

Wounded Warrior Project Highlights Benefits of Adventure-Based Mental Health Programming at NRPA Annual Conference



Adventure-based activities on a Project Odyssey create space for skill-building and connection.

Sept. 17, 2025 -- Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) will showcase its innovative approach to supporting military mental health through adventure-based learning at the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Annual Conference in Atlanta.

The presentation spotlights Project Odyssey®, WWP’s 12-week mental health program that leverages recreation and outdoor experiences to build resilience and strengthen coping skills among veterans and active-duty service members, who also qualify for WWP support.

Harnessing Recreation to Build Resilience

“Project Odyssey gives active-duty service members the opportunity to step away from their routines, engage in the outdoors, and rediscover purpose,” said Meg Louk, Project Odyssey manager at WWP. “The camaraderie and challenge of these experiences help warriors gain tools for mental wellness and suicide prevention that extend far beyond the retreat.”

The session, titled *Innovating Adventure-Based Mental Health Programming for Active-Duty Military*, will be presented by Louk alongside Project Odyssey specialists Adrienne Ross and Miah Pavlich Wheeler. Together, they will discuss how outdoor recreation and experiential learning provide effective pathways to address post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression. By reaching service members while they’re still in uniform, Project Odyssey provides critical tools and connections long before many would traditionally engage with veteran services. The presentation will also highlight WWP’s collaboration with the U.S. Army, which has expanded Project Odyssey programming to active-duty service members in Alaska, Washington, Colorado, and North Carolina.

Preventing Suicide Through Connection and Challenge

Project Odyssey incorporates a five-day outdoor retreat followed by 11 weeks of structured virtual support. Activities such as kayaking, hiking, and snowboarding help warriors strengthen communication, practice coping skills, and foster trust. Army chaplains have also been trained as co-facilitators, ensuring continued peer and spiritual support after retreats conclude.

Warriors gain confidence and connection through Project Odyssey activities.

Through this collaboration, more than 567 soldiers have participated in Project Odyssey, with outcomes including increased resilience, improved social connection, and decreased suicide risk.

This work helps address what's called the "deadly gap" when there is a heightened risk of suicidal thoughts and behaviors during the first year after transitioning from military to civilian life. By engaging with service members while they are still active duty, Project Odyssey equips them with community and coping skills before separation, reducing the vulnerabilities that often make the transition difficult.

Participants report stronger camaraderie, better communication, and renewed purpose, which are all factors linked to lower suicide risk. 2025 programming continues at sites including Alaska, Joint Base Lewis-McChord (Tacoma), Fort Carson (Colorado Springs), and Fort Liberty (Fayetteville).

A Lifeline for Warriors and Their Families

Preventing suicide is core to WWP's mission of supporting the needs of injured, ill, and wounded post-9/11 service members and veterans. Even one suicide is too many. WWP programs are available at no cost to both veterans and active-duty service members, ensuring access to critical support before, during, and after transition.

By building trust and camaraderie in the field, participants establish lifelines that extend back into their units. These bonds help active-duty service members know they are not alone, reducing isolation and protecting against suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

According to the latest Warrior Survey, more than 1 in 4 WWP warriors had suicidal thoughts within the past 12 months. Research shows that strong social ties not only improve quality of life but also serve as a critical protective factor against suicidal ideation. More than half (67%) of warriors said talking to another veteran helps them cope with stress or mental health concerns.

The NRPA Annual Conference takes place Sept. 16-18, 2025, in Atlanta, Georgia, and brings together thousands of recreation professionals to share best practices for fostering healthy communities.

Contact: — Charlene Cristobal, Public Relations, ccristobal@woundedwarriorproject.org, 904.832.5299

About Wounded Warrior Project

Wounded Warrior Project is our nation's leading veteran services organization, focused on the total well-being of post-9/11 wounded, ill, or injured veterans. Our programs, advocacy, and awareness efforts help warriors thrive, provide essential lifelines to families and caregivers, and prevent veteran suicides. [Learn more about Wounded Warrior Project.](#)

<https://newsroom.woundedwarriorproject.org/2025-09-12-Wounded-Warrior-Project-Highlights-Benefits-of-Adventure-Based-Mental-Health-Programming-at-NRPA-Annual-Conference>