Wounded Warrior Family Quarterly Newsletter

October 2016

Navy Wounded Warrior Safe Harbor

CNIC • Fleet • Fighter • Family

Family Symposiums

The goal of a Navy Wounded Warrior (NWW) – Safe Harbor family symposium is to hear directly from the families of seriously wounded, ill and injured Sailors and Coast Guardsmen within each region. During the event, wounded warriors and their family members recount their experiences, challenges and triumphs along their road to recovery. These firsthand accounts provide awareness of the many and varied needs of enrollees and their families. In addition, their feedback will help NWW improve the delivery of non-medical services nationally and in the local regions to current and future program enrollees and their families. Family symposiums were recently held in San Diego, Calif., and Jacksonville, Fla. The following stories recap those events:

Southwest Region Family Symposium

Communication was a common theme during the Southwest Region Navy Wounded Warrior –Safe Harbor Family Symposium held Aug. 18 at the Anchors Catering and Conference Center in San Diego.

Rear Adm. Markham Rich, commander, Navy Region Southwest, opened the event by saying that we need to do a better job communicating and making sure all service members who qualify for NWW are aware of the program, so they can receive tailored assistance for all their non-medical care issues. Guest speaker Darnisha Hunter, community representative/veteran and military advocate from the office of San Diego Mayor Kevin L. Faulconer, shared the city's initiatives to help military veterans and their families with mental, physical and holistic services.

In addition, Lt. Cmdr. Erin M. Simmons, OASIS (Overcoming Adversity & Stress Injury Support) division officer, shared information about the services available through the OASIS program, a center that is designed to treat active-duty service members diagnosed with PTSD. See the article on OASIS in this newsletter for more information.

The panel of wounded warriors sharing their stories included Petty Officer Second Class Benjamin Kilhefner, a transitioned service member who wants to continue to help military members and veterans. He advocates for establishing an annual training for mental health to help change the mindset of leadership, which tends to push service members to keep going without addressing mental health needs. After years of compartmentalizing and processing the casualties and sniper fire he endured, he now affirms that "It is okay if you don't feel right, it is okay to be afraid, it is okay to sit on a panel like this one and talk about mental health issues." His wife, Jordan, who was by his side, supports him with his goals and

continued on the next page

Wounded Warrior and Caregiver panelists share their stories in San Diego.

November is Warrior Care Month

November is officially designated as Warrior Care Month, a month dedicated to honoring the courage, resilience and accomplishments of wounded, ill and injured service members, and their families and caregivers. In 2008, the Secretary of Defense established Warrior Care Month to increase awareness of the programs and resources available to wounded, ill and injured service members, their families and those who care about them. The theme "A Show of Strength" highlights the perseverance of our wounded warriors and their families throughout the recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration process. Navy Wounded Warrior – Safe Harbor is dedicated to this mission every day as we recognize the show of strength that families and caregivers must provide day and night in order to support their warriors.

Many community leaders, businesses and military installations will collaborate to recognize military families through special events such as open houses, fun runs, family fun nights, and community dinners. Also look for discounts at MWR facilities, local businesses and sporting events, and special recognitions during community activities throughout the month of November. Contact your local MWR office or FFSC to learn more about events in your area.

Look for announcements and dates regarding a joint service Facebook town hall for wounded, ill and injured service members, and their caregivers and families, hosted by the Office of Warrior Care Policy on www.facebook.com/warriorcare.

Family Symposiums

continued from previous page

their "new normal." Services they received through NWW included assistance locating housing and furnishings. Ben called the program a "one-stop shop."

Petty Officer First Class Andrea Dubus experienced communication frustrations as she was transferred between health care facilities from overseas to Balboa, and the facilities did not immediately receive her records. This lapse required her to relive and retell the circumstances of her injury and her medical history repeatedly. She further described the challenges of recovery without her primary caregiver nearby – her fiancé – who is also on active duty and stationed elsewhere. Dubus said she is thankful to NWW for making the recovery process easier by assisting with her needs, and for helping her find lodging at a Fisher House for her fiancé when he was able to visit and offer his support.

