

Quality of Life Foundation

WINTER 2012/2013

NEW NAME TO REFLECT THE FAMILIES WE SERVE

If you have visited our website recently, you may have noticed a slight change. We have renamed our *Wounded Warrior Family Care Program* to the *Wounded Veteran Family Care Program (WVFCP)*.

The reason for the change is simple: we want to build a stronger connection between our name and the families we serve; families of *veterans* who—as a result of a service-connected wound, injury, or illness—require daily, substantial caregiving at home. While the program name has changed, our steadfast commitment to meet the unmet quality of life needs of caregivers, minor children, and veterans remains the same.



Our logo reflects the name change from the Wounded Warrior Family Care Program to the Wounded Veteran Family Care Program.

Some of the needs we met for caregiving families in 2012.

- Individual & Family Counseling Services
- Dental services
- Family vacations
- Emergency Financial Assistance
- Tutoring for minor children
- Home repairs
- Auto repairs
- Moving services
- Professional organizing services
- Children's outdoor play area
- Lawn Care
- Plus many more... please help us do even more than this next year!!!

HOLIDAY BLESSING PROGRAM

Happy Holidays

The **Quality of Life Foundation** and **Azalea Charities**

partnered this

year to extend a "Holiday Blessing" to the minor children of families who are enrolled in the *Wounded Veteran Family Care Program*. Our goal is to relieve some of the family stress during this holiday season and help families bless their children.

There are currently 35 families enrolled in the *Wounded Veteran Family Care Program*. Each one lives with constant financial challenges; 22 have minor children in their households—representing a total of 65 children under the age of 18.

Thanks to our many generous donors and **Azalea Charities**, we were able to

send each family a Visa gift card with \$100 in value for each of their minor children. Sixty-five children will receive a little something extra through this "Holiday Blessing Program"—to let them know their families' service to country is greatly appreciated.

Due to the overwhelming and grateful responses from our families, we plan to continue this program next year.

Most of our financial donations are gifts from individuals in the amount of \$100 or less. Combined, these donations make a relevant and meaningful difference in the lives of caregiving families, during the holidays and all year long.

Please consider making a **tax deductible donation to the Quality of Life Foundation** for your end of year giving.

FOCUSING ON THE FAMILY FIRST, LEAVES MANY CAREGIVERS WITH UNMET NEEDS

We received a referral from a **Recovery Care Coordinator from the Air Force Wounded Warrior program** for the family of an Air National Guardsman. The Airman, as a result of his service to country, suffers from a terminal illness due to burn pit exposure in Iraq. The veteran has been in and out of hospitals since he returned from Iraq in 2005. His spouse has been by his side every step of the way.

Like most of the families in our program, they had several unmet needs. The most pressing issue was to find dental assistance for the spouse caregiver. She had not been to the dentist in four years due to lack of dental insurance. In addition, the family did not have enough funds to pay out of pocket. It was imperative that the caregiver get to the dentist due to a broken crown that was causing a lot of problems.

...offer them health, pride, dignity and self-esteem

The family was assigned a Family Support Coordinator (FSC), who reached out to a local dentist, **Heritage Dental Group** in St. Peters, Missouri, to request pro bono dental assistance to fix the broken crown. Without hesitation the receptionist said while she had to confirm with the doctor, she thought he would probably want to see her right away. We were overjoyed when the doctor said yes, and wanted to get the caregiver in as soon as possible.

Since the first appointment, **Heritage Dental Group** has done extensive pro bono dental work for the caregiver using the latest techniques and genuine care; utilizing state of the art equipment.



Caregiver learns to smile again after living four years with a broken crown.

This is **Heritage Dental Group's** way of thanking the caregiver, veteran and the family for their sacrifices and service to country. Like most of us, they are grateful for our country, our freedoms, and our way of life and welcomed an opportunity to give back to a military family.

The caregiver has one additional job now and that is to teach herself how to smile again, after spending years without smiling due to her broken crown.

The FSC is currently working to help the family with other unmet needs such as a family vacation and an outdoor pool for the veteran to maintain his required exercise and therapy regimen.

A Sad Truth

It is a sad truth that caregivers often negate their own personal needs as they struggle to balance the demands of caregiving, managing a household, and taking care of other family members. Many caregivers have come to us with unmet dental health needs for themselves, or their minor children.

Most of them have simply endured the pain and embarrassment as a result of unmet dental needs and "soldiered on" with life—just as their veteran did while fighting to ensure the freedoms we hold so dear.

You may ask your self, what can I do to help? If you know a dentist, share this newsletter story with him or her—ask if they might sign up to **help a veteran family in their area.**

You can also **make a financial donation to the Quality of Life Foundation** to help offset the costs associated with these needs.

Since these brave American veterans risked their lives for each of us, should we not contribute whatever we can to offer them and their family members health, pride, dignity and self-esteem?

