

# *From the Heart...*

*...Lifeskills for Today's Family*  
By Sharon L. Benedict MS



## ***Caring for Children of Wounded Warriors, part 1***

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Sept 5, 2014)

With September focused on the lifeskill, *Childcare*, let's spend some invaluable moments learning about several organizations whose missions are to reach out to the families of our armed service members who need help in so many ways. For those of us who have never experienced what these service members have, we just simply take for granted our ability to get up in the morning, take a shower, get dressed, feed the kids, drive them to school, buy groceries, go for a walk or on a vacation, or even go to work to pay the bills.

For most of us, we have all heard of the organization, Wounded Warrior, who do a fantastic job helping wounded, ill, or injured service members find support for themselves and their families. The Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) is dedicated to supporting warriors as well as their families (<http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/programs.aspx>), and to ensure these warriors are never forgotten.

WWP focuses on four essential areas of help and healing – *the Mind, the Body, Economic Empowerment, and Engagement*. Among their program offerings, WWP “. . . envision a generation of Wounded Warriors well-adjusted in mind, receiving support to overcome the challenges of readjustment. Through interactive programs, outdoor

rehabilitative retreats, peer support, and professional services, warriors are given the tools to maintain healthy, meaningful relationships with family and friends, and pursue life goals without the barriers or stigmas associated with mental health issues.” Among the programs for the Mind, such offerings include Combat Stress Recovery Program, Project Odyssey, Restore Warriors, Long-term Support Initiatives.

Wounded Warrior Project has committed \$30 million to help 250 of their most severely injured warriors with lifetime support through two initiatives — the Independence Program And The Long-Term Support Trust. Long-Term Support Trust. This long-term support offers lifeskills training, home care, transportation, respite care, education and training, residential program to the severely wounded who, upon the loss of their caregiver, is at risk for institutionalization. “The goal is to empower each warrior to live independently as possible, with the highest quality of life and the finest, most compassionate care. These offerings directly impact and support the wounded warrior’s family and care of their children.

WWP mission for the Body is to “. . .envision a generation of Wounded Warriors well-adjusted in body, receiving the care they need to maximize rehabilitation and live active and healthy lives. Through adaptive sports, health, nutrition, and recreational activities, WWP helps warriors achieve independence and pursue an excellent quality of life

The WWP’s Economic Empowerment mission is to “. . . envision a generation of Wounded Warriors who are economically empowered. They are not unemployed or underemployed, and have opportunities to pursue a meaningful career or own their own business. WWP offers higher education programs, information technology training, and

employment assistance services to encourage economic empowerment for warriors to provide long-term financial stability for themselves and their families.”

WWP’s fourth focus is Engagement. “To ensure injured service members stay connected with one another, WWP has both a peer mentoring and robust Alumni program. Additionally, the Policy & Government affairs program ensures injured warriors and their families have a voice in local and national advocacy and legislative issues. WWP also offers a Benefits Service program that provides you with access to government benefits and details on all of our programs and community resources.

With Engagement, families will stay connected via communication, events, networking, along with peer support, via mentoring, to develop one-to-one friendships with fellow warriors who are further along in the recovery process. Engagement also provides family support for their children. Additional offerings include help with policy & government affairs, international support, and others.

So far this year from January through March 2014, 2865 warriors were referred to WWP programs, 398 warriors and family members served in project odyssey, 320 warriors placed in jobs, and 156 warriors participated in soldier ride. You are encouraged to support this life-sustaining organization on behalf of our warriors and families.

In the next article, we will learn more about another wounded warrior organization supporting families of our heroes.

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comments and can be contacted at [seekreachachieve@gvtc.com](mailto:seekreachachieve@gvtc.com). Visit her website at [www.celebratingyourjourney.com](http://www.celebratingyourjourney.com).

# *From the Heart...*

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## ***Caring for Children of Wounded Warriors, part 2***

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Sept 12, 2014)

With September focused on the lifeskill, *Childcare*, I decided to spend some invaluable moments learning about several organizations whose missions are to reach out to the families of our armed service members who need help in so many ways. For those of us who have never experienced what these service members have, we just simply take for granted our ability to get up in the morning, take a shower, get dressed, feed the kids, drive them to school, buy groceries, go for a walk or on a vacation, or even go to work to pay the bills.

