

To Heal the Veteran's Spirit The Future Life Inc We Serve Programs' Vet Chats

Future Life Inc. founded the We Serve Programs in answer to the frequently asked question: *What types of programs offer support and healing to veterans and military family members after the Face2Face technology tool has mapped the Veteran's emotional landscape and both clinician and patient agree that he or she needs help in healing?* The answer to that question goes to the essential beliefs of the Future Life team members. While we are a software technology company, we are also dedicated to building community based on the belief in a power greater than ourselves. We assert that war is both archetypal and wounding of everyone it touches. It changes every part of us--body, mind, heart, soul, spirit, relationships and communities. We believe that invisible wounds of military service such as PTSD are not a failure of character but proof of warrior's mortality and humanity.

Vet Chats

The key concept of one of the We Serve Programs, Vet Chats, is that active duty military, veterans and military family members are brought together in a space such as a church or other community and/or sacred space. These venues permit a deeper reflection on the personal element of healing and remind all participants of the presence of spirit and order of a higher power. Ultimately, it is our hope that Future Life's We Serve Programs Vet Chats will grow into a nationwide military fellowship that gathers together to share common experiences in military service, and to help one another heal in body, mind and spirit.

The We Serve Vet Chats Leadership Training Program™ is a sustained program of education, resource materials, and interactive online and live events on local, regional and national levels that recruit and support those who wish to conduct Vet Chats in their communities across Ukraine.

What inspired the Vet Chat Program?

The Vet Chat Program was developed to combine a safe space, perhaps, but not necessarily in a faith-based institutions with the camaraderie of veteran's posts, lodges and auxiliaries by using principles and traditions similar to Step programs to sustain physical, mental and spiritual healing. From personal experiences and 12 years of research, interviews and writing about veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, it became clear to the Future Life team that the power of community and sharing experiences of war as a healing mechanism was, and still is, overlooked by both public and private entities alike. The high rates of substance abuse, suicide (still at 22 per day, over half being Vietnam Veterans) , homelessness, alienation, self-isolation,

unemployment, and relationship fragmentation were being addressed by therapies put forth by government agencies and Veterans Service Providers but the nation's military service community also would profit from a significant holistic healing program, on a national scale, to remedy the wounds of our military men and women returning from combat to their families and communities.

Future Life Inc's We Serve Vet Chats went through numerous permutations and beta testing at both the Washington, D.C. Mormon Temple Visitors' Center and the Church of the Immaculate Conception. It became clear that Vet Chats should be specifically located in safe and, if appropriate sacred spaces, so that participants and their discussions were infused with a sense of dignity, credibility, spirit and trust. Initial reactions to the Vet Chats were extremely positive. Groups were intimate and forthcoming, engaging in lively and thoughtful discussions about experiences in military service, both on deployment and on the home front. After successfully testing Vet Chat programs in 2014, during 2015 and 2016, Future Life's We Serve Program facilitators began a regularly scheduled Vet Chat program at 6:00 PM on the fourth Sunday of every month at the Washington, DC Temple Visitors' Center.

Why are Vet Chats important to returning veterans?

It is critical that Vet Chats provide opportunities veterans to share personal stories and listen to others in face-to-face personal environments. In today's highly-fragmented, impersonal and technically fast-paced society, where social media takes precedence over human contact, our nation's veterans are increasingly isolated and alienated. The men and women who serve in the military still represent only a small percentage of our nation's population. Their invisible war wounds (which can be as real as visible wounds and often more debilitating) are neglected and ignored. Veterans commit suicide every day, not to mention their high rates of substance abuse, domestic violence, homelessness, mental health issues such as PTSD and lack of employment in their civilian communities.

Where do Today's Veterans Gather?

Veterans have always banded together and formed organizations to support, educate and serve veterans and their families. In generations past, it was not uncommon to find these outposts in churches and other venues across the nation and the unspoken welcome was palatable. But today these places have become less-effective in reaching out to younger veterans. Vet Chats will restore the bonding and camaraderie between fellow soldiers that comes from sitting at a common table and sharing stories along with the feeling of support from their squadron or platoon. The therapeutic benefits inherent in these types of gatherings which will include military family members will again be on offer to our youngest generation of warriors.

How do Vet Chats align with technology?

In this age of technology, our youngest veterans and most family members communicate via social media (Facebook and Twitter) on devices such as smart phones, email, texting and Skype. While these technologies have changed our world and the way we communicate with each other, they have also depersonalized it. There are fewer and fewer opportunities for veterans to talk to one another face-to-face and share their experiences through fellowship on a personal and intimate basis. Without recourse to the traditional nurturing of warriors when they return from battle, the spiritual wounds of war cannot heal. War cracks the lives of everyone, unmask the most extreme emotions, fuels the deepest existential questions and then leaves literally millions of veterans isolated and alone without the bonds of love and loyalty they knew while serving. Their return home becomes the most difficult part of the journey. The same inherently impersonal technology that enables today's veterans to instantly interact and communicate with the world creates both the need and demand for the Vet Chats Program.