A GLIMPSE INTO THE LIFE OF THE CAREGIVER OF A VETERAN WITH PTSD AND TBI

Family of a Vet contacted us to assist the wife and caregiver of an Army veteran. The caregiver had left her job to assume full-time care for her spouse who suffers from PTSD and TBI. As customary, we contacted their **VA Case Manager** to ensure collaboration and then enrolled the family into our program. The most immediate need was food and diapers for their daughter—thanks to our Unmet Needs Fund, we were able to respond swiftly. From helping the caregiver get to a retreat, to providing financial assistance for other needs, we have stayed by the side of this courageous caregiver.

She has graciously agreed to share the following to give our readers a glimpse into her life as she combats PTSD with her veteran spouse.

She writes, “In the beginning of our courtship, I knew he was *different*. Very nonchalantly he mentioned that he had PTSD.”

Isolation

The caregiver endured months of isolation and rejection as PTSD took a toll on her marital relationship and extended family relationships.

Separation

After 9 months of marriage they separated, while expecting a daughter. The caregiver went into preterm labor and was put on bed rest due to worry and anxiety. She writes, “He was slipping through my fingers, and there was nothing I could do to save him from the developing cycle of depression, impulsivity, anger, and eventually, substance abuse. I had no idea that PTSD was the puppeteer, and I gave up on him.”

Putting the pieces back together

The veteran reached out to his wife and said, “I can’t do this on my own. I can’t take care of myself.” At that point, the caregiver returned home to find the veteran living in deplorable conditions. She writes, “I returned home to find him living in the back yard, cooking over an open fire, using a bucket as a toilet. No power. No running water.” She decided to give the marriage another try and moved in despite her pregnancy—related health issues and began to try to put the pieces of their life back together again.

Daily life

The caregiver describes her daily life as she writes, “He only has about five *good days* each month. The other days consist of apathy, depression, isolation, or anger. I manage his medications (he recently graduated a 12 week inpatient PTSD treatment program). I prepare his meals, or he forgets to eat. I lay out his clothes, or he will walk outside in boxers, in the cold. I supervise him in public, due to flashbacks and anxiety attacks. I drive everywhere, I care for my child completely, I deal with HOURS of phone calls and paperwork each day



© Gadsden Times
Caregiver striving to hold family together—as veteran and family faces PTSD-related challenges.

just trying to increase my Army vet’s quality of life.”

“In the same aspect, I have forgotten about my self, and my needs, and desires. But that is EVERY spouse or caregiver of a disabled veteran. They served our country and protected us, so now we serve and protect them. The rewarding part is the rare smiles and happy moments—seeing his eyes twinkle from joy, even if it only occasionally happens, makes it worth it. Seeing how much he loves our daughter makes it worth it.”

Help in difficult times

“It has been hard for our family to make ends meet over the years. It’s a monthly battle. Being the type of people we are, we do not ask for help. It’s not in our nature. But, three organizations have reached out to us to keep our heads above water during emergent times. **Quality of Life Foundation** has saved our livelihood. Nothing is scarier than facing eviction, and not being able to feed your family. **Operation First Response** also assisted us quickly. The group support I receive from **Family Of A Vet** is what keeps me going most days. 200 other women who relate to me, understand and have lived in our situation, and never pass judgment. The road is long... LONG. The only way we all can thrive is with the selfless acts of compassion and kindness by organizations such as these. Without them, women lose their husbands, children lose their parents, families lose what little they have been clinging to all along.”

* Photograph used with permission from *The Gadsden Times*.

COLLABORATION WITH COMMUNITY TO MEET NEEDS OF VETERAN FAMILY

Many veteran caregiver families have limited resources to meet unexpected expenses. An essential component of our success is working with other non-profits, organizations and businesses to see if they have resources or services that will help families enrolled in our Wounded Veteran Family Care Program.

Collaboration is an essential component of our success.

Collaboration was our goal when we received an email directly from a spouse caregiver, who was looking for assistance for their family of eight, which includes six children under the age of 17. This is a family of an Army Veteran who suffers from debilitating PTSD, severe migraines, and hearing and vision loss. The family experienced significant financial setbacks when the veteran became unable to work and the



Family of an Army veteran enrolled in the WVFCP with 6 children under the age of 17 had several unmet needs.

spouse caregiver now assumes responsibility for her husband.

The family's most urgent need was financial assistance to help pay for their two daughter's dental work. We were able to help this family pay for the

dental work through our Unmet Needs Fund which is funded in part by **Azalea Charities**.

The family also needed a laptop computer. It was critical that they get a new computer as their oldest daughter had classes online for 6 hours a day and the spouse had enrolled to take online classes. The family also has three other school aged children that need to have access to a working computer. The family's FSC reached out to a local non-profit, who prefers to remain anonymous, for assistance and within a week—the family received a grant to purchase a new computer.

While the family currently has no outstanding unmet needs, QoLF is available to assist them at any time.



Dental needs... trending topic in this newsletter

We have highlighted two families in this newsletter that have dental needs.

We have noticed that this is common need in the caregiver population.

If you or someone you know can offer dental services or financial assistance to help meet dental needs through the Unmet Needs Fund, please **contact us** today.

Everyone Can Give Back

Every United States citizen benefits from the service and sacrifice of our nation's military families. Each of us can do something to give back.

The gift of time... The gift of cash... The gift of advocacy.