COME HOME TO A LIFE CHANGING EXPERIENCE

The retreat guides the service member or veteran through the impact of the past into the present, and how to honor the past, yet reduce its influence on everyday life. Thus the veteran can live more fully in the present and improve their quality of life in the future.

“I am a partner to a Vietnam veteran and we were participants in the Wellness and Healing Retreat in Angel Fire, New Mexico. When I first arrived, I had no understanding of the PTSD and that there were so many veterans and their partners suffering in silence because of this. This retreat helped me to understand my partner’s anger episodes and taught me different ways to help him get through it...and help me get through it. This is so strong and overwhelming, it is a comfort to know that there are people out there who are willing to help us out. This retreat helped us to open up and face our fears.” —Veteran Partner, April 2010

So many veterans and military families face the exact same challenge as described above. Some go day-to-day not even knowing that they are suffering from something in which there is treatment. Others suffer in isolation, as they are unaware that many are dealing with the same thing. And spouses and partners start to blame themselves for something that is completely out of their control. Post traumatic stress disorder, or more commonly known as PTSD, is a complex group of symptoms that are adaptive in a war zone but not at home that can develop from life threatening situations or continued exposure in which the person was physically harmed or felt threatened.

In about 11–20% of Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars (Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom), or 11–20 Veterans out of 100.

In as many as 10% of Gulf War (Desert Storm) Veterans, or in 10 Veterans out of 100.

In about 30% of Vietnam Veterans, or about 30 out of 100 Vietnam Veterans. [1]

veteranswellnessandhealing.org

If you would like to learn more about the National Veterans Wellness & Healing Center
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These percentages are likely to be somewhat understated, not only because the prevalence of PTSD may increase during the two years after exposure to trauma, but also because of soldiers’ fears of the repercussions of admitting they are having difficulty. Even among soldiers with symptoms, general distrust and perceived barriers to seeking mental health services are obvious. In a study, eighteen percent of participants reported they would be too embarrassed to seek mental health services. Twenty four percent felt admitting a problem could hurt their careers, and thirty one percent felt they would be seen as weak.\(^2\) Possibly, the greatest myth is that war related post traumatic stress is just between the ears.

As military conflicts continue in Iraq and Afghanistan, PTSD is on the rise with no immediate end in sight as new conflicts continue in this tumultuous world. More and more veterans are returning from overseas with this disorder. The Wounded Warrior Project estimates that there are over 300,000 cases of PTSD afflicting our soldiers engaged in current conflicts.\(^3\) Similarly, PTSD continues to impact the not so recently returned veterans from places such as Vietnam and Korea who have been suffering from the same issues and many who haven’t received successful treatment in the past. At the same time, our military, our government, the media, and Americans are becoming increasingly aware of this growing problem and the fact that new programs and solutions are drastically needed. Specifically there is a need for holistic wellness programs.

Recognizing this need, as well as the unique attributes that the veteran-friendly village of Angel Fire, New Mexico could contribute, a group of local leaders founded the National Veterans Wellness and Healing Center (NVWHC) in 2009, a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit with a mission to establish an environment that is responsive to the needs of veterans and military families using creative therapies and processes that focus on addressing the whole person, mind, body and spirit. Our proven holistic wellness and healing program works with the conscious and subconscious levels of body memories giving our participating couples an opportunity to experience modalities that assist in releasing old unwanted memories allowing them to recapture a sense of well being to lead rewarding and productive lives. In the past, most of the treatment was limited to “talk therapy” and did not deal with the whole person.

Angel Fire, with its timely “family-centered” veteran programs and plans, directly fills this void and will enable the community to share its positive story across the country, generating substantial awareness and call-to-action.
HOW THE NATIONAL VETERANS WELLNESS & HEALING CENTER BEGAN

Angel Fire, New Mexico is the home to the first Vietnam Veterans Memorial in the U.S. Today, this historic and very moving facility is known as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial State Park. Over the past four decades, the Memorial has welcomed more than two and half million visitors and has gained an international reputation as a must-visit site for vets and their families, military history experts and others. As Angel Fire is located in a beautiful alpine setting at 8,500 feet, it creates a distinctly spiritual physical place, inviting quiet contemplation of the stories presented in the Memorial’s welcome center. Because the Memorial is such an iconic place of healing among veterans, Angel Fire now hosts some of the country’s most innovative week-long Wellness and Healing Retreats for veterans and their families suffering from PTSD. Retreats are designed around a broad array of traditional and non-traditional treatment techniques, capitalizing on the area’s spiritual atmosphere and recreational opportunities.

Since 2009, we have held week-long retreats at the Angel Fire Resort and throughout the community, helping over 150 veterans and their partners who have successfully completed the week-long retreat and have been celebrating their success since. After the retreat, couples continue to meet, usually once a month, in their own communities with other couples who have gone through the program and share tools that have helped them return to being active and productive members of society. These reunions have kept the lines of communication to the Center alive. Several past participants continue to return to Angel Fire for family vacations and events like Memorial Day or Run for the Wall.
NVWHC BRINGS AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO TREATING PTSD

The National Veterans Wellness and Healing Center has teamed with the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services, Angel Fire Resort, Cardinal Retreats, Roadrunner Tours, and the Native American community to create the innovative programming for these retreats. Such a team coupled with the hands on experience along with total community support is a unique and winning combination that guarantees successful accomplishment of the veterans’ retreats. Furthermore, the uniqueness of the retreats is attributed to the fact they are offered at no cost to the veteran and their spouse, it is one of the only programs in the country that focuses on the couple or the family rather than just the veteran suffering from PSTD, and that the retreats are a week-long with follow up sessions throughout the year. Our goal is to help 75% of the veteran couples who attend the retreats and to achieve a 50–70% reduction in their PTSD symptoms.

