

Continued Support Leads Veteran to Connect with Wounded Warrior Project

JACKSONVILLE, Fla., Nov. 21, 2016 /[PRNewswire-USNewswire](#)/ -- As an 11-year Army veteran who served two tours in Iraq, Yvette Francis was certainly familiar with Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP). In fact, she had crossed paths with the organization more than once.

"I was first told about Wounded Warrior Project back in 2009 when I returned home from Iraq the second time," she said. "I remember getting a pretty shirt, but I figured the organization was probably just something for people who are still in the military. I didn't take it seriously."

When her out-processing was completed, Yvette left Fort Rucker – where she served in an aviation unit – and headed to Savannah, Georgia. There she reconnected with a friend who is a fellow service member. While catching up, he suggested a group he felt could help her transition to civilian life.

"He said I should go ahead and finish registering with Wounded Warrior Project – that there was a lot their staff could do to help me out," Yvette said. "I told him 'sure, not a problem,' but again, I didn't think much about it."

Yvette relocated to Jacksonville in 2014. In September of that year, she decided to explore her post-military career options at a local job fair. Striking up a conversation with a representative from CSX® Transportation, she noticed a pin on his shirt in the shape of one soldier carrying another – the unmistakable logo of WWP.

"I asked him if he was part of Wounded Warrior Project," Yvette recalled. "He said he was and explained how it helped him. I told him about my time in the service – how I had deployed and gotten injured. He told me I should really take the initiative and reach out to the veterans service organization."

The adage about the third time being the charm proved true for Yvette. The job fair representative gave her contact information for a WWP staff member, with whom she had a wonderful conversation, she said.

"After that, I completed my registration and submitted my proof of service documents," she said. "And I have been a part of Wounded Warrior Project ever since."

Since joining WWP, Yvette has participated in various programs designed to form and strengthen bonds between injured veterans while bolstering physical and mental health and wellness. One such gathering was a multi-day rehabilitative [mental health workshop](#), which she attended earlier this year.

At these workshops, injured veterans work through the challenges of combat stress and other invisible wounds of war with outdoor rehabilitative exercises. While pushing themselves during activities like kayaking and high ropes courses, participants reap the benefits of connecting with peers, trained counselors, and WWP staff. By the end, warriors share lessons learned from the activities that impacted their personal struggles most and set achievable goals for their recoveries.

"It challenged me a lot," she said of her experience. "It made me come to grips with some of my fears. I wouldn't say I am completely over them, but I had to deal with them – and I think I'm a little better now because of it. My recovery is still a work in progress, but I enjoyed myself to the fullest."

In a [WWP survey](#) of the injured warriors it serves, more than half of survey respondents (51.7 percent) talked

with fellow Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, or Operation New Dawn veterans to address their mental health issues, and 29.6 percent expressed physical activity helps.

While her time at the workshop was challenging, Yvette said the support – and genuine care – of the WWP staff made a world of difference.

"They really did a lot for us, and they kept pushing us," she said. "If there was something we wanted to talk about, they had an open door policy, and we could talk about any issues. And on several occasions since then, they have reached out just to check up on me and see how I'm doing."

Yvette returned from the workshop with a collection of intangible souvenirs: the support of WWP mentors, the strength to keep challenging herself to improve her physical and mental health, and friendships with fellow warriors.

"I met some great women there," she said. "I still keep in contact with them."

These days, Yvette devotes most of her time to her part-time job and her education. She plans to explore more career options through WWP's [Warriors to Work®](#) program. In the meantime, WWP continues to support her journey. The weekend following Veterans Day, WWP invited Yvette to EverBank® Field to be a part of the NFL's Salute to Service, a campaign designed to honor those who have fought or are fighting for our country.

"I'm a huge sports fan, so I was excited to go," she said. "It's nice to be supported and see organizations making an effort to show they care. I feel appreciated for everything my fellow wounded warriors and I did – and everything service members are continuing to do."

For other injured veterans, Yvette had a simple message – do not be afraid to ask for help.

"There are a lot of people who have been through the same things you have, more or less," she said. "There are organizations like Wounded Warrior Project that do a lot for us. They are here for you, and you shouldn't feel discouraged in any way from asking for assistance. The help is there for you."

About Wounded Warrior Project

We Connect, Serve, and Empower

The mission of Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) is to honor and empower Wounded Warriors. WWP connects wounded warriors and their families to valuable resources and one another, serves them through a variety of free programs and services, and empowers them to live life on their own terms. WWP is a national, nonpartisan organization headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida. To get involved and learn more, visit woundedwarriorproject.org.

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