



Embrace
A Vet

REVEILLE

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HEALING & WELLNESS RETREATS: WHAT? WHY?

Funny questions? Not really. Embrace A Vet volunteers often are asked these questions. **WHAT** is it that makes EAV retreats for veterans and caregivers unique? **WHY** would a veteran and spouse, significant other, family member or friend want to attend a free 5-day residential retreat in a quiet, pristine location to eat delicious food, participate in relaxing and potentially healing activities, meet other veterans and caregivers who have had similar experiences, and share concerns and stories that people who have not served in the military do not fully understand? Who would want to take that risk? So far, 56 veterans have done so.

The shocking statistic that, in the United States, 22 veterans per day completed suicide was the impetus for the development of the EAV retreats. Joy Johnson, founder and Executive Director of Embrace A Vet, determined to **DO** something. She formed a Wellness Team, consisting of a naturopathic physician, a registered nurse, a team leader from a Maine Vet Center, a retreat coordinator who had previously worked with veterans diagnosed with posttraumatic stress (PTS) and/or traumatic brain injury (TBI), and a corporate trainer from a regional health care organization. Through contacts and research, the team learned of an alternative therapy, Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) based on the ancient Eastern practice of using the body's energy meridians to promote healing. EFT can minimize or eliminate many of the symptoms associated with PTS which often manifest as anxiety, stress, hypervigilance, depression, sleep disturbances, substance abuse, isolation, anger management issues, and other emotionally charged behaviors.

Over time, EAV retreats have evolved into an experiential model where veterans and caregivers attend hands-on learning seminars using theories of energy psychology as a basis for healing, balanced with individual sessions of massage therapy, Thai body

work, Ayurveda, acupuncture, yoga and/or various recreational activities during the day and into the evening. Caregivers participate in the classes equally, and benefit from two sessions of wellness coaching, the basis for a bonding process of ongoing post-retreat support. Additionally, each veteran/caregiver pair meets daily with a wellness coach to assure reasonable levels of comfort.

The **WHY** of Embrace A Vet retreats is easier to explain. Other than pharmacological interventions and traditional therapy techniques, there has been little in the standard care package for returning veterans with posttraumatic stress and/or traumatic brain injury. However, energy psychology is beginning to appear in some treatment plans, and some Maine clinicians use EFT in their practices.

We in EAV believe that we are making a difference for Maine veterans and their caregivers through the combination of a healthy, healing environment, together with complementary therapies, buddy-to-buddy contact, learned self-care techniques, and on-going support. **WHY** EAV retreats? Because we care and because we know these retreats can help.

In order to assess the impact of our retreats, EAV administered the standard PTSD Checklist to 31 veterans

between 2013 and 2015 in order to monitor veterans' post traumatic symptoms from retreat entry to exit and again at a reunion approximately six weeks later. Analysis of this data suggests that 74% of these veterans maintained clinically meaningful improvement. Recently we added new tools for both veterans and caregivers that allow us to monitor negative emotions (e.g., anxious, isolated, hopeless) and positive emotions (e.g., happy, supported, hopeful) from retreat entry through retreat reunion. We also added a program evaluation designed to identify achievement of retreat goals. Results to date suggest that negative emotional states decreased and positive emotional states increased from retreat entry to retreat exit. Responses from both groups include, "I feel I have purpose in life." And "I feel able to learn from my experiences." Additionally, veterans had a high rating for "I am open to seeking assistance with posttraumatic stress injury challenges." Currently we are looking to extend monitoring beyond the reunion in order to determine how well the results are sustained over time. We feel optimistic and view results-to-date as a testament to the hard work of the retreat attendees and the dedication of our staff.

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PAWS for PEACE and K9s on the FRONT LINE

In order to improve EAV's ability through Paws for Peace to provide service dogs without cost to Maine veterans living with the symptoms of post traumatic stress, we have partnered with two other organizations to form **K9s on The Front Line**. The Coastal Humane Society, Brunswick, has been our principal source of carefully selected shelter dogs suited for service, and North Edge K9 in Gorham has provided joint training of the veterans and their animals by certified law enforcement K9 handlers and trainers.

It is estimated that PTS affects one in five combat veterans, preventing many of them from leading successful civilian lives. A specially trained service dog literally can change the veteran's life. These dogs can be trained to perform specific tasks to intercept paranoia and flashbacks, interrupt repetitive or injurious behavior, blunt nightmares, retrieve objects and calm in stressful situations. Moreover, these service dogs act as a social buffer between the veteran and the general public, thus facilitating a more secure functioning

of the individual. Simultaneously, the lives of dogs that would otherwise be euthanized are saved and given purpose.

A prospective service dog is evaluated based on temperament, emotional intelligence, soundness, obedience and sociability before being paired with a veteran who also has been screened. During their intense 16-week group training curriculum, the team will build a lasting bond and mutually beneficial relationship. The group setting also offers a positive environment that can .

kick-start the healing process. The commitment is to create a "family" of all veterans who receive service dogs. The trainers will be available to all our veterans for any follow-up the veteran may feel is needed, and the veterans are encouraged to help sustain the program through volunteer work.



Two happy veterans & new friends.



Post Office Box 516
Topsham, ME 04086-0516
www.embraceavet.org

CALENDAR

Winter Retreat
February 18-22, 2016



Camp Kieve, Nobleboro

FMI about future retreats, please visit embraceavet.org and click on "programs" & "retreats"

We're Jumping for Joy!

It was a Big Night Out for Embrace A Vet. On January 15, 2016 the Southern Mid-coast Maine Chamber presented their annual Joshua L. Chamberlain Award to EAV founder, Joy Johnson. The award, first given in 1976, was created to "recognize those individuals in our area, who through their outstanding dedication and service toward the best possible military-community relationship within this area, deserved to be singled out,

congratulated, and remembered." Joy was nominated by LCDR Paul Loveless, USN (Ret), who presented the award.



Save the Date!

5th Annual
Barn Party

Saturday
June 11, 2016