Summing up the discussion, NWW Program Director Capt. Brent Breining echoed the need to get the word out about the care that Sailors and Coast Guardsmen can receive from NWW. He further spotlighted the challenges of the caregivers, the importance of their support of the wounded, ill and injured, and the many resources available to provide assistance to those caregivers.

Southeast Family Symposium

The physical, spiritual and mental well-being of Sailors and Coast Guardsmen was discussed at the second annual Navy Wounded Warrior – Safe Harbor Family Symposium hosted at the NAS Jacksonville Officers Club. Many audience members engaged in the conversation with the wounded warrior panel members, acknowledging the need to change the perception that the higher the military rank, the less need for services or support in times of injury or illness. All wounded warriors, no matter what pin is on their collar, are human beings and need the support of their command, shipmates, friends, and family throughout their recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration process.

Chief Warrant Officer Carmelo Sanchez articulated the difference between a command's reaction to combat injuries and illness. He said that on the battlefield, all hands pull together to treat, stabilize and medically evacuate a service member. According to Sanchez, that scenario stands in stark contrast to a command's reaction when a service member has been diagnosed with an illness and their shipmates don't know about their physical condition and emotional needs. He said it's imperative that we do not make a distinction between the visible and invisible wounds, illnesses and injuries. Sanchez also emphasized that while the physical treatments may differ, the spiritual, emotional and mental aspects of care remain consistent for all wounded warriors.

Retired Chief Warrant Officer Brian Bunch admitted that it was difficult for him to ask for help. After surgery, he woke up shocked to find himself in a wheelchair, facing

Wounded Warrior and Caregiver panelists share their stories in Jacksonville.

weeks of physical therapy to learn how to walk again. He shared his acronym for HELP, hoping others in a similar position would be encouraged: Initially, he felt Helpless, Embarrassed and emotional, Lonely, in Pain, panicked, and pitiful. He advised others to swallow their pride, admit they need help and use the resources available. As his journey continues, he now views a new acronym for HELP: Hopefulness and happy he survived, Empowered and embracing help, Love, Peace of mind, and maintaining positive thoughts.

The advice from Coast Guardsman Christopher North and recently retired Petty Officer First Class Jeffrey Strickland, who both unexpectedly had their careers cut short due to illness, is to use the resources available through NWW. Resume help, employment fairs, internships, and continuing education options are available to help service members transition back to civilian life. The resource fair following the symposium featured representatives from several transition support organizations who provided counseling and educational materials to attendees.

Mark your calendars for these upcoming Family Symposiums:

Nov. 9, 2016
Naval District Washington
USO Bethesda
4565 Taylor Road
Bethesda, MD 20889
POC: Cmdr. Colin McKee
colin.g.mckee.mil@mail.mil

Jan. 26, 2017
Navy Region Northwest
Bangor Plaza
2720 Ohio Street
Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor
Silverdale, WA 98315
POC: Lt. Cmdr. Chris LeBlanc
christopher.leblanc@navy.mil

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Combat Veteran Confronts PTSD with New Beginnings

Combat Veteran Confronts PTSD with New Beginnings

Petty Officer First Class Aaron Jones is the son of an artist/musician mother and Army Ranger father. Growing up, he always knew he had inherited his mother's artistic ability, but he pushed it aside, enlisted in the Navy, attended field medical service school, and deployed three times to Iraq. He acknowledges becoming worn down from the pressures and responsibilities of being a combat corpsman. Through art therapy, Aaron has found the steps to help him escape from PTSD, and is pursuing fashion design. He said that fabric is safe to work with, because "it doesn't bleed out," and he enjoys the process required to select fabrics for his design projects because the steps lead to creation, as opposed to the loss experienced in combat.

