

Everyday Faces: Article from Teller County Life, Pikes Peak Courier Review, Wednesday, March 17, 2010

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Everyday Faces

A warrior for warriors

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If there is anything this country learned from Vietnam it should be how to take better care of the men and women who served. At least that is the hope of Clinical Social Worker Donna Finicle. In 2007 Finicle established Welcome Home Warrior to provide mental health services to soldiers and their families in Teller County.

Recently recognized as Social Worker of the Year by the National Association of Social Workers, Finicle says it was her attention to a unique group of people that won her the award.

"Welcome Home Warrior is filling a gap of services for soldiers coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan. They weren't reaching enough families," Finicle said.

To reach families, Finicle began hosting retreats. March 26-28 Welcome Home Warrior will host its fifth weekend getaway for military families. Families who attend get a free weekend at Golden Bell Camp with campfire sing-alongs, a spa afternoon and sports like tubing and swimming, but more than anything they get quality time together, while learning ways to handle dealing with the stress of returning from a war zone.

"We work therapeutic things into the weekend like discussion groups for parents and teens and play therapy time for little kids. But every-

thing is optional. Most of these guys are pretty macho and have been trained to handle it on their own. They don't want therapy," Finicle said.

However, even the toughest soldiers start looking for help when symptoms like uncontrolled anger, inability to sleep, nightmares, flashbacks, anxiety, or other anti-social behaviors intrude into their lives.

"Unfortunately most soldiers don't come for a year or two after they return. They wait until everything is crumbling, their job, their marriage. The family needs support dealing with them. And the soldiers need their families to stay with them," she said.

Finicle's number one goal in working with military families is to help them open up lines of communication. She believes the first step toward healing is to be able to talk about situations while deployed and the symptoms experienced at home.

"Guys with multiple deployments can come back numbed out. They are not themselves. They spend so long in combat ready mode and that is hard to turn off," Finicle said. "It can be so disheartening for women when they feel they've lost the person they married."

Returning to who they once were is the reason for the Spa afternoon at the Welcome Home Warrior Retreats. Finicle treats the families to massages and reiki, a



Donna Finicle was recently recognized as Social Worker of the Year by the National Association of Social Workers for founding Welcome Home Warrior as a way to help this generation of soldiers deal with trauma from living in a war zone. Her fifth military family retreat will be held March 26-28. Photo by Kate Kettler

Japanese technique for stress reduction. She also teaches relaxation training such as breathing techniques and progressive relaxation of muscles.

"If a soldier has a flashback, his adrenaline is immediately triggered just like in combat. I call it Slow Down Breathing where we concentrate on slowing breathing, slowing

the heartbeat, just slowing it all down. Then he can think rationally," she said.

Finicle has both personal and professional motivation to work with returning soldiers. When her brother returned as a soldier in Vietnam, he was so lost it took Finicle 10 years to find him.

"His is the story of many Vietnam vets," she said. "He

lived as a homeless man for 10 years. He was damaged by the war and then treated terribly when he returned."

While Finicle is eager to use her 24 years of experience with the Department of Veteran Affairs in Colorado Springs, she is also realistic that it takes time to build trust with soldiers.

"I won my wings back in

the VA," Finicle said. "The VA doesn't know me yet, but I'm willing to go through the gauntlet to win their trust. Their stories are not going to make me faint."

To attend a Military Family Retreat or receive services from Welcome Home Warrior call 687-1000 or visit www.whwarrior.org.