

INSIGHTS INFORMING THE CONCERNS OF POST- 9/11 VETERANS AND FAMILIES

Case Study:

Team Red, White, and Blue (RWB)



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY'S INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES (IVMF) HAS BEEN CONTRACTED TO SUPPORT THE GEORGE W. BUSH INSTITUTE'S RESEARCH TO EFFECTIVELY SERVE AND EMPOWER OUR POST-9/11 VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES.



GEORGE W. BUSH INSTITUTE



TEAM RED, WHITE, AND BLUE CASE STUDY

1. Organizational Overview

History

Team Red White and Blue (Team RWB, or RWB) was founded in 2010 in Ann Arbor, MI by US Army Major Mike Erwin. Erwin had long been supportive of veterans' non-profit organizations and recognized a gap in services available to wounded veterans. Although there was a national framework of support, which tended to be episodic in delivery of services, Erwin sought to create an organization that could provide consistent, inclusive support at the local level. Erwin originally had the idea of gathering veterans to compete in the Twin Cities Marathon to raise funds for wounded veterans. This attracted sponsorship, but no real organizational structure or ability to form partnerships at the local community level. He also realized that the sponsorship attracted only episodic relief for veterans, with no consistency in delivery of services.

Although at that time he felt that there was a disproportionate amount of support being "heaped" upon the wounded, there was very little support for non-wounded veterans who were struggling with depression, combat stress or similar issues. Erwin's initial intent in creating Team RWB was to support wounded veterans locally within their respective communities, creating a "buddy system" that paired these veterans with volunteer advocates (veteran or civilian). The leadership team quickly realized, however, that the majority of members (including the wounded) were signing up as volunteer advocates as opposed to self-identifying as wounded and in need of support. At the same time, the RWB team also realized that those volunteering their services as advocates, or "buddies", were benefiting from a sense of belonging and connectedness to the organization. From this realization, Team RWB leadership decided to evolve into a more inclusive organization, expanding the focus beyond simply wounded veterans.

Executive Director Blayne Smith estimates that anywhere between 26 to 40 percent of those having served in combat suffer some type of challenges ranging from post-traumatic stress, anxiety, guilt or depression. These individuals often struggle with a loss of camaraderie, identity and purpose (what RWB leaders refer to as CIP). To provide support for these veterans, the organization has evolved into an inclusive model with the goal of reaching out to both wounded and non-wounded veterans, those seeking this sense of connectedness and purpose, and non-veterans. RWB leaders note that many veterans participating in the chapters today are not physically wounded, but may suffer from mental challenges like the loss of CIP, though they often find it difficult to reach out for help; these veterans are attracted to RWB programming for a number of reasons, such as the motivation to participate in athletic events, and receive the added psychological benefits of this renewed sense of camaraderie, identity, and purpose,

through the community connections provided by the organization. By including non-veterans, the organization provides locally-based support which facilitates veterans' reintegration into the community, assisting with this process.

This partnership within the local community resulted in a division of Team RWB into regions based on Metropolitan Statistical Areas and has evolved from a grass roots level organization into a national body dividing the country into six regions: Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, South Central Pacific, Midwest and Pacific. The organization has expanded rapidly since its inception in 2012 growing from 10 chapters to over 30 in 2014.

Mission Statement

Team RWB's Mission Statement reads as follows: "To enrich the lives of America's veterans by connecting them to their community through physical and social activity."

Organizational Structure

Headquartered in Tampa, FL, Team RWB is a 501(c)(3) incorporated organization overseen by a Board of Directors, Advisory Board and executive staff. The organization is staffed primarily by volunteers, having only a total of nine full time paid employees dispersed nationwide. The country is divided into six regions: Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, New York City, Southeast, Midwest, Pacific and South Central. In addition, there are several chapters located overseas on military bases in Korea, Germany, Japan, and Kuwait. Team RWB is an inclusive organization in that it serves both civilians and veterans; as of the time of the GWBI team's visit, Team RWB was comprised of approximately 36,000 members, located in over 100 communities across the globe and registering approximately 500 new members each week.