Aside from the proven clinical approaches used to help the veterans, complementary alternative medicine such as yoga, guided imagery, Reiki—a Japanese technique for stress reduction and relaxation, massage therapy, acupuncture and Native American ceremonies are used. The wellness and healing retreats have also successfully incorporated the use of equine assisted therapy into the program. The natural setting of Angel Fire in the Sangre de Cristo mountains is the perfect location to bring couples to a place where healing in nature is optimal.

Nature and its inherent therapeutic benefits are integral to all of the retreats. The beauty and serenity of the area provides a natural setting offering a sense of well-being and connectedness to the participants and staff. Participants are out in nature, watching wildlife and participating in Native American ceremonies in an outdoor setting that becomes an integral part of the therapeutic recreational experience. The Native American ceremonies and healing component bring a nonsectarian element of spirituality to the couples to provide an opportunity for deep healing. For centuries, ceremonies have been used in the Native American communities to welcome their warriors home. We are fortunate that today’s Native Healers are willing to share their ancient cultures with this community.

Each retreat participant is invited to and encouraged to take part in one-day refresher sessions held one month, four months and one year following the end of their retreat. These sessions reinforce the continuation of wellness principles and techniques, provide inventories to assess levels of PTSD, assess on-going support, and ensure the veterans and families are receiving the care they deserve. These sessions enable retreat participants to reconnect with one another, as important relationships often develop during a wellness retreat, and opportunities to continue providing support to one another helps strengthen long-term healing.
THE CENTER

Looking toward the future, the National Veterans Wellness and Healing Center in Angel Fire will have a year-round campus that will accommodate veterans and their families, and support staff and researchers in the pursuit of assisting veterans to reclaim their productive and active lifestyle.

This project will enable expansion of Veterans Wellness Retreats and other related programs in an ideal, consolidated setting. When fully scheduled, Veterans Wellness Retreats will serve a minimum of 780 new veterans and spouses or families each year. This number will double as “Graduate Retreats” are held annually for follow-up treatment. Individual veterans or active service personnel needing decompression or a “down time” will also be able to spend time at the Center, working with a staff advisor to self-design opportunities to relax and recreate.

The entire Center is being designed to provide not only an optimum setting for Veterans Wellness Retreats and related activities, but also to understand and cater to the needs of active military and veterans. When completed, the Center will feature a separate facility including spa, treatment and meeting rooms as well as lodging options ranging from traditional hotel rooms to small individual “casitas”. The grounds will incorporate a small stable and corral, sweat lodge and bonfire area, outdoor amphitheater, meditation areas with seating and special gardens, and walking paths which will connect to extensive trail systems.

TOGETHER WE CAN HELP VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

We have made amazing strides to establish the village of Angel Fire as the top veteran-friendly small community in America. The success of its innovative, family-oriented PTSD programs and the plan to deliver more programs over 2012 continues to move the NVWHC and Angel Fire toward its goals of serving veteran couples in the coming year. Complemented by the vision to build the Center, we are ready to share these accomplishments with the nation and to solicit funding and support to bring this bold plan to fruition.

The National Veterans Wellness & Healing Center plans to raise $500,000 to continue running its Veterans Wellness Retreats next year and $5 million to build the Center.
THE NEW CENTER WILL ALLOW US TO:

- Host 52 Veterans Wellness Retreats annually
- Serve 780 veterans and their families annually
- Bring 50–75 new full-time, year-round jobs to Angel Fire
- Create new programs, services and partnerships with local and national organizations
- Create diverse and sustaining revenue generation for the organization and the community
- Develop partnerships with universities for pilot programs and training
- Expand to not only treating veterans, but to also treat first responders including EMT’s, police officers, and fire fighters, as well as journalists and reporters, who have PTSD and traumatic brain injuries.

We are committed to remaining viable over the long term—to being here for those veterans and their families who need support. The NVWHC is headed by a Board of Directors that includes military combat veterans with over 50 years of military service, Village officials, and local business owners. Furthermore, it has unprecedented support from the community of Angel Fire creating a mutually benefiting relationship between the two.

From the beginning, individuals, corporations, businesses, and foundation partners have generously supported the National Veterans Wellness & Healing Center, including the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services, which provided $350,000 to launch the program. As we work to help heal more veterans and their families throughout the country, you can be a part of this remarkable journey.

Just recently, nine acres of land very close to the Carson National Forest was selected as a potential site for the National Veterans Wellness and Healing Center. At this time there is a very good chance that this land will be donated prior to the end of 2011. Once the land is deeded, we are prepared to move forward with infrastructure planning and architectural drawings during the winter of 2011/2012. 2012 will add more infrastructure and roadways to and from the site as retreats continue in the community. With continued generosity, we plan on beginning the actual foundation in the spring of 2013.

Your contribution to the National Veterans Wellness & Healing Center and its capital campaign for a new campus will allow us to heal veteran and military families today, tomorrow and in the future not just in New Mexico but across the country!

[3] www.woundedwarriorproject.org/content/view/1175/