Through San Diego ArtOASIS, the Museum of Contemporary Art in La Jolla showcased artwork by military personnel overcoming PTSD, where Aaron exhibited the dress he designed and named "New Beginnings." This dress has significant meaning, emotion and memories, which Aaron described:

The flesh-colored roses represent the faces of service men and women. The black roses on the bodice of the dress are service members who were close to him but were lost. The "v" area that extends downward conveys a safe place, while the black ring at the bottom signifies a protection halo that he wants for all military personnel. The skirt includes a red godet to bring awareness to the trauma, bloodshed and carnage of real life survival, both in combat and on the home front. The back of the dress features feathers, which symbolizes freedom and taking off, even though the underpinnings of trauma will always stay. Lastly, the cape is camouflage expressing the shedding of a second skin, in this case the military, and the start of his "New Beginning."

Aaron Jones and model wearing his design, "New Beginnings."

Aaron's future is full of promise. He recently had an opportunity to meet a renowned fashion designer at her studio. After studying his designs and hearing his story, she advised him to include his combat experience in his art because "it is a part of you." To his surprise, she extended him an invitation to come back to the studio to work with her. In addition, he has been accepted into the Colorado State University Apparel Design program, where this self-taught designer can continue to develop his skills. Aaron is thankful for the support from his wife and parents in his new endeavor and also thanks his command and NWW for helping him relocate to the San Diego area so that he can pursue an internship in design.

Aaron's advice to other service members in a similar situation is: Don't give up. Be true to yourself. Keep doing work. Meet your PTSD or substance abuse halfway by using the tools from treatment to survive. Swallow your pride. Do whatever you can to live and accomplish your goals, and take responsibility for your own actions.

Caregiver Highlights –Hear Directly from our Non-Medical Attendants

Congratulations to caregiver Nicole Condrey who won first place in her heat at The Navy Mile event! Nicole traveled with her husband Chief Ron Condrey to support him and the other athletes as well as participate herself. Adaptive sports can have a positive impact on both the service member and caregiver. Nicole understands the military mentality for teamwork to accomplish the mission. As a caregiver, she says she can provide support and supply patience and faith, but she feels that she cannot fill in for the "team." Adaptive sports are an opportunity for her husband to reconnect with the team, employ his leadership skills, and boost his confidence and morale. Nicole believes that taking leave from work, separating themselves from the day to day stressors in the home and traveling to an adaptive sporting event is beneficial. It is also an opportunity for her to meet other caregivers and talk through common struggles, reaffirming that she is not alone in her role as a caregiver. Nicole rightly summed up the vocation of all wounded warriors and caregivers: "We are all a family, we are all a team."

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The Navy Mile

The second annual Navy Mile was held Oct. 2 on Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C., to celebrate the sea services and help kick off the United States Navy's birthday week. Several NWW enrollees participated in the race to represent the Navy and bring awareness to wounded warriors adapting and overcoming through sports.

Thank you to the athletes who traveled to our nation's capital and raced!

Nicole Condrey receiving her first place medal at The Navy Mile.

Scholarship Opportunities

It is that time of year again! Don't miss out on scholarship opportunities for military spouses and children. Check out these websites for eligibility and closing dates:

www.militaryfamily.org
www.militaryscholar.org
http://navyleague.org/scholarship/
www.fra.org
www.hopeforthewarriors.org

OASIS Program

Overcoming Adversity & Stress Injury Support (OASIS) is a residential treatment center for active-duty service members experiencing combat PTSD. Their motto is "We Help Manage the War Within," acknowledging that traumatic stress is normal after some experiences, but can be treated effectively. Once a service member is admitted to the program, OASIS creates a tailored plan for them to address their individual needs, with the goal of returning to full duty. The OASIS program uses a two-phased model for treatment. During the approximate first two weeks, service members receive a comprehensive assessment, individual therapy, medical evaluation, skill building, recreation therapy, substance abuse treatment, and acupuncture. During the remaining approximate six weeks, service members participate in various therapies and exercises according to their individual plan. Other assistance OASIS provides includes medication management; focus on sleep and insomnia, physical exercise, relaxation, resilience and coping skills training, and holistic treatment. To view a San Diego news feature story on OASIS, visit: http://www.10news.com/news/navy-facility-helping-veterans-overcome-ptsd. If you have questions about the OASIS program, contact Lt. Cmdr. Erin Simmons at (619) 533-0704 or erin.m.simmons18.mil@mail.mil.