

November 2011 SEMPERMAX TBI Meeting of the Minds  
After Action Report

Event Dates: November 18-20, 2011  
Location: Embassy Suites Dulles Airport, Herndon, VA

Participants: 13 TBI service members/veterans  
17 Caregivers  
9 Wounded Warrior Children

A Meeting of the Minds was held November 18-20, specifically focused on severe TBI families, in support of the SEMPERMAX mission to foster a sense of team among the wounded and reduce isolation and disenfranchisement from society. As in past Meetings of the Minds (Tampa - Summer 2010, Gettysburg - Fall 2010, Colorado Springs - Spring 2011) the format for the weekend was casual with a significant amount of built in socialization time, along with dinner briefs on resources, new insights, and shared lessons learned, as well as a local half day tour. The tour for this Meeting of the Minds was the National Marine Corps Museum, vocalized to have been appreciated by all service affiliations. Transportation was provided gratis by Quick Bus.



The pace, size, and scope of the current Meeting of the Minds model (under 50 participants) continues to prove successful, particularly for the TBI families. Participants cited that open communication allows caregivers and "TBI Guys" to make strong connections with others and to realize that they are not alone in their journey through recovery. The size and casual pace, with built in down time, permits rest

and effective focus without over stimulation during briefs. In general, families reported a sense of comfort, shared healing, and renewed hope stemming from their attendance. They left having forged bonds with an extended family.

This was SEMPERMAX's first Meeting of the Minds that specifically included children. The children seemed to enjoy being with peers of similar background and challenges and demonstrated an abundance of smiles in the activities and games provided them. An intrinsic value in their participation was found by all.

Moving forward, participants requested similar sized regional gatherings to provide options and allow for more attendees to a Meeting of the Minds venue, while keeping the numbers at specific sites at a level in which the TBI families could function well. A partnership with Colleges that have a hospitality or hotel program was suggested for logistical support. Participants suggested a resource expo where they could seek out information during down time and to accommodate those who could increase the pace of the event. Pulling from the Blind Veterans of America Model, participants expressed a willingness to pay their own expenses in order to attend future events and allow for newcomers to receive benefits of paid expenses. They were also eager to become peer mentors or "squad leaders" in future endeavors.



Information briefs included presentations: by Michael Zacchea on Entrepreneur Bootcamp for Veterans and suggested reading called Concussion Crisis; by Karyn George on Defense Veterans Brain Injury Centers (DVBIC), Brain Line.org, and the National Intrepid Center of Excellence (NICOE); by Jeff Zyburt on WIROC plans in Florida and biofeedback, which has potential for expanding and redirecting brain capacity; and by Scott

Mallory on Truckin 4 Troops' mission and service offerings. In addition, the TBI Caregiver Guide was introduced and copies provided to families.

Following the presentations, participants expressed a strong desire to visit the NICOE and a wish that they had access to such services. Participants indicated ongoing confusion about what the NICOE offers, who they help, and how one can be accepted. It was clarified that NICOE's focus is active duty service members with moderate TBIs.

Participants also expressed significant frustrations with the Med Board Process, the length of time it takes, and its complexity for the TBI population. Some thought was given to an advocate who could work directly with TBI patients to sift through the Med Board appointments and processes to ensure that all TBI sequelae are included and addressed. It is noted, however, that this triggered a discussion on the increasing frustration with the many levels and multitude of caseworkers from different agencies FRCs, RCCs, etc. who do not seem to have a strong level of understanding about TBI and communicate poorly or not at all. It is suggested that these case workers receive enhanced training on the needs, intricacies, and limitations of TBI survivors.

It was highly recommended that those affected by TBI continue to communicate when they leave the service and voice their concerns to

government officials to try to help focus government programs on objectives that truly meet the needs of TBI veterans. With this in mind, it is suggested that an invitation be extended to upper leadership in DOD, the Service Branches, and the VA. SEMPERMAX will extend those invitations to future Meeting of the Minds.

Great appreciation goes out to all the families, the volunteers and speakers who made the event a success and our board members and donors who make these programs possible.

One Team!