In keeping with the organization's Mission Statement of connecting veterans to their community, Team RWB has Chapters and Communities located throughout the six regions. Each Chapter and Community reports to the national Team RWB headquarters. Team RWB Communities are locations that are newer or smaller, may not offer quite the same volume or variety of activities, and have not yet been certified as Chapters.

Programming

Chapter & Community Programs

Executive Director Blayne Smith describes the Chapter and Community program as "the core of what we do as an organization." The goal is to have veterans involved in their local community on a consistent basis. Each Team RWB Chapter hosts a variety of "consistent, positive activities" intended to foster authentic relationships at the local level, connecting veterans with each other and members of their community. Typical events might include weekly running groups, hiking, yoga classes, functional fitness, volunteering, or social events. Chapter leadership seeks to vary weekly events by time (when events are held), type (running, rowing, etc.), and location, to ensure maximum participation among their chapter members. Because some chapters are located in major metropolitan areas, the variance in location is critical to maximize participation, in order to expand the organization's reach across the cities. Additionally, Chapters may at times collectively sign up for races or other team-based events which build camaraderie and gain visibility for the organization, helping attract new members to the chapter. Each Chapter is led by a Chapter Captain, Veteran Outreach Director, Community Outreach Director, Athletic

Director and Social Director, all of whom are volunteers. The only exceptions to this model are cities in which paid members of the RWB leadership team reside, as they are expected to play a dual role. For example, Team RWB Executive Director Blayne Smith also serves as Chapter Captain in Tampa Bay.

The Community Program enables Team RWB to foster growth at the grassroots level. A Community is created as interest forms in areas where there is as yet no formal Chapter, and only limited program options are available. Eventually, through mentorship from regional and national headquarters and through continued development at the community level, the Community will be certified as a Chapter.

Veteran Ambassador Program

The Veteran Ambassador Program serves to welcome new veterans to the team and ensures that they have the information and resources to stay connected with both the local Chapter and the national community. This is essentially a program for those who do not have a Team RWB Chapter in their neighborhood, but who are still part of the team. Members receive regular updates from and participate in Facebook groups. They have access to veteran athletic camps and the leadership development program. This is the most inclusive of the programs, where the veteran, wherever they are in the world, can sign up to become a member of the organization.

Veteran Athletic Camps

The Veteran Athletic Camps serve as opportunities for veterans to learn new sports or activities which they take back to their local chapters. The Camps are led by experts and experienced, sometimes world-class or professional athletes and have included activities such as yoga, trail running, triathlons and rock climbing. Participants at the Camps are nominated by the local Chapter Captains and each prospective attendee is required to submit an application package explaining why they want to attend and how they intend to use their newly acquired skills when they return to their local communities.

WOD with Warriors

Work Out of the Day (WOD) with Warriors is a fitness tribute workout held twice a year on Veterans Day and Memorial Day at gyms throughout the country, where both Team RWB members and members of the local community can sign up to participate. These workouts, designed to remind participants of the day they are honoring (Veterans Day is built around the number 11, for example – 11 pushups, 22 box jumps, etc.), provide an opportunity for veterans to connect with members of their community through fitness events while remembering fellow veterans.

Leadership Development Program

Team RWB recognizes the importance of leadership and role models within its organization. To this end, Team RWB has organized seven national camps and four regional camps to train and develop leadership skills in 2014. Participants are recommended by the local Chapter Captain and submit a three-page application detailing how the individual will implement the knowledge gained through the camp to benefit the local community. Course components include access to personality profiles, strength finders and individualized mentorship. The camps are also designed to both mentor potential leaders and for participants to mentor at the local and regional levels. After completing the camp, the individual is expected to work in a leadership role in a local community organization such as the Special Olympics or similar organizations that provide “real life leadership opportunities.”

Team RWB Apparel

While not a program, it is worth noting that an important component of Team RWB programs, and perhaps an important component of the impact that the team has on its members, is its recognizable logo and apparel. Every member of Team RWB is issued (for free) the organization's hallmark red t-shirt with the RWB eagle emblazoned on his or her chest. RWB "Eagles", as members are called, often proudly buy additional gear from the Team RWB online store – socks, hats, stickers, car decals, triathlon suits, children's clothing, etc. – to display their pride in the organization. When Chapters gather for weekly fitness events or sign up for a local 5K, they are easily recognized by the large group of veterans and community members running by wearing red t-shirts and carrying an American flag, a Team RWB tradition.

