

# Returning Veterans Helping Other Returning Veterans

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American Public Health Association Session: Improving  
Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services To Returning  
Veterans from Iraq & Afghanistan and Their Families.  
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This is War to us



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This is what we see




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These are our dreams



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# Why them, not me?

# PEER SUPPORT

FOR IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN VETERANS

**It's Importance**

By: Jason Ridolfi

# Topics

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- History
- Definition of Peer Support
- The Importance
- New Roles in Today's Military
- Personal experiences
- Vets4Vets



# History

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## ✘ Alcoholics Anonymous, 1935

Operated under the principle that persons who had experienced and overcome alcoholism would be more effective in assisting others who were trying to do the same.

# History (cont'd)

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## ✘ No official results

It's Estimated that there are nearly 2,000,000 official AA members in 100,000 groups in 150 countries.\*

\* [www.alcoholics-anonymous.org](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org)

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My Point:

People Like it!

It Works!

# Definition

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- No generally accepted definition of peer support.
- One common element is that peer support is provided by, and for vets dealing with negative issues.
- Promotes a wellness model which considers clients to be normal, as opposed to a medical model which considers clients to be sick.\*

\*Carter, 2000

# The Importance

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- Trust
- 100% knowledge of the content
- Eliminates the feeling of being looked down upon

# The Importance (cont'd)

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- Feeling of not being alone (Fellowship)
- A tool to help reduce risk behaviors

# New Roles In Today's Military

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Today's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have aspects that we have not encountered in past conflicts. Because of this, there needs to be an understanding that today's veteran is different from previous veterans and require new standards of care.

# New Roles in Today's Military

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- No lines. Everyone is in danger





# New Roles in Today's Military (cont'd)

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- Many more injury survivors than in any past war.



# New Roles in Today's Military (cont'd)

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- Unprecedented use of National Guard and Reserves for overseas combat



# New Roles in Today's Military (cont'd)

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- Women in combat



# New Roles in Today's Military (cont'd)

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- New understanding of PTSD/TBI

# Personal Experiences

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- Being understood by people for our reactions
- The highest emotional and adrenaline rushes, then back to normal life
- Having to accept death before it happened



# Vets4Vets

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- ▶ Brings veterans together
- ▶ Teaches how to speak and listen
- ▶ Self-supporting community relationships

# Vets4Vets

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- ▶ 100% free for the veterans
- ▶ Want to work with other organizations





# Wrap up

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- ❖ History
- ❖ Definition of Peer Support
- ❖ The Importance
- ❖ New Roles in Today's Military
- ❖ Personal experiences
- ❖ Vets4Vets

# THE END

