



HEARTS OF VALOR

Vital peer-to-peer support for family caregivers of our wounded warriors.

Since the 9/11 terror attacks, more than two million Americans have served in overseas combat zones. Tens of thousands have returned home with severe physical injuries and devastating psychological wounds, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI).

Their spouses and other family and non-family caregivers face enormous challenges as they care for their loved ones 24/7 and cope with personality changes, anger flare-ups, frustrations, and compassion fatigue. The stress can be exhausting and overwhelming.



The Meadows Family

Melissa Meadows knows the strains of being an injured veteran's primary caregiver, especially difficult when the patient is a loved one. Her husband, Jonathan, suffered traumatic brain injury while serving in Afghanistan when a roadside bomb hit his convoy.

Melissa left Connecticut to join Jonathan in the warrior transition unit at Fort Belvoir, Va., where they remained for a year. She lost her pediatric nursing job, and felt anxious about not being there for her grown kids. Their house fell into disrepair.

"I spent that first year scared to death," Melissa remembers. "I lost everything, even my husband, because the man I had with me was not my husband. I mean, physically he was, but everything else was not him."

The Army medically retired Jonathan in 2015. They moved into an Operation Homefront Village in Gaithersburg, Md., which provides rent-free transitional housing, and later into a mortgage-free home in Hampstead, Md., through Operation Homefront's Homes on the Homefront program. One son and their 5-year-old grandson live with them. "It was divine intervention," Melissa said.

"If you go down, you can't help anyone. Caregiver self-care is so important."

While at the Village, Melissa led Operation Homefront's Hearts of Valor program, a close-knit wounded warriors' caregivers' support group. Melissa's favorite advice is to put the "oxygen mask" on yourself first. "If you go down, you can't help anyone. Caregiver self-care is so important."

AT A GLANCE...

Across the United States, Hearts of Valor provides crucial support for the family and non-family caregivers of service members severely injured and traumatized on the frontlines in Iraq and Afghanistan:

- In-person peer support groups at more than 60 locations provide a strong foundation of support for the daily challenges of caregiving and connect caregivers to others who "have walked in their shoes."
- Annual all-expenses-paid caregiver retreats offer respite, expert coaching, and assistance in developing caregiver skills.
- Confidential, one-on-one support in-person, online, and by phone from mental health professionals with experience in military trauma provides guidance and encouragement.
- Up-to-date resources for caregivers—24/7 online and via our monthly newsletter—keep caregivers in the loop.

Through periodic off-site retreats, caregivers are able to enhance their skills, get much-needed respite, build peer connections, and get the hope they need to continue facing the daily challenges of caregiving. Since the program began, 3,270 caregivers have joined Hearts of Valor.

Hearts of Valor helps family caregivers overcome challenges such as:

- Stress and anxiety
- PTSD/TBI behaviors
- Compassion fatigue/burn-out
- Relationship and intimacy issues



Number of caregivers in the program since 2011



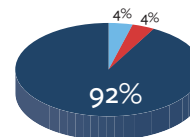
Number of caregivers added in 2016

WITH YOUR SUPPORT

Through the support of USAA, Genentech Foundation, La Quinta Inns & Suites and other partners and donors, Operation Homefront helps dedicated family members care for their loved ones—our nation's wounded war heroes—and shows them they are not alone. The need is great. Find out how you can help us serve more at www.heartsofvalor.org.

WHO WE ARE

Operation Homefront builds strong, stable, and secure military families so they can thrive in the communities they have worked so hard to protect.



Expenses

- Program Services
- Fundraising
- Management and General