

WWP News & Media: Veteran Group Outings, Charity Events, Helping Vets

## Wounded Veterans, Families Meet Santa at Wounded Warrior Project Gathering Participants Get Comfortable in Pajamas for Holiday Connection Event

SUFFOLK, Va., Dec. 22, 2016 /[PRNewswire-USNewswire](#)/ -- The lyric goes, "It's the most wonderful time of the year."

Gingerbread cookies, candy canes, telling Santa your wishlist, and ... adult onesies?

Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) recently hosted a group of injured veterans and their families to experience all the trappings of the holiday season. Pajamas of all kinds were welcome at a gathering with Santa that included breakfast for dinner and a visit with some furry friends from Therapy Dogs International®. The holiday outreach activity gave wounded warriors and their families the chance to connect with one another and learn about WWP programs.

"For me, Wounded Warrior Project means that even if my service for the military has ended due to being injured, I am still considered part of the family and will be able to enjoy these gatherings and the camaraderie that is felt being on active duty," said Army veteran Paola Santiago.

Navy veteran Kimberly Hague said she and her family had a lot of fun at the connection event. "My kids played with the dogs, made arts and crafts, and listened to Santa's story. I loved the look on my son's face when the service dogs came in, and I even learned more about service dogs, like how they are trained and what they do."

Paola agreed. "The event was amazing. My daughter had a ton of fun just walking around and dancing. She is just 13 months old. She loved the dogs that came, too."

As a twist to the gathering, warriors contributed some joyful labor as elves in Santa's Workshop by making arts and crafts for the kids and volunteering in other ways. Kimberly, for example, happily took on a role as event photographer. There was a fun way for every guest to participate, no matter the age.

"We made a gingerbread cookie since my daughter is still too young to do the other activities," Paola said. "I loved seeing my daughter being friendly and just walking around everywhere. That was a highlight for me."

These outreach events are not only connection opportunities for wounded veterans, but they also introduce

participants to additional WWP programs and services.

"I learn more and more with each Wounded Warrior Project event I attend," Kimberly said.

Paola and Kimberly said they found out about WWP while on active duty, and having this knowledge helped in adjusting to civilian life.

"It made the transition feel easier knowing I would have some support if I needed it – or at least a way to get directed to other resources," Paola said. She was honest about her challenges, what WWP has meant to her, and the importance of the bonds of military sisterhood: "Times were tough in my life a few years ago, and a friend suggested Wounded Warrior Project. With this organization, I have support from others who know where I've been and what I've been through and what I am currently going through. My husband is a veteran, but sometimes it's great talking to other female veterans."

The latest [WWP survey](#) of the injured warriors it serves highlights a key point about the importance of these connection activities: 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. The opportunities for connection at WWP outreach events support the long-term recovery of warriors in environments that accommodate physical injuries and social anxieties.

Through the generosity of donors, WWP's programs and resources are available to injured veterans and their families free of charge. The programs assist injured veterans with mental health, physical health and wellness, career and benefits counseling, and connecting with other warriors and their communities. Recreating the bonds found through military service is critical in warriors' healing.

To learn more about how WWP connects, serves, and empowers through programs and services that impact the lives of wounded warriors, visit <http://newsroom.woundedwarriorproject.org/>. To find photos from this event, click on multimedia, then images.

## **About Wounded Warrior Project**

### **We Connect, Serve, and Empower**

The mission of Wounded Warrior Project<sup>®</sup> (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](http://woundedwarriorproject.org).

SOURCE Wounded Warrior Project

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Additional assets available online: [Photos \(1\)](#)

<https://newsroom.woundedwarriorproject.org/2016-12-22-Wounded-Veterans-Families-Meet-Santa-at-Wounded-Warrior-Project-Gathering>