The first organization covered in part one was Wounded Warrior Project ([www.woundedwarriorproject.org](http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org)). For most of us, we have heard and even supported this organization that does a great job for the past ten years helping service members who are wounded, ill, or injured, find support for their families.

Another organization is the Wounded Warriors Family Support (WWFS, <http://www.woundedwarriorsfamilysupport.org/>). Their mission is “. . . to provide support to the families of those who have been wounded, injured or killed during combat operations. The families of our casualties suffer in many ways: some financially, some psychologically.”

The demands when caring for a wounded veteran are daunting to say the least, both physically, psychologically and financially. Most of the time those caregivers are spouses and family members who also have a fulltime job, manage the bills, and take care of their children. Caregivers also often neglect their own health and wellbeing in order to provide much needed care to those they love.

WWFS has a Respite Program that provides intermittent relief with the everyday caring responsibilities for wounded warriors and their families. These supplemental services are nationwide to the caregivers and families of wounded war veterans. The program “. . . aims to ensure that family members who were thrust into the role of caregivers are provided with the support they need to keep their families intact while keeping themselves healthy.”

Examples of respite services include secondary caregiver assistance, respite aid for remote areas, short-term temporary relief in the form of child care and other services, and assistance with enrolling in the Department of Veterans Affairs Caregiver Support Services and other agencies offering resources and support.

Wounded Warriors Family Support's Family Programs provide retreats to wounded veterans and their families free of charge. The family retreats are a chance for wounded veterans to heal and reconnect with their loved ones in a peaceful, non-stress environment.

WWFS offers family retreats that “. . . give wounded veterans and their families a break from the pressures of everyday life to take time to become stronger as individuals and families.” These retreats help wounded veterans “. . . to decompress and share in

positive experiences with their spouses and children, strengthening the bonds of their families and making lasting memories.”

One example of a retreat experience is the Bahama Bay Resort in Florida. WWFS owns four fully furnished condominiums at this resort that families of wounded or injured veterans, widows, and children of our fallen heroes can qualify for. Preference will go to those with children and the greatest financial need. All condominiums are ADA compliant. Units are minutes from Universal Orlando Resort, in Orlando Florida. Seven nights are offered free of charge with passes to Universal Orlando Resort, Sea World Orlando, and Wet ‘n Wild Orlando for immediate family members. Although this service is free of charge, each family must cover their airfare, ground transportation and incidentals. Yet, what a wonderful life and family affirming service offered to our heroes and their families.

Other retreats include Victorian Resort at Galveston, Texas; Shenandoah National Park; Yellowstone Snow Lodge; and Maswik Lodge near the rim of the Grand Canyon inside the park. WWFS recommends other organizations that also provide much needed services to wounded warriors and their families:

Armed Forces YMCA of the USA (<http://www.asymca.org/>)

Fisher House Foundation (<http://www.fisherhouse.org/>)

The Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund (<http://www.fallenheroesfund.org/>)

Operation Homefront (<http://www.operationhomefront.net/>)

National Military Family Association (<http://www.militaryfamily.org/>)

In the next article, we will learn about a foundation established in 2010 to specifically fund grants for wounded warrior families. These grants help pay for the many expenses

left in the wake of the devastating effects and consequences of war, when these families are in great need of “. . . encouragement, hope, help, and financial integration.”

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## ***Caring for Children of Wounded Warriors, part 3***

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Sept 19, 2014)

During September the first organization covered was Wounded Warrior Project. For most of us, we have heard and even supported this organization that does a great job helping service members who are wounded, ill, or injured, find support for their families.

The second organization was the Wounded Warriors Family Support (WWFS). Their mission is “. . . to provide support to the families of those who have been wounded, injured or killed during combat operations. The families of our casualties suffer in many ways: some financially, some psychologically.” WWFS has a Respite Program that provides intermittent relief with the everyday caring responsibilities for wounded warriors and their families.

Respite services include secondary caregiver assistance, respite aid for remote areas, short-term temporary relief in the form of child care and other services, and assistance with enrolling in the Department of Veterans Affairs Caregiver Support Services and other agencies offering resources and support. They also provide retreats to wounded veterans and their families free of charge. The family retreats are a chance for wounded veterans to heal and reconnect with their loved ones in a peaceful, non-stress environment. Examples of retreats include Victorian Resort at Galveston, Texas;

Shenandoah National Park; Yellowstone Snow Lodge; and Maswik Lodge near the rim of the Grand Canyon inside the park.

