

MILITARY SERVICE INITIATIVE

Team 43 Sports



GEORGE W. BUSH
INSTITUTE



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Ensuring post-9/11 veterans and their families make successful transitions to civilian life with a focus on gaining meaningful employment and overcoming the invisible wounds of war.

BACKGROUND

Many of the three million veterans who have served since 9/11 return home to face challenges as they transition back to civilian life. Over the next five years, another million service members will transition from the military. Challenges can include unemployment, homelessness, feelings of isolation, and debilitating health issues. These educated and highly skilled patriots are in search of effective services to help them find renewed purpose and identity. Research commissioned by the George W. Bush Institute has revealed that 71 percent of Americans say they do not understand the problems faced by those who have served since 9/11.

There is a critical need for leadership to establish a cohesive vision, collaborative focus, and accountability to effectively support post-9/11 veterans and military families. The Bush Institute is providing this leadership through programs that support post-9/11 veterans and their families.

TEAM 43 SPORTS

As part of a larger set of programs that support veterans in the transition to civilian life, the George W. Bush Institute hosts two *Team 43 Sports* events: the Warrior 100K, a high-endurance three-day bike ride, and the Warrior Open, a highly competitive golf tournament. *Team 43 Sports* showcase the courage, commitment, and resilience of these warriors and underscore the importance of sports as part of the rehabilitation process for our men and women injured on the front lines. In spite of severe injury and trauma, these men and women have found new ways to use their minds and bodies to achieve and surpass great goals.

Since 2010, more than 140 warriors have participated in *Team 43 Sports*. Through these events, which include the personal participation of President Bush, the Bush Institute connects these warriors with resources to assist in their transition and assists them in developing their networks. The events also spotlight some of the leading nonprofit organizations delivering services to veterans, as well as private sector entities that prioritize making employment opportunities available to veterans. Finally, the events generate high-profile media coverage of participating organizations and the issues facing our nation's transitioning veterans.

“These men have had a graduate course in life. They’ve learned camaraderie, teamwork, discipline. They’ve seen some of life’s horrors, and yet we know they can transition. One way to do so is through athletics.”

- President George W. Bush

PROGRAM IMPACT

The impact of these events is far-reaching on the lives of the warriors and their families, with many taking on new work because of their participation in *Team 43 Sports*. Program alumni describe their experiences with *Team 43 Sports* in their own words:

- “Spending quality time with the former Commander in Chief ... reaching out to show you how much he really cares about us as individuals ... It’s an uplifting feeling; a new touch of confidence.”
- “Sharing my story over dinner with everyone was my highlight. I didn’t feel alone and rejected; I was welcomed and accepted. My vulnerability become my strength and that brought a whole new community of friends and support for me and my wife.”
- “For my husband, it gave him a different perspective on what I go through with PTS and helped him see that there are so many others who fight similar battles.”
- “After I did last year’s event, I started my own nonprofit ... helping veterans in Utah.”
- “I didn’t realize how much I missed the comradery of fellow soldiers... Also, in the past, I had always seen having PTS as something to be ashamed of. Seeing how other warriors confront it, and how they were able to improve their lives inspired me.”

DAVE’S STORY

Dave Smith enlisted in the Marine Corps in 2003. He deployed twice in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and was engaged in some of the war’s heaviest fighting. He was honorably discharged in 2007 but experienced severe post-traumatic stress. “When you go to war, something in you changes,” he said. He was angry, and worried about stigma. “We don’t admit weakness. That’s not part of our warrior culture,” he explained.

But things got worse – at one point, he even contemplated suicide. Then a fellow warrior gave him the wake-up call he needed. “He had the courage to tell me ‘I’m getting help. I’m working on this,’” Dave recalled, “And you should, too.” So Dave took ownership of his transition. He first associated with the Bush Center in 2012, joining President Bush on the W100K ride. “Being able to see his heart and passion for helping veterans has meant a lot to me and has given me inspiration to never stop serving,” Dave said.

He’s become an active member of Team 43, sharing his story and encouraging others to make a difference. Dave explained, “The program reminds us we are not forgotten, our sacrifices were not in vain, and that helping us towards a successful transition is a major priority.”

For more information on Team 43 Sports, please contact Emily Casarona.

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