

# 2012

## Meeting of the Minds and Warrior Support Network Conference, Arlington, VA

July 9-14, 2012

Based on feedback from SEMPERMAX Support Fund's individual Meeting of the Minds and Warrior Support Network Conferences held in 2011, a combined conference was hosted in July that brought the two populations, Wounded, Ill, Injured and Support Organizations, together in one event. This created greater opportunities for direct contact between the two populations, leading to enhanced awareness of services and needs and fostering supportive connections.

As with all SEMPERMAX Conferences, all expenses for the families were paid by the foundation and generous sponsors, and four key areas of team healing were touched upon with the week's offerings: Socialization with peers for a sense of connection, networking and sharing of lessons learned for need resolution, education, and respite.



During the first two days, support organizations provided briefs on their mission and the programs and services they provide, culminating in an expo and dinner where Wounded/ Ill/Injured, their caregivers, and representatives from the support organizations could network and mingle. On Tuesday night a bit of respite was provided in the form of the beautiful and impressive sunset parade at the Iwo Jima. The deluge of rain mid way

through the parade did not deter the participants from enjoying themselves. During the last half of the week, Wounded, Ill, and Injured participants and their caregivers were provided with some down time, massages, workshops (Workshops included mobile technology, entrepreneurship and financial planning, and communication and intimacy after injury.), and time to connect with other families walking a mile in similar shoes. **For us at SEMPERMAX, watching the bonds form, the smiles shine through, and the caring and outreach between all the participants is too rewarding for words.** It is in these moments that we can see and palpably feel the healing impact togetherness brings, strengthening feelings of community and relieving feelings of isolation and at times desperation.

The words of the participants speak to how needed programs like this are needed. The biggest take away is always a yearning for MORE - more

gatherings such as this to connect, to share, to realize it's needn't be a lonely journey, to heal.

### **From the Caregivers:**

"Many wives have touched my heart and I hope to be in contact with them for years to come."

"We have learned so much by seeing so many like us."

"I appreciate the time to make friends with others who have the same feelings as I do."

"The West Coast needs to have this type of program."

### **From the Warriors:**

"This conference was amazing; I have met so many great people and made lasting relationships."

"Had one of the best experiences of my life. I was introduced to tools and knowledge that can help my friends and family's lives, as well as my own...If the experience could be mass produced and extended to those that need it, it can turn their lives around."

"Best thing I have ever done, gave me hope to a new life. Keep doing these."

### **Feedback through which we and others can improve conferences:**

- Offer more down/free time to give guys/warriors time to talk to each other.
- Offer two times for important workshops.
- 9-3:00 would be ideal start and end times.
- Later start times, better.
- Incorporate new hopes and dreams into shared dialogue.
- Have more breaks between classes.
- Greater wheelchair accessibility.
- Focus financial planning discussion more on saving money vs. investing - resources limited.
- Include more organizations looking to hire vets.
- Host entire event in hotel (larger meeting areas on property rather than meetings off-site).
- Provide more handouts.