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PROJECT HEALING WATERS FLY FISHING

1. Organizational Overview

History

Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing (PHWFF) was founded by Ed Nicholson, a Vietnam veteran who developed the idea for the organization after a 2004 visit to Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC). What began as a desire to introduce fly fishing to recovering injured and wounded service members returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan soon blossomed into a project that now encompasses not only the recovering warriors of Walter Reed, but other veterans with disabilities at 177 programs at Military and Veterans hospitals, nation-wide. The organization is committed to helping service members and veterans with disabilities enjoy a better life, through participation in fly fishing education and outings and, more importantly, in building lasting mentoring relationships that will follow them as they transition to civilian life.

Mission Statement

PHWFF's mission statement is as follows: "Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing, Inc. is dedicated to the physical and emotional rehabilitation of disabled active military service personnel and disabled veterans through fly fishing and associated activities including education and outings."

Organizational Structure

PHWFF's national office is located in Waldorf, Maryland. A small paid staff, with the help of volunteers, works to coordinate the organization's national activities and serve as the organization's point of contact for its many donors and volunteers. The PHWFF Board of Trustees, with a membership of twenty, sets policy for the organization and provides financial oversight.

A critical component of PHWFF's success lies in its association with other fly fishing organizations including the Federation of Fly Fishers and Trout Unlimited (TU). Collaboration with these two groups, in addition to many independently run fly fishing clubs located throughout the United States, allows PHWFF to offer its program in conjunction with DoD and VA facilities nationwide. PHWFF has 177 programs currently operating in 14 geographic regions of the US. Each of these is made possible only through dependable local volunteers who serve their respective groups in a variety of ways. Some are experienced fly fishers who donate their time and knowledge to those the program serves and others play the role of outings leaders and support staff.

Each of PHWFF's 14 geographical regions is overseen by a volunteer Regional Coordinator (RC). Some RCs began their association with PHWFF as participants. Each individual program within a geographic

region is managed by a volunteer Program Lead (PL). The RCs and PLs organize and schedule outings and classes for participants, including classes for fly tying, fly casting, and rod building. The RCs and PLs essentially serve as the link between PHWFF's national headquarters and its thousands of volunteers who are the face of the organization to active military and veterans with disabilities. Each PHWFF program functions as a result of this successful teamwork between PHWFF staff and volunteers at both the national and local program levels. PHWFF programs are operated by local chapters of Trout Unlimited and Federation of Fly Fishers clubs, sometimes in a joint effort. The remaining programs are run by independent fly fishing clubs. PHWFF reports that in 2013, programs were operated by 67 local Trout Unlimited chapters, 54 Federation of Fly Fishers clubs and 39 independent fly fishing clubs.

Programming

PHWFF doesn't wish to be seen simply as a 'take-a vet-fishing' program, but rather for veterans and stakeholders to also understand the corollary benefits of the service they provide. Rather than taking a one-time, event-based approach to service, the organization's goal is to provide veterans with disabilities with an ongoing program that is both therapeutic and serves as a potential life-long pastime. PHWFF seeks to provide a variety of on-going classes and outings that can engage any interested participant, regardless of their disability. Weekly classes offer participants the opportunity to benefit from regular camaraderie with peers as they learn new skills.

Classes offered by local programs currently include basic fly tying, fly casting, and rod building classes. Local programs also hold clinics for participants, meeting both the needs of beginners as well as those of more experienced fly fishers who are learning to fish within the scope of their new abilities. All equipment and outing expenses are provided at no cost to the participants. As with many chapter-based veteran-serving non-profits, PHWFF's franchise model affords flexibility for customization across communities – as the relationship in each community between the fly fishing club, DoD or VA facility, and interested participants is unique, each program takes on its own look and feel.

Currently PHWFF does not have any programming in place to include the families of the veterans it serves, nor does it have any programming specifically geared for women. PHWFF has expressed interest in expanding beyond the core service delivery in order to develop this type of additional specialized programming.

Veteran Populations Served

PHWFF serves all active military service personnel and veterans with disabilities. During 2013, over 2,400 volunteers donated approximately 130,000 hours of their time to PHWFF programs across the US; these volunteers served over 5,400 veterans with disabilities during this time period. The organization strives to increase the number of participants its programs reach, particularly disabled veterans in the post-9/11 demographic.

Funding Sources and Strategies

PHWFF is resourced through a broad array of funding sources, and does not rely heavily on one specific source for its sustainment. Funding sources for 2013 included individual donations (29%), special events (18%), grants and foundations (14%), corporate donations (13%), a DeCA promotion (3%), contributions from the United Way and the Combined Federal Campaign (2%), and in-kind contributions (21%), such as equipment from the fly fishing industry or free cabin rentals and professional guide services. These in-kind donations allow PHWFF to reach out to more participants and to provide them a maximum of

services and experiences with minimal cash disbursement by the organization. Additionally, according to PHWFF's 2013 Annual Report, the manpower provided by PHWFF's 2,400+ volunteers contributed almost \$2.9 million in non-cash value to PHWFF.

For 2013, PHWFF "general management" costs comprised 17% of total expenditures, while fundraising expenses made up 4%. There was a slight increase over the amount spent in this area in 2012, with the change being attributable to an increase in the number of fundraising events held and initiatives started. The organization had a program-to-administrative expense ratio of 79% in 2013.

2. Measurement and Data Supporting Effectiveness & Impact

Types of Data Routinely Collected

PHWFF does not routinely collect data on the veterans it serves out of concern for privacy issues. At an organizational level it tracks the aggregate number of registrants for classes and fishing outings. Going forward, the organization recognizes that in order to access new funding sources and to provide broader services to their members they will need to compile data on the individuals served by the program.

How data are used for getting impact

Currently, PHWFF relies heavily on individual testimonials to measure effectiveness. During the Case Study Interview, PHWFF staff did not identify participant data that they felt would be most useful to them in identifying their program's strengths and weaknesses. The organization is very sensitive to the issue of participants' privacy and is currently limited in its ability to measure the program's effectiveness and impact, in part, due to the absence of a formal method for tracking or contacting former participants in the program. This issue has been recognized and is part of their strategic plan for 2014-2017. Using their existing Donor Perfect software, PHWFF intends to develop a Plan of Action and Milestones (POA&M) allowing them to reach former participants.

Formal Evaluation Activities

As stated above, PHWFF is currently in the process of developing a formal process for collecting data.

3. Strategic Themes

Social Connectedness

As stated previously, a critical component of the PHWFF program is the camaraderie that extends between the volunteers and participants. The programs provide veterans with opportunities to engage in activities in which they can build relationships and increase socialization. Some participants have become program volunteers and PLs. PHWFF aims to increase the number and variety of programs it offers at national, regional, and local levels, and to continue to expand program offerings which foster social interactions and provide personal fulfillment, such as rod building contests and fly tying competitions.

Several examples of Social Connectedness were given by members of the PHWFF staff during the Case Study Interview, including the following:

"Going beyond the community though in an overarching way, Project Healing Waters has facilitated two groups having an ongoing conversation. I don't believe that prior to these types of activities born to serve wounded and disabled vets and active military, there was ever a time when conservationists and

the military talked to each other a lot, and now they do. It's not our mission, but it's an indirect outcome that we have a lot of people associated with our programs now that think in a conservation-minded way.”

“It's that relationship building with the volunteers, and maybe someday we'll figure out of the 2,700 [volunteers] how many were in the military and how many were not, but regardless, they have families, they have communities, they have other lives other than just Project Healing Waters, and a lot of times our participants bridge that gap and become family friends.”

“And then the other level happens when we have our outings and we have a gathering here, there, everywhere across the country, and you get the community that comes in, in many instances to support that outing in a very tangible way where they feel welcome and appreciated. The community is invariably very warm and outgoing and effusive in their ‘thank you for your service’ in a way that really means something to these guys and ladies.”

“When you take [veterans] into a community event like Mossy Creek and take them up into Pennsylvania...Greenville, Maine — where the community comes out and embraces them, shows them dramatically just how much they care and it's not just lip service or words, that has an incredible impact on these Soldiers and Marines and whoever because they can see it in a tangible way.”

Transition to Civilian Life

PHWFF does not have a program specifically designed to assist with transition to civilian life. However, the organization's philosophy that it serves as more than just a recreational outing, also as an avenue for reintegration, drives its efforts to create an environment which fosters trust between the service members and veterans it serves and the volunteers which run its programs. Through its outdoor education programs and peer mentoring techniques, PHWFF programs can serve as a stepping stone to community reintegration for its participants. During the Case Study Interview, the Founder/President made a point of saying, “I think it's important to add, we're not a veterans' organization. We work with wounded and disabled veterans...If they're still in the military and they're at a transition unit, we usually work with the medical staff, and they clear the ones like, ‘Yes, this person or these individuals will get something out of the problem and should be involved in the program.’ Once they're out of the military, we require that they have a disability rating. We don't care what percentage it is, just as long as it is a disability rating.”

Employment and Education

PHWFF does not provide employment services and does not offer any financial support for educational pursuits. While it is not the organization's intent to alter its mission to include those services, it does recognize the need to interface with the private and the public sector in order to make sure that it can help its members get the help they need in these areas.

Founder/President Ed Nicholson stated “PHWFF wasn't just about taking people fishing. Picking them up, dropping them off, ‘Have a good day. We'll see you. Maybe we'll take you out next year.’ We were there every week. The staff [at the VA] saw that. The participants knew that we would show up every week and that we would have something entertaining and educational for them, and we would teach them how to tie flies. We would teach them the elements of fly fishing in its many shapes and forms, but we would also get them excited about coming in every week. The anticipation of doing that is a

marvelous tonic for almost everybody. You don't have to be disabled to anticipate something good coming and making that anticipation to help you feel better.”

The challenges that wounded service members and veterans face while recovering can create barriers – often psychological – to reintegrating into the workforce, aside from their physical disabilities. In this way, Project Healing Waters’ reinvigorating effect potentially plays a role in mentally preparing the service member or veteran with disabilities to return to the workforce by awakening something within them which was perhaps ‘beaten down’ by the challenges they encountered through their injuries.

Reintegration with Family

While PHWFF programs are not specifically aimed at assisting in reintegration with family, their social component is vital for participants. Some PHWFF programs have begun to host family events as one of the services they provide to their participants. During the Case Study Interview several members of the PHWFF staff mentioned that they knew of participants who had joined the program after a family member contacted the organization to inquire about membership. Testimonials from participants cite the program’s positive effects on their family life and on their general ability to interact with others. One PHWFF staff member stated:

“Though our mission statement is that we work with wounded and disabled veterans and we don't say that we directly work with families also, but it's just by the nature of what we do they're indirectly benefiting from the program I guess. We do have certain outings or events where the families are more than welcome to come, and it's just great because I think in order to heal a veteran, the family needs to be involved.”

Community Connectedness

PHWFF is a community-based volunteer organization. Volunteers include professional educators and fishing guides as well as experienced anglers, all of whom donate their time and knowledge to support the participants. PHWFF headquarters is developing better avenues for communication with its volunteers, including a cloud-based document and resource sharing service, a volunteer information blog and the integration of local program pages into the national website. It is also producing a field fundraising package for local volunteers to include templates for fundraising letters and communications. PHWFF volunteers carry the organization’s message to their local communities.

Women Veteran Efforts

PHWFF does not designate specific programming for women veterans, though it is sensitive to the unique needs and issues faced by this demographic. The organization’s goal is for all of its participants to be able to come to its events and feel like they are being treated as equals. PHWFF reports that 10% of their participants are women. The PHWFF CEO stated that “We have some female participants who feel for the first time in their lives they're accepted by a group of men in that program.” The CEO added that “We consciously have made an effort to include women in our literature now. I mean, fly fishing can come across as an old-man's sport where guys wear tweed and go fishing.”

The CEO also noted that “We have some women in our programs who simply cannot handle having a male instructor one-on-one...and so we fulfill that need. That's handled organically right now. I do not want to set policy on that.” Some PHWFF programs have begun to host outings and events specifically for women who might otherwise not participate. As the PHWFF CEO stated, “If you just show up with a

bunch of guys and a bunch of volunteers that know nothing about how to work with or understand any of the issues that they're going through, especially being victims of military sexual trauma, they're not going to want to participate because they'll be so intimidated and just so many things that go along with that.”

Media

PHWFF program activities and events have been featured on major networks including ESPN, CNN, and FOX, and in Fly Rod Chronicles and other local network outlets and print publications. PHWFF aims to attract more national attention in well-known media and will measure its success in this initiative by tracking how many articles and editorials on the program are published in magazines and newspapers with national circulation. They also intend to set objectives for radio and television exposure. The CEO states that “Yes, we engage the media on a regular basis. I am full-steam ahead on anything we can do to get the message out there, but in the right way.”

PHWFF is utilizing social media more and more to reach out to younger veterans as this has proven to be a successful method for connecting with this demographic.

Independent Sector Involvement

PHWFF’s success can be attributed, in part, to the early partnerships that it established with Trout Unlimited and the Federation of Fly Fishermen. By partnering with these established groups, PHWFF was able to tap into a pre-existing infrastructure that allowed for its rapid growth, and its access to these groups forms the core infrastructure for PHWFF’s delivery of its programs across the country. Without these partnerships, it is arguable that PHWFF would not have the geographic reach it has today.

Additionally, through its incorporation in the Combined Federal Campaign, PHWFF gets exposure to thousands of service members and federal workers seeking an outlet for regular charitable contributions. While this only forms a small portion of PHWFF’s revenue, it also serves to expand awareness of the group among the military and federal workforce.

Veteran Programming Differentiation

As previously noted, PHWFF does not typically design or deliver any of its programming in order to serve different cohorts of disabled veterans. The organization recognizes that each veteran it serves has individual needs that will be met in different ways by the program. Over time some of PHWFF’s programs have initiated differentiated service for women and families.

4. Key Learnings and Reflections

Catalysts of Impact

PHWFF has seen tremendous growth in its first 10 years. This is a combined result of several factors, perhaps the most distinguishing one being its remarkably strong volunteer network of over 2,400 individuals. The Partnership agreements with TU, the International Federation of Fly Fishers, and independent fly fishing clubs, nationwide, allow PHWFF to operate effectively and efficiently. The organization’s brand name recognition within the participant community, as well as the Department of Defense, the VA, and the fly fishing industry has been very successful.

PHWFF has a strong financial history and it has succeeded in developing partnering arrangements with other like-minded veterans support organizations. Its organizational structure has allowed the RCs and

PLs sufficient flexibility to adapt their operations to the specific requirements of their regions while maintaining the PHWFF brand, coupled with headquarters oversight and control of essential activities (e.g., financial management and reporting).

Barriers to Impact

In spite of its great success to date, the growth and success of other VSO's, including those that offer like services (and will compete with PHWFF for future political recognition, volunteers, and money) is perhaps the organization's greatest challenge. The withdrawal of the US military from Southwest Asia, coupled with the "war-weariness" of the public, may lead to diminished donor interest in, and public support for, PHWFF. Insufficient means to contact former participants and to measure impact and effectiveness is a recognized problem that is currently being addressed.

PHWFF relies on a 'franchise' system, tied to clubs run by other organizations. The Industry Coordinator for PHWFF stated that "The biggest issues that we face right now are communications between what we'll call headquarters up here and our program leads, and that does or doesn't happen for a variety of reasons."

Finally, limited use of social media and other forms of communication to reach participants hinders the organization's ability to move forward in providing broader services and reaching out to new funding sources.

Ongoing Efforts to Enhance Impact

PHWFF plans to continue to increase its total number of active programs. It is working to establish a system to track and contact all current and former participants. This will provide measurable outcomes on the impacts and effectiveness of PHWFF programs. PHWFF has also joined the R4 Alliance, a membership organization, in an effort to help build the R4 Alliance's database of people in need. The organization also looks forward to implementing a standardized training module for volunteers.