Veteran Populations Served

Although Team RWB largely serves the post-9/11 veteran population, the organization encourages veterans from all eras to participate. Of post-9/11 veterans, Team RWB reports that approximately 3% of the members have physical disabilities, and 26-40% struggle with mental and emotional issues such as PTS, anxiety or depression. Executive Director Blayne Smith estimates that as many as 60% of veterans, although not suffering from a clinically diagnosable mental or physical illness, struggle with the loss of "camaraderie, identity and purpose." Although less clinically in need than the disabled or traumatized veteran, these veterans have a need that Team RWB views as critical to serve, along a continuum of preventative care. Adjusting to civilian life without support from the community – and the loss of camaraderie, identity, and purpose – can too frequently lead to a downward spiral and resultant homelessness, joblessness or drug use.

Funding Sources and Strategies

Since its inception, Team RWB has not compensated any volunteers, board members, or advocates for their services, work, or time. Nor are team RWB athletes compensated in any way; they donate their time to train and participate in athletic events, and they cover all of their own expenses to do so. Executive Director Blayne Smith affirmed that Team RWB is "driven by volunteers whose only compensation is the satisfaction of knowing they are impacting the lives of America's veterans." Each Chapter Captain is allocated a budget from the national headquarters based on the Chapter's output, or Unique Veteran Interactions (UVI). A Chapter is assigned to a Tier based on its UVIs which drives its funding level – increased UVI counts thus lead to increased funding. Approximately 96% of all expenses were allocated to programs in direct support of veterans.

The organization relies heavily on corporate sponsorship and donations for funding. Annual revenue grew from \$840,000 in 2012 to over \$2,100,000 in 2013. In an effort to maintain and further develop corporate sponsorship, Brandon Young, Director of Development was hired in April 2014 to work with current and potential partners in an effort to increase the level of sponsorship and branding.

2. Measurement and Data Supporting Effectiveness & Impact

Types of Data Routinely Collected

In May, 2013 Team RWB engaged McKinsey & Company to design a survey to determine what veterans wanted and valued most in their post military life. Veterans are now given this baseline survey when they first sign up with the organization. The survey measures subjective themes such as community

connectedness and fulfillment, along with objective data such as employment status, use of VA services, etc. The veterans then receive a follow-up survey six months later. The objective of the surveys is to measure the extent to which Team RWB has enriched veterans' lives, and according to Director of Research, Caroline Angel, "the quality of relationships and experiences that contribute to life satisfaction and overall well-being."

Surveys were broken down into several major outcomes, with a primary focus on connectivity (interpersonal relationships, involvement in the community, available resources within the community, physical and mental outcomes and life satisfaction). The results of the data are intended to communicate to participants the impact of their involvement and membership within the organization. According to Angel, "people like to know what they're doing matters." Although Team RWB recognizes that there is some selection bias in the surveys, the response rate is very high.

Team RWB also collects data to measure the numbers of veterans and community members served (known as Unique Veteran Interactions, or UVIs, as mentioned above). This is achieved by monitoring attendance at all of the local events. For example, a team member is appointed to track attendance at a Saturday morning running group. The total of all in attendance and the total of veteran attendance are then forwarded to the Chapter Captain. The Chapter Captain in turn submits a monthly report to the Director of Operations who aggregates and tracks the numbers by Chapter.

Angel also explained how the organization is refining several surveys and increasing the rigor of the research design. Brown University currently has a student who is conducting qualitative research into the impact of running and connectivity – how running facilitates talking. Angel also recently finalized a leadership survey to look at the impact of RWB involvement of the Chapter leaders. The objective of this study is to determine how RWB impacts leadership development and leadership growth and how this translates back to and impacts the Chapter at the local level.

Because Team RWB has only been in existence for just over four years, certain programs have not yet been fully implemented and are still in the developmental stage. This is particularly true with regard to the research and analysis of the impact and effectiveness of the services provided. The organization is currently in the process of refining the content of the survey questions to better measure impact. It is also formulating and refining surveys for participants of the veteran athletic camps to evaluate how the program impacts behavior over the long term.

Data Analysis and Reporting

The McKinsey survey is offered to all individuals when they officially join Team RWB through the website. Each individual is asked a series of seventeen questions including the type of connectivity they are experiencing, how often they exercise and their level of engagement in the community. The feedback resulted in a database of over 4,000 responses, referred to in-house as the Veteran Ambassador Program. Angel has been reviewing the data and looking at the ways in which members self-reported the impact from RWB involvement since joining the team and to what extent RWB had created connectivity within the community. Connectivity was measured by the number of personal relationships, available resources within the community, programs available, extent of physical activity and mental health outcomes.

The data gathered from the surveys have a dual function of refining the current programs, and delivering feedback to members that their involvement and engagement matters; many members join Team RWB to motivate and inspire others, but they also want to know that what they are doing matters.

Similarly, attendees of leadership camps are surveyed while they participate in the program, and these individuals are tracked over the long term to determine to what extent the camps have impacted behavior.

The data collected has allowed Team RWB to review its programs and to refine program delivery, but it has also been effective in providing data to potential sponsors to illustrate the program's impact on the individual and the community. Director of Development Brandon Young, explained that Team RWB was currently in negotiations with corporations and grant making organizations and uses the data that has been gathered to quantify the impact of RWB on the veteran and on local communities, stating that "this is a core sentiment of our development strategy moving forward...taking the results that we have and figuring out how we can present these to our prospective partners."

How Data Are Used to Get to Impact

Team RWB leadership expressed a difficulty in articulating impact to funders who are more interested in supporting organizations or activities which are more obviously directed towards veterans at the point of crisis, such as transitional housing, or employment assistance. Because Team RWB views veteran transition – and veteran wellness – as a continuum, the organization views this concept of camaraderie, identity and purpose as being perhaps the first line of defense against the many other challenges veterans may face. As such, data collected through surveys are intended to articulate this model, demonstrating the impact that Team RWB activities have on members, including improved mental and physical health outcomes and improved sense of self-worth and connection to the community. By "connecting the dots" for potential funders and stakeholders with the data collected, Team RWB is able to demonstrate that the organization is much more than just a running club for veterans but rather a critical preventative component in the transition and reintegration process for veterans.

Additionally, the measurement of Unique Veteran Interactions (UVIs) helps the leadership team ensure that it allocates resources in the most active locations, as well as incentivizing activity among chapter captains.

Formal Evaluation Activities (Internal and External)

Team RWB is not evaluated by external organizations, however they have used the results from the McKinsey surveys to evaluate and improve program delivery and design. Most notably, Team RWB was originally designed with the intent of serving only wounded veterans. Analysis of the survey results indicated that the organization would need to reevaluate this initial assumption and expand membership to include all veterans.

Internally, Team RWB utilizes their measurement of Unique Veteran Interactions (UVIs) as a performance indicator. Performance of Chapters is monitored to ensure that Chapter Captains fulfill the mission of the organization by reaching out to the community and providing a variety of events designed to encourage connectivity. Failure to meet the minimum criteria can result in a Chapter being disbanded.

3. Strategic Themes

Social Connectedness

By definition, the mission of Team RWB is to connect veterans to their communities, thereby enriching their lives. Having identified the loss of a sense of belonging in transitioning service members and veterans, Team RWB seeks to fill this gap not only by connecting veterans to each other, but by bridging the gap between them and the members of their community at the local Chapter level. The current ratio of membership in the organization is approximately two-thirds veterans to one-third civilians, so within each chapter, veterans are getting to know non-veterans through direct interaction. Additionally, chapters participate in social and volunteer activities out in the community, further incorporating community members in their activities.

One unique aspect of the RWB experience is the bright red t-shirt, which to some may seem like a surface aspect of participating in the team. While this helps bond the team together by serving as a “uniform”, it also has a secondary effect of sparking curiosity in those who see the team as they participate in their activities, thus serving as an outreach tool to members of the community-at-large. Whether in a race or at a BBQ, seeing a large group in red with an American flag often attracts onlookers who ask, “What is this group?”, “What kind of team is this?” or “What are you training for?” This opens the opportunity for a conversation about Team RWB, a chance to invite more members of the community into the group, and a moment to explain some of the challenges and strengths that veterans face and can bring to society.

Additionally, Chapters are charged with providing variety to the members in terms of time, location and type of activity available. Although a Chapter might have a high number of running activities, for example, in order for it to be seen as more than just a running club, the Chapter will also offer options varying as widely as yoga, community CrossFit classes, kayaking and picnics. While this helps keep members engaged, it also provides broad geographic exposure within the community, as well as broad exposure within the various athletic communities around the area, as activities typically integrate non-veteran participants at the athletic facilities where RWB events are held. At these events, the Chapter Captain typically says a few words about the organization to explain the mission of Team RWB to the non-veteran, non-members in attendance. This sparks post-workout conversations and often leads to increased membership.

Executive Director Blayne Smith describes Team RWB as a “community of communities,” meaning that it operates at a local grassroots level in program delivery, but also serves on a national level and as a national community. For members who might live in a city where no Chapter or Community is currently available, they can still participate in regional or national events. By offering a frequent variety of physical and social activities, the veteran directly interacts with members of the local community and a social framework is created to provide veterans with a sense of camaraderie, purpose and sense of accomplishment.

By holding events at both local and national levels, Team RWB gains public exposure and social connectedness. One of the largest national events is the WOD with Warriors, held twice a year on Veterans Day and Memorial Day. Participation takes place at all local Chapters. Additionally, the Old Glory Relay, begun on September 11th, 2014 involved Chapter members running with an American flag from the VA Hospital in San Francisco to the Walter Reed hospital in Washington, DC. Members from the local Chapters were invited to participate in this national event. Both of these events again provide

opportunities for the veteran to connect on a social level, providing a culture of support, encouragement and inclusivity. This Old Glory Relay gained broad attention within the communities the flag passed through, highlighting the group, but also the strengths of veterans rather than the potential weaknesses and challenges veterans may face.

Veteran Programming Differentiation

As an inclusive organization, Team RWB does not provide programs specific to the needs of various cohorts within the veteran community (i.e., women veterans, veterans with disabilities, etc.). Rather, as specific needs arise for unique groups within its Chapters, local leaders liaise with their partners such as the VA or similar veteran service providers that can provide differentiated services to the veteran.

While programming does not differentiate between types of veterans, RWB leadership has learned lessons about differences among various cohorts, and has leveraged these lessons in both organizational design and outreach strategy. Upon examining data from the McKinsey survey, Team RWB leadership identified three cohorts within the population attracted to its programs, characterized by their different positions in civilian life, reactions to their military service, desire for engagement with veteran non-profit organizations, and desire for engagement with other veterans. Executive Director Blayne Smith explained that half of survey participants fell into a “middle ground” and were referred to as the “Family Focused” group. This group was not in need of RWB services or particularly interested in participating. He explains:

“These are veterans who are doing fine is the easiest way I could say it. These are folks who served in the military, they got out of the military, they don’t necessarily want a lot from the military – they’re not seeking a lot of services. These are the folks that enjoyed the military and did well and got out and are doing fine. They have jobs. Many of them have families. High percentage married, high percentage educated, high percentage well employed, gainfully employed. And to be honest, they weren’t looking, they weren’t eager to participate in Team Red, White & Blue because they just have other things. They’re coaching Little League. They’re doing other stuff, right, which this gets missed a lot when we talk about veterans and the hero/victim binary narrative. Some veterans just got in, served it, got out and they’re doing just great.”

The second group was labeled the “Connection Seekers.” This group tended to be younger, less-educated and more typical of the veteran that non-profits typically serve. These veterans were looking for mentorship and camaraderie. He explains:

“These folks tend to be younger. They tend to be less educated. And they tend to sort of over-represent enlisted. And these are the folks who, again, very broadly generalizing here, would fall into sort of the stereotypical veteran that nonprofits want to serve. You know, they’re a little younger, they tend to be underemployed, less educated, lower ranking when they got out, probably susceptible to more of the issues that we talked about, right. And if you look at the numbers we talked about like physical wounds, mental and emotional challenges, it starts to line up a little bit for you, like maybe a quarter or so. And what we also found was that these people were looking for things, like when we asked them what they wanted, these folks said that they were looking to still belong to something bigger than themselves. Like they didn’t get out of the military and just move

on just fine. They kind of miss it, right? They were looking for a mentor, you know, they were looking for camaraderie, that kind of thing. That's what we call the Connection Seekers. Right, which is good. That's who we're trying to serve."

The third group was referred to as the "Driven." These veterans tended to be employed, well-educated and higher ranking than the Family Focused and Connection Seekers. This cohort typically missed the opportunity to lead and coach once outside of the military structure.

"The most interesting part of the whole thing that really jumped out at us – and we knew it as soon as we saw it because we'd been seeing it anecdotally – there's a whole quarter of the population over here that we call the Driven. These are your folks who tend to be fully employed, well educated, more senior military when they exited, you know, because many of them were officers or more senior NCOs, and tend to have lives that look pretty good on the outside. However, these are folks who often struggle with their transition from the military because they miss the opportunity to do things like lead, coach, you know, identity is a big one, you know. If you think about it, these are guys who were staff sergeant squad leader, scout sniper in the Marine Corps, and now they install cable systems or they're the manager of guys that install cable systems for Time Warner Cable. And that's just not the same thing, and that is something that they wrestle with, right? They miss leading, coaching, having a sense of, having their job be a part of their identity. They don't go around wearing their Cox Cable hat to Happy Hour, right? But they wear their 2/8 Marines cap. So this was interesting to us because we said, man, we knew it. These are the people who are signing up like crazy to join our organization because they need the organization but, they don't need it, right?"

Upon recognizing these cohorts, Team RWB leaders understood that the "Family Focused" were not in much need of the organization's programming, nor was there much demand among that population. However, the needs/desires of "Connection Seekers" were complimentary to those of the "The Driven", where one group was comfortable having a leader, being mentored, etc., and was in search of participating in a community again. Likewise, the other sought opportunities to mentor others and lead within their community. As a result, RWB's structure somewhat mirrors this match of skills and desires, where Chapter Captains tend to come from "The Driven" – former officers and NCOs. While not an organizational policy, rule, or even goal, and not uniform across the organization, in some cases, the structure within RWB Chapters mirrors rank structures within the military, where veterans of higher rank tend to take on leadership positions and mentor those of lower rank who tend to have more acute transition challenges.

Women Veteran Efforts

While Team RWB does not have a specific emphasis on women veterans, the organization is all inclusive and has both women veterans and female non-veterans as members. Local Chapters are urged to create a variety of programming opportunities, and this diversity of programs potentially appeals to men, women and families.

Transition to Civilian Life

Team RWB does not provide programs specific to preparing veterans and their families for post-service life in terms of readying them to make informed decisions related to employment, education and finances.

Team RWB provides “camaraderie, identity and purpose (CIP)” to the veteran, which Team RWB contends is the most common “loss” experienced during the transition. Executive Director Blayne Smith says that RWB programs which support CIP, help prevent many veterans from spiraling down into depression, drugs and or alcohol dependency, which are the hallmark challenges associated with a failed transition to civilian life. The focus is to provide identity through community involvement at the local level, which is a tremendously important component of facilitating a successful transition into civilian life.

Instead of projecting itself as a “self-help” organization specifically designed to assist veterans struggling with transition, Team RWB is designed and markets itself as an organization as a community for all, but with a subtle distinction that the ultimate goal is to assist all veterans and at the same time make a stronger community. While specific outreach does not occur during transition, Team RWB chapters exist on several large military installations, including military posts overseas, such that many transitioning service members are already dedicated members of the organization prior to their departure from service. Several of these posts are Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) posts, which have high throughput of members of the military, so RWB leadership hopes that by involving service members in Team RWB on these posts, they will then seed the rest of the military on their follow-on assignments with a dedication to the organization, perhaps found their own chapters, and thus facilitate stronger transitions by having members of the organization included prior to and post separation from service.

Independent Sector Involvement

Team RWB has a number of partners in the independent sector that support the work of the organization. One of the most visible is the organization’s highly successful relationship with Nike, which has recently established a veterans’ affinity network within the corporation. To date, Nike has donated 25,000 t-shirts to Team RWB. In the summer of 2014, seven members of Team RWB’s leadership team were invited to coach a leadership development course for the nation’s top high school quarterbacks at the Nike World Headquarters. Brandon Young, Director of Development, sees this partnership with Nike growing and moving towards a more formal relationship throughout 2015. The Veteran Ambassador Program shirt has been inserted into Nike’s production line for 2015.

Other partnerships include Johnson & Johnson, ConocoPhillips, Kraft Foods Group and the Bob Woodruff Foundation. Each has partnered with Team RWB in various ways including in-kind donations, fundraising efforts and media exposure.

Band-Aid and Bengay, divisions of Johnson & Johnson, have sponsored several Team RWB events such as the Old Glory Coast to Coast Relay. This event began on September 11, 2014 and involved Team RWB members carrying an American flag from the VA Hospital in San Francisco to the Bethesda Naval Hospital in Washington DC for a total of 3,800 miles over 60 days. Bengay guaranteed up to \$65,000 in donations based on the amount of miles covered during the event. In addition, Band-Aid pledged a \$25,000 corporate donation as well as covering marketing costs for the event. Additionally, a third party, “Charity Miles,” has been engaged to track the mileage of Team RWB members who have pledged to participate virtually. Members can download the Charity Miles smart phone application, create an account and mileage will be tracked and matched in dollars by Bengay.

The USO donated \$125,000 to fund half of the various athletics camp programs in 2014, and as of the GWBI team visit, Young was in negotiations hoping to increase this involvement and investment to around \$200,000 in 2015.

Team RWB also has a strong relationship with the VA, particularly in terms of referrals to the organization. Executive Director Blayne Smith describes Team RWB's relationship in terms of being the "downstream partner to the VA," whereby the VA refers veterans to the local Chapters or Communities. The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) partners with Team RWB in an effort to encourage more veterans to access their benefits; the VBA created a link on Team RWB's website which takes the veteran to the VBA e-benefits portal.

Additionally, Team RWB partners with like-minded organizations Team Rubicon and The Mission Continues to provide its members with leadership development, public service, and mentorship opportunities, while these organizations refer their veterans to Team RWB for day-to-day camaraderie, fitness, and community connection. All three organizations collaborate nationally once per year on a "Run as One" event to show their solidarity and partnership.

Community Connectedness

Team RWB does not operate with the intention of providing specific support services such as counseling, housing or employment assistance to the veteran. Rather, the organization focuses on providing community engagement which in turn informally channels referrals for services and assistance – veterans and community members, through interaction at chapter events, learn about the issues and challenges each other are facing, and share their networks of support with each other. Organically, lessons learned about VA benefits or helpful organizations and agencies are passed from one member to another throughout the Chapter or to Chapter leadership to be shared with all members. The local Chapters provide multiple opportunities for veterans to connect and engage in a variety of events, volunteer opportunities and leadership programs. By hosting weekly fitness activities and social events, veterans connect with peers who have similar interests, fostering these kinds of informal networks and referrals.

Additionally, the national headquarters of Team RWB encourages Chapter Captains to develop their own network of connections with their local VA medical center, Vet Centers, veteran-serving nonprofit organizations, and other resources so that each location can develop referrals at the local level. The national organization therefore does not have or dictate an official referral process but, as each Chapter has its own character (due to the personalities involved and unique aspects of the communities they operate in), each chapter also has its own system of identifying the additional needs of its veterans and caring for them as necessary and available.

Media

Team RWB has a strong social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and YouTube. Additionally, it writes an online blog through which it updates stories about its members and recent events. Facebook in particular is important to the strength of the nationwide network of Team RWB Chapters and Communities.

Team RWB also garnishes media attention from national events such as the WOD with Warriors, Run as One, and the Old Glory Coast to Coast Relay. One of the main funders of the Relay was Johnson & Johnson

which provided extensive media coverage and absorbed all marketing costs. At the time of writing, branding and marketing is handled jointly by Board Member and Marketing Director Larry Olson and creative design firm Rule 29. One of the next hires that the organization will be looking to fill will be that of a Communications Director. This role will build national awareness and continuity in the messaging for Team RWB.

Of note, in discussing the organization's communications strategy, Team RWB leadership was clear in their stance that they remain apolitical. All communications from the organization seek to convey a positive and uplifting message rather than publicly weigh in on public controversies or lobby on behalf of political causes.

Reintegration with Family

Team RWB does not provide programs that are designed to specifically reintegrate veterans with their families. However, because the organization is inclusive of all and family members are encouraged to participate in events with the veteran, it is in this sense that the organization helps informally to reintegrate the veteran with the family. Chapter Captains are encouraged to design and schedule programming which will be attractive to family members and accommodate their schedules, to increase family participation, as this will build the community within the chapter and help foster not only the veteran's integration into the community, but the family's as well.

Executive Director Blayne Smith estimates that approximately 30 percent of the organization is made up of non-veterans (including the family members of veterans) and this has impacted the structure and development of Team RWB. Whereas some families opted out of Family Readiness Group programs organized on military bases because of the sense that sometimes families "carried" the rank of their service member (and this drove unwelcoming or non-inclusive behavior), the informal and open acceptance of all ranks in Team RWB events encourages family member participation. With this in mind, Smith has deliberately avoided using military terms in an effort to prevent creating an organization based entirely of veterans (where other VSOs similar to team RWB use terms like "platoons"). This attitude and vernacular have both avoided isolating veterans from the community and encouraged non-veteran and family membership, ultimately enhancing the grassroots community for all.

Employment and Education

Team RWB does not provide specific programs for veterans to access education or employment opportunities. However, Team RWB has been working to develop a partnership with employment services provider Hire Heroes USA to help ensure that Team RWB members get access to services with their organization.

4. Key Learnings and Reflections

Founded in 2010, Team RWB has grown rapidly to become a nationally recognized organization and continues to expand at a near-exponential rate. With Chapters and Communities throughout the United States and overseas, Team RWB has nevertheless remained deeply focused at the local "community" level. Deeply dependent on local volunteers, the organization emphasizes physical and social activities to encourage veteran participation along with programs designed to give back to the local community. Team RWB continues to be all inclusive, inviting participation among veterans and non-veteran members.

Catalysts of Impact

Team RWB's success can be attributed to a number of factors. First, the t-shirts, while seemingly a trivial aspect of the organization, serve as a uniform which unites the team and provide at the very least a subconscious (if not a conscious) sense of belonging, as "Eagles" are intensely proud of wearing RWB gear. Likewise, due to the strong community built within the organization, anyone wearing an RWB shirt approaching a chapter in any city is easily recognized and welcomed into the group, so that a visiting member, whether having moved to a new city or simply wishing to participate in activities while on vacation, feels like a member of the Chapter.

This, combined with the collective activity of group fitness, in a sense replaces something the veteran is familiar with – group physical fitness performed during military service. Similar to physical fitness during military service, the veteran often has no control over the workout of the day (though in RWB they are allowed the chance to provide feedback and input), but this gets the veteran outside of their comfort zone at times and pushes him/her physically and mentally, often in ways they have not experienced since their military service. This collective activity of facing and overcoming challenges, all while dressed the same, provides a very familiar environment for the veteran and re-instills that sense of camaraderie and identity that the veteran has often lost when transitioning out of military service. In an unfamiliar, sometimes confusing or off-putting civilian world, a few hours with Team RWB can provide a familiar environment which "makes sense" to veteran participants. Day-to-day, veterans struggling to find their way in life may find a sense of purpose in setting new physical goals, or in mentoring those who are struggling within the organization. Other members of the chapter find ways to connect with non-veteran members of the community, and even more learn about benefits and services they may be eligible for.

The strength of the team leads members to look after each other, and when a regular attendee fails to attend, they will likely receive a phone call or a visit, checking up on them or goading them to attend the next event. Attracted by the "fun" of physical activity and the opportunity to feel like they belong again, these veterans benefit from a host of secondary effects that promote physical and mental health and wellbeing. Likewise, these benefits serve as a bulwark against the downward spiral that some veterans face, which can eventually result in homelessness, unemployment, substance abuse, or suicide.

Barriers to