

## **The Grow It Forward Farm and Retreat (Proposed)**

*"We must neither forsake nor fail to honor those whose service has sustained our freedoms. Words are not enough. Intention insufficient. We each owe a debt of reciprocity. Where their service to us ends, ours to them must begin."*

### **The Retreat**

Proposed as a holistic approach pilot to

- serve the needs of Service Members and Veterans by providing a safe, natural, collaboratively supported environment to promote healing and health through a variety of non-clinical activities and therapeutic modalities that support rest, rejuvenation, re-centering, restoration and reconnection with the self and with others
- support of the goals of: improving force resiliency, readiness and total force fitness; promoting natural methods and techniques to support healing and reduce dependency on opioids and other chemical pain management agents; improving the transition success rate among Veterans; reducing the instances of Veteran suicide, and of addressing the issue of Veteran Homelessness.

### **The Grow It Forward Farm (GIF)**

Proposed as a supportive companion pilot program. Its purpose is to provide a safe, supported living environment in which homeless Veterans, and those at risk of homelessness, can participate in the programs offered by the retreat, work on-site, and acquire the education/skill training and experience necessary to pursue careers in agriculture and associated companion careers to build a path to home. The Retreat will be staffed and supported by the products produced on the farm wherever possible to further the goals, efficiency, and efficacy of both programs.

### **What makes the GIF different?**

- The collaborative service lifecycle approach to wellness as opposed to singular point in time initiatives.
- The variability of time that each service member can participate; and,
- Our acknowledgement and respect of the individuality of each service member, their service, and their transition experiences.

The premise of our programs is that the health of the body, mind and spirit are inextricable intertwined and although healing can begin through the development of self-management techniques and strategies, it can only be sustained through the commitment of individuals to maintain them. By providing a variety of options and the time to evaluate and practice them, participants at the Retreat will be empowered to determine which techniques and strategies can be the most effective and sustainable for them and will be encouraged to develop a personal success strategy to achieve stability, improved health, resiliency and quality of life both during Active Service and through their transition to civilian life.

The programs are designed to promote: physical health through therapeutic modalities that support natural pain reduction and physical healing, physical activity, rest and nutrition; mental health through education and exposure to self-management techniques and healthy coping strategies as well as through collaborative education and professional therapeutic support from the VA and local partners; and, spiritual health through self-reflection and connection with the self, others, and the divine as it is perceived and practiced by each individual<sup>1</sup>.

Through these enhancements, participants will be empowered and afforded the opportunity to identify strategies and tool that are personally effective and establish an individualized success plan thus increasing both personal ownership and the likelihood of the sustainability and stability of the outcomes.

*"None of the myriad organizations, foundations, or government offices can tackle every obstacle alone. Expanded public-private partnerships can reinvigorate local organizations, help navigate through a complex bureaucratic landscape, and synchronize efforts to affect real change."<sup>2</sup>*

We believe that real, sustainable change that has the power to grow exponentially is built on individual empowerment and success and that our approach will provide a more holistic solution that can affect real change in the service experience.

- Built on the tenets of honor, service, gratitude, and hope.
- Coupled with our commitment to partner and collaborate with other "shared mission" organizations; and,
- Empowering and enabling participants to design and forge their own paths forward to living their best lives.

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<sup>1</sup> It is the policy of The GIF Retreat to respect the beliefs and practices of all participants without promotion or judgement and to support the engagement of spiritual leaders and counselors as appropriate and requested by individual participants.

<sup>2</sup> The Office of Warrior and Family Support, Office of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

## Overview of the Programs:

The Retreat is divided into two primary focus areas:

- Inter deployment
- Transition

### The Inter-Deployment Program (IDP)

Designed for units and individuals to prepare for and restore from Military deployment, will focus on rest, nutrition, social engagement, personal/spiritual reflection and physical activity that will enable Service Members to both decompress and focus on personal preparation and restoration without the stressors, noise, and distractions of the world outside and will, in the case of unit participation, also improve cohesion and community capacity within the unit.

The IDP is being proposed to help support the Department of Defense objectives of Total Force Fitness to *enable individuals to sustain optimal well-being and demonstrate the resilience needed to carry out assigned missions*.<sup>3</sup>, and was partially inspired by the Third Location Deployment Program<sup>4</sup> currently utilized by the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand to provide a decompression program for those returning from theater deployment.

