not afford this type of experience with my kids on my own," said Marine Corps veteran Daniel Davenport. "Meeting other WWP members was awesome, and I really cherished having the one-on-one time with my kids at this special event."

The families got to socialize even more at dinner, which helped pull them out of isolation, one of the most significant struggles wounded warriors deal with after serving their country. It can be difficult knowing how to overcome that challenge and rekindle bonds similar to those formed in the military.

Later on, everyone split into smaller groups to tour the zoo, including areas with lions, cheetahs, elephants, and a behind-the-scenes exhibit with giraffes and rhinos. Zoo workers also introduced wounded warriors and their families to a little-known animal - the echidna, which is a spiny anteater. It is unique because it is one of two mammals that lay eggs - the other being the duck-billed platypus.

The overnight adventure provided a multitude of memories for all who attended - whether it was seeing animals at the zoo, spending time camping, or simply bonding with other injured veterans and their families.

"This experience was impactful for our family because it allowed us to be together out of our current stressful environment," said Tamra Rehak, wife of Marine Corps veteran Jon Rehak. "The tent was awesome. The view was so exciting that we want to go back and spend more time there."

The night ended with popcorn, s'mores, and games, and the next morning began with a private tram ride.

"The last few months have been scary and uncertain for our family," said Sarah Lopez, wife of Air Force veteran Jorge Lopez. "But this weekend Jorge engaged, smiled, laughed, and at one point during the tram ride held my hand. To most families, those things go unnoticed, but to a family affected by the wounds of

war, moments like this mean the world to us."

After the last activity of the outing, a close-up elephant training presentation, veterans and their families learned about additional WWP programs and services, which are offered free of charge for a lifetime and are designed to ease the burdens on warriors, their caregivers, and families, by aiding in the recovery process and smoothing the transition into civilian life.

The programs are personalized to enable warriors, caregivers, and family members to reach educational and employment goals, and recover physically, mentally, and emotionally.

"Program events like this burn everlasting memories into my children's heads in a world that can be unpredictable and sometimes confusing for them," Sarah said. "We look forward to more WWP gatherings like this."

### **About Wounded Warrior Project**

The mission of Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) is to honor and empower Wounded Warriors. The WWP purpose is to raise awareness and to enlist the public's aid for the needs of injured service members, to help injured servicemen and women aid and assist each other, and to provide unique, direct programs and services to meet their needs. WWP is a national, nonpartisan organization headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida. To get involved and learn more, visit [woundedwarriorproject.org](http://woundedwarriorproject.org).

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For further information: Rob Louis, Public Relations, [rlouis@woundedwarriorproject.org](mailto:rlouis@woundedwarriorproject.org), 904.646.6896

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