The use and reliance on technology has robbed younger generations of the strong and warm God-designed interaction crucial to sustainment of personal well-being. The greater the reliance on technology, the greater the veteran becomes isolated from the rest of the world. However, technology can be used to break through that isolation. When intimate trust or contact ceases to exist between the family and the active duty member or veteran, We Serve can bridge the connection through secure virtual messaging among veterans -- opening the door to the path of healing. The We Serve Programs Vet Chats training series equips veterans and others to deliver a program of support. After completing the We Serve Programs' Vet Chats training online or in classrooms graduates are assigned to the military and veteran communities and can review the entire Vet Chats training program virtually.

What is Military Culture and how does it change a person?

The military has a fundamental emotional, physical and even spiritual effect on those who serve. Military training is designed to transform civilians into soldiers—men and women whose purpose is to defend our way of life by taking others' lives and giving up their own when that sacrifice is required for the United States. The We Serve Vet Chats Training Program™ includes sections on Recruitment, Basic Training, Advanced Training and Deployment to War in order to understand and reflect on the purpose of military culture in more detail. We stress that while the physical wounds of those returned from combat may be apparent, there are also invisible wounds in the minds, hearts and souls of veterans, whether or not they participated in direct combat operations. The application of technology to warfare means that today's soldiers participate in war even while "behind the wire". War, particularly in the case of repeated deployments as seen by our National Guard and Reserve forces over the past decade and a half

can yield wounds that are left unseen and untreated upon separation. This remains a startling truth even as we reduce the number of physical casualties and deaths. While it takes years of training to transform a civilian to a soldier, troops generally receive only a few days' worth of transition skills training as they leave military service. Whether at the end of a decades-long career or a couple of years' commitment, these precious few days are often not enough to even begin to address real problems.

Why do so many veterans yearn for the fellowship of other veterans over civilian relationships?

Finally, there is a common bond that grows from serving with others in battle. Soldiers would say that they would die to protect their buddies in battle. The Warrior Ethos: "I will never leave a fallen comrade," is ingrained on every service man and woman that has served in the military. The total dependency on others to stay alive becomes in itself, a way of life. Once the platoon, squadron or team is disbanded, individual soldiers report feeling lost and "at sea." The Vet Chats forum replicates the military bonding experience as service members return again and again to listen to others and share their own stories.

A Vet Chat is a fellowship of military service men and women who share their experiences, strength and hope with each other in order to solve or help them deal with their common problems while helping others to recover from feelings of hurt, isolation, loss, survivors guilt, and reprogramming to such an extent that he / she no longer feels part of their former home environment.

The only requirement to attend a Vet Chat is a desire to listen, be understood, not be alone, and to find peace. There are no dues or fees to attend. Active duty, veterans and military family members are always welcome. It has been our experience that in some cases active duty military and veteran attendees can experience difficulty expressing themselves completely when family members are present. For that reason, while we welcome family members and recognize their need for spiritual healing, the focus of the Vet Chat remains on the current and past service members.

The We Serve Programs' Vet Chats has the mission of healing the bruised soul. All veteran members are themselves recovering from a lack of peace due to military service and experiences at war – the causes being many and different.

Attendees are as diverse in education, career path, experience, age, gender, ethnicity and socio economic position as the nation itself. Veterans do not have to sign up or submit an application to be an attendee. Veterans, active duty and military family members simply choose to attend a Vet Chat. Veterans can come and go as they please. They work best through the offer of help and suggestion only. Vet Chats can be as small as two people or as large as 50 or more. The

number of attendees is not relevant in and of itself so long as attendees find a safe and comforting harbor and inspiration to heal in body, mind and spirit.

Vet Chats work as veterans share their stories of what they used to be like, what happened, and what they are like now. Vet Chats usually take place in the evenings and are generally one to two hours in length. There is always an opening and closing prayer.

The We Serve Programs' Vet Chats is based on a foundation of confidentiality. There are no audio recordings or filming at any gatherings. Participants are requested to turn off their cell phones and leave them in a secured lock box. Use of first names only with no reference to ranks or positions in the military keeps everyone on the same personal frame of reference. Veterans can trust that no story or experience will ever be published or repeated outside of the gathering.

The atmosphere of confidentiality helps build trust and security. Service members, veterans and members of the military family who attend must feel safe sharing their stories with others as they heal and connect with brothers- and sisters-at-arms who can understand their experiences. The bonding and loyalty that comes with sharing experiences enables and encourages people to return as relationships with each other and Spirit evolve and strengthen.