### The Extended Transition Program (ETP)

Designed for transitioning Service Members and Veterans who have been identified as at risk on their Military Transition Assistance Program (TAP) assessment due to lack of employment or established housing, and for those who lack a supportive social network, will additionally provide collaborated support to ensure that: 1) participants understand and are enrolled in all available and desired programs and benefits; 2) participants are connected to the appropriate professional and peer support networks; and, 3) will support participants in the development of a success strategy and S.M.A.R.T.<sup>5</sup> goal map to achieve their professional and personal goals and reduce the risks of negative/destructive behaviors and homelessness.

*“By building a process to help our Service members discover a post-military path to empowerment, we set them on the trail opposite from the desolation and despair that currently encumbers our Veteran community.”<sup>6</sup>*

The ETP is being proposed to help address the current transition challenges as identified by The Veterans Administration<sup>7</sup> in that 1) over two-thirds of today's Veterans reported difficulties adjusting to civilian life; 2) nearly 8 in 10 Service Members leave the Military without a job; and 3) more than 40 percent of Service Members leave the military without having identified permanent housing. Further expanded on by Veterans as difficulties in<sup>8</sup>: navigating VA programs, benefits, and services; addressing financial challenges; applying military-learned skills to civilian life; and, to mitigate challenges in existing initiatives *whose effectiveness may be limited for some due to brevity and by the ability of the individual participants to absorb, retain and process the information required to maximize success, especially among service members who have little or no exposure to independent life outside of the military*<sup>9</sup>.

### The Grow It Forward Farm (GIF)

The GIF is being proposed to help prevent and end Veteran Homelessness. Inspired by the adage: *Give a man a fish, he eats for a day. Teach a man to fish, he eats forever*. Although the rate of Veteran Homelessness has decreased over the last years, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Point In Time (PIT) study in 2018 identified and counted 37,878 homeless veterans living in the United States, a number that many feel is underreported. Of those counted,

- 61% of homeless veterans were housed in emergency shelters or transitional housing facilities
- Leaving 39% unsheltered, many living in places "not suitable for human habitation."

The top three reported causes of homelessness among unaccompanied individuals were:

- (1) lack of affordable housing
- (2) unemployment
- (3) poverty

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<sup>3</sup> Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction regarding Total Force Fitness:

[https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Library/Instructions/3405\\_01.pdf?ver=2016-02-05-175032-517](https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Library/Instructions/3405_01.pdf?ver=2016-02-05-175032-517)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/news/article.page?doc=third-location-decompression-getting-the-tools-and-time-to-relax-and-reintegrate/hrd91rn>

<sup>5</sup> S.M.A.R.T. Specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timebound

<sup>6</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Suicide Prevention, 2016

<sup>7</sup> The Military to Civilian Transition 2018 A Review of Historical, Current, and Future Trends

<sup>8</sup> Zoli, Maury, & Fay, 2015 from The Military to Civilian Transition 2018 A Review of Historical, Current, and Future Trends

<sup>9</sup> Zogas\_Veterans' Transitions\_CoW\_2.1.17

The challenge of emergency shelters, transitional housing and many other point-in-time solutions is that they address only one component of the problem. As stated in a Texas Veterans needs assessment published in March, 2016: "*Though providing a homeless Veteran with shelter is immensely important, it is difficult to end the cycle of homelessness without also accounting for factors such as employment and mental health.*"<sup>10</sup> Homeless Veterans may also have difficulty finding gainful employment due to the lack of transportation, clothing, resources and a permanent address, phone and access to internet services required. Further exacerbating the difficulty is that many are encumbered by a criminal record for larceny and criminal trespass simply for trying to survive.

Participants will live and work at the Grow it Forward Farm and Retreat while obtaining an education or the necessary skill training in agriculture and complementary trades/vocations as well as life skills such as personal finance and budgeting, meal planning and preparation, home maintenance, as well as resume building and interview skills to support their successful transition to a healthy and productive life, and with the hope that graduates would consider establishing mirror programs to support other homeless Veterans on their journey to home.

The Grow It Forward Farm is designed for homeless Veterans, and those at risk of homelessness, who were not dishonorably discharged from Military Service and who do not have a history of violence, an active addiction, or severe mental health factors that would impede their ability to live and work in the environment, but will include those with non-violent/drug related criminal records and those who were discharged from service with general or other than honorable circumstances. Participants must be able to physically perform the duties of one or more of the roles available (based on the variety of complementary tasks that accompany an agricultural and hospitality based business, there will be opportunity for those with physical disabilities that may preclude them from the labor intensive tasks associated with agricultural production). The program will be established primarily as an unpaid work experience program with an expectation of approximately 20 hours per week of work to allow for additional hours required for education or training and will provide room, board, transportation, clothing and personal care items. If the recipient receives subsistence assistance through coordination of benefits with other programs (e.g. G.I. Bill MAH, per diem grants, etc.) the GIF program may retain an amount up to the per-diem amount established by the VA for supportive housing to help offset program costs. Any excess received will be held in trust for the recipient to be received at departure from the program. Additionally, the program will seek to establish a fund that will award graduates a set amount to assist them with obtaining housing and transportation as they transition out of the program.