The demands when caring for a wounded veteran are daunting to say the least, both physically, psychologically and financially. Most of the time those caregivers are spouses and family members who also have a fulltime job, manage the bills, and take care of their children. Caregivers also often neglect their own health and wellbeing in order to provide much needed care to those they love.

Another organization that supports our wounded warriors and their families is the Wounded Warrior Family Foundation (WWFF). Founded March, 2010 in Alabama, WWFF has established ties at many military bases in Alabama and across the nation. “This foundation has been successful with the emergency services divisions at major bases such as Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Ft. Rucker in Dothan, Ft. Benning, Georgia, Ft. Hood Texas, Army Corp of Engineers, Mobile, Warner Robbins, Georgia, Ft. Hood, Texas and many more.”

WWFF is a member of the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) of United Way and approved by the Lower Tennessee Valley, Chattanooga and North Alabama Sectors for 2012 as well as Atlanta, Columbus, GA. Mobile, Pensacola, Lower Mississippi, Houston, Killeen, Texas and adjacent Texas Sectors.

These grants help pay for the many expenses left in the wake of the devastating effects and consequences of war, when these families are in great need of “. . . encouragement, hope, help, and financial integration.” Services provided include “. . . prevention of bankruptcy, utilities, Christmas gifts for the kids, back packs for the kids, moving expenses, food and utilities, medical retirement supplements, mortgage

payments, car payments, food, spouses' surgery, electricity bill, insurance payment, student loan, family welfare, child's dental care, child's glasses, shots, work uniforms, child's school shoes and uniform, allergy shots, and many more along the same vein. These were necessities that the families could not afford due to drastic cuts in income."

WWFF has representative across many states, including Texas. The following regional representatives can be contacted to obtain more information about their offerings. Be sure to check at all three organizations to see how you can support our wounded warriors, their families and children.

**WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT, [www.woundedwarriorproject.org](http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org)**

*Houston Office (832) 536-3098*

*Executive Staff, [www.woundedwarriorproject.org/mission/executive-staff.aspx](http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/mission/executive-staff.aspx)*

**WOUNDED WARRIORS FAMILY SUPPORT, [www.woundedwarriorsfamilysupport.org](http://www.woundedwarriorsfamilysupport.org)**

*Main Office (402) 502-7557; 888-872-0114 (outside regular business hours)*

*Shawn Newman, Program Director, [shawn.newman@wwfs.org](mailto:shawn.newman@wwfs.org), (402) 932-7036,*

*(402) 598-9055 (cell)*

**WOUNDED WARRIOR FAMILY FOUNDATION, Regional Representatives,**

**[www.woundedwarriorfamilyfoundation.org](http://www.woundedwarriorfamilyfoundation.org)**

*Devin and Joy Marshall, Registered Representative, Ft. Hood, Killeen & surrounding CFC sectors, Texas. 116 E. 10th Ave. Belton, TX.76813; devintreymarshall@yahoo.com ; 254-449-6704*

*SFC Nevada Smith, PLT Sergeant, D CO, 1st BN, WTB; Ft Hood, Texas; registered representative for Ft. Hood, Texas nevada.smith@us.army.mil BB# 285-1970 (o) 553-7784*

*LaSonya Nolen*, 2609 Lakecrest Dr. Killeen, TX. 76549; 254-216-3408

*Cassandra Davis*, PO Box 19655, Austin, TX. 78706; ceerdavis@yahoo.com ;

512-585-2482

*Rachel and James Holbrook*, 11215 Ballard Peak, San Antonio, TX. 78254,

burdy8520@yahoo.com; 401-297-7063

*Rocky Sheffield*, 116 E. 10th Ave. Belton, TX. 76513; re: Devin Marshall; 254-

449-6704

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## **Your Child's First Words**

(published in Boerne Star, Friday, Sept 26, 2014)

The first words your baby utters are probably one of the more thoroughly enjoyable moments in a Mom and Dad's early months of being parents. Those first words just might be "Ma..ma. Da..da." But be prepared for other words, such as "duc...(for duck), ca...(for cat), ba...(for ball).