## Therapeutic Overview

### Earth Therapy

Simply stated, this is about spending time in nature to reconnect, re-center, rebalance and restore the body, mind, and soul. Studies show that spending time in nature, away from the noise, distraction and interference of the man-made world can ease pain, reduce anxiety, and stress and help restore internal balance. It is this belief in the healing power of nature that is the foundational premise.

### Journaling

Each participant will be given a personal journal with pen and ink to share their experiences with through purposeful writing. The use of pen or quill and ink is to encourage mindfulness and help the user to stay focused on the task at hand. Although participants will have a selection of options with some specific exercises from which to structure the journal, they will also have the freedom to explore outside of these parameters to find the style and format that be the most beneficial to their journey.

### Artistic expression

Artistic creation has often been used to translate the emotional into the physical and has been used in therapeutic activities as an emotional outlet and a form of self-expression. Participating in artistic activities has been shown to reduce anxiety, pain, and stress and can be used as a vehicle for relaxation and meditation.

*\*Select artistic creations may be auctioned or sold in support of retreat activities.*

### Aqua Therapy

Water is used to help release physical tension, relieve pain, reduce stress, and provide participants with an enhanced opportunity to focus by eliminating environmental noise.

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<sup>10</sup> Kidder, Schafer, Carter, March 2016, p. 33.

### Massage/Manual Therapy

The body and the mind are inextricably linked. The health of one directly and indirectly affects the health of the other. Therapeutic Massage Therapy is used to relieve not only physical pain, it has also been found to be beneficial in reducing stress and relieving the symptoms of anxiety and depression.

### Animal Therapy

Caring for and positive interaction with animals has been shown in studies to increase levels of the stress-reducing hormone oxytocin and decrease production of the stress hormone cortisol. The act of brushing or petting an animal can be both therapeutic and meditative. They can also provide us with valuable insight into our current emotional selves as they reflect and respond without judgement to our emotions and our energy.

### The Medicine Wheel

The Medicine Wheel has been used by many indigenous peoples and cultures to represent the circle of life, the seasons, the cardinal directions and is often used in ritual as a pathway to healing and personal growth. It is thought to represent the collective knowledge of the Universe and of all things within it.

### The Labyrinth

Representing the mysteries of life, death, and the universe. Journeying through the Labyrinth has been used for centuries as a vehicle of meditation, introspection, and contemplation and as a pilgrimage to the self.

### Peer Counseling and Mentorship

The Program will coordinate with other veterans' groups and organizations to establish mentoring relationships for participants as well as encourage voluntary group sharing activities for peer to peer support.

### Professional Counselling

The Program will seek to work with local universities as part of studies to track and refine methods to provide the highest efficacy possible. Additionally, the program will coordinate with the VA and local spiritual centers to bring specialized counsellors on site for veterans wishing to utilize their services during their stay.

### Agricultural Overview

*\* Note that specific products may be changed based on the size of the property acquired as well as land and market conditions*

### Potential Livestock / Animal Products:

- Pigs for meat and to assist with land cultivation and management
- Goats for milk, cheese, meat, integrated pest control, land management therapeutic interactions
- Sheep for wool and meat
- Chickens, ducks and Guinea fowl for eggs and meat and integrated pest control
- Horses for therapeutic purposes and as working partners to assist with land cultivation and management
- Dairy/beef cattle
- Honeybees for pollination and honey

All animals will be humanely raised and processed utilizing rotational grazing and supplemented as recommended for optimal health and development. No hormones or unnecessary additives will be utilized.

### Potential Plant Products:

- Mums and nursery stock flowers
- Bamboo and other landscape plants, trees, and shrubs
- Vegetables (patch and greenhouse)
- Herbs
- Hemp

### Other

- The GIF will be as earth friendly as possible and utilize alternative renewable energy (e.g. wind and solar) where practical; will seek to utilize composting toilets and SDD septic to support water conservation and irrigation, and will seek to compost, recycle and reuse as much as possible and practical beginning with construction and development and continuing through the life of the programs.