In those first few months your baby may grimace, cry, or squirm, communicating a range of emotions and physical needs . . . from hunger, fear, frustration, to stimulation overload. We parents hopefully listen and can interpret those different sounds. Infants and toddlers are keenly aware of your own routine mutterings. Baby will not only recognize Mommy and Daddy, laugh, squeal, and smile spontaneously, but may decide at some point to utter one of your expletives that leaks out within hearing distance. So, I suggest if you don't want baby to adopt it (or frankly anyone else), leave such language behind you.

When hearing your voice, baby may become quiet, smile, get excited, and move his or her arms and legs. I remember those moments as the sweetest times to play, cuddle, and just watch them discover their bodies and life around them. Their personalities begin to surface as they become more active and an alert member of the family. Babies blurt and blissfully babble on for hours!

So, enjoy every sound while you are central to their lives. They grow up so fast. Your tiny child is actively learning about touch, sights, sounds, feelings, and curiously random thoughts. Christopher P. Lucas, MD, director of the Early Childhood Service at the NYU Child Study Center and associate professor of child and adolescent psychiatry at the NYU School of Medicine advises that “What occurs during the first five years of life can have an enormous impact on not only how well the baby's brain develops at the moment, but how well that baby learns and grows throughout their lifetime.” [source: WebMD, Colette Bouchez, *How Your Newborn Grows: Infant Development, How to Raise a Smart Baby*].

Much of the advice given is basic . . . Trust your instincts, Add some love, Simple age-appropriate toys. Other tips from WebMD help you encourage your baby's brain development at every stage of growth with their age activity guide. Check out Bouchez article on tips for ages birth to five years old at <http://www.webmd.com/parenting/baby/infant-development-9/brain-development>.

Research reports are wonderful tools for helping us understand what most parents see in their children every day. Young children are innately curious; and as they reach toddler age, they love to explore, particularly in a safe, nurturing, and stimulating environment. They will understand what you are saying at a remarkable pace, if even they can't currently speak it.

When they begin to form their own unique sentences, they will even practice giving you instructions on how to play with their own toys! Enjoy being the student with them. Their young wisdom will surprise you when you allow them to safely stretch, explore, and build confidence on their own.

A young child's world is one of relationships—with parents and other caregivers. With a safe and nurturing environment, learning comes naturally. Children are then enthusiastic about learning. According to Kids Health, “the more interactive conversation and play a child is involved in, the more a child learns. Reading books, singing, playing word games, and simply talking to your child will increase his or her vocabulary while providing increased opportunities to develop listening skills.” Here are some tips offered to encourage your child's learning, reading, and communication skills:

- Help your child relate to books by selecting stories that mirror families like yours or people from your cultural or ethnic group.
- Keep books, magazines, and other reading material where your child is able to reach them without help.
- Help your child create his or her own "This Is Me" or "This Is Our Family" album with photographs or mementos.
- Talk with your child about books or TV programs and videos you watch together.
- Let your child see you reading and enjoying books.

Along with creating a safe physical and relational environment, early childhood healthcare/wellness is essential. Healthcare includes quality nutrition, exercise, enough rest, accident prevention, protection from environmental hazards, controlled substances, viruses, and chronic and severe stress.

Children are particularly vulnerable to the stress within families and the emotional state of caregivers. Interventions done early significantly determine the outcomes, both

in terms of the child's health and well being but also the cost savings—compared to trying to remedy the problems later.

Remember, then, to treasure every moment. Make the memories last by creatively recording all the magnificent things your child does. In addition, spend some time cruising through the resources listed at the end of the article for some great information and helpful parenthood tips.

In the meantime, don't miss one moment rolling on the floor with your young ones or playing together in the sandbox. Be a kid again yourself.

Resources:

Activities for Toddler Twins, <http://www.twinslist.org/toddler.htm>

Child Welfare Information Gateway, <http://www.childwelfare.gov>

Childcare.Gov, <http://www.childstats.gov/>

Focus on the Family, [www.family.org](http://www.family.org)

Kids Health, <http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/>

Program for Infant & Toddler Care, <http://www.pitc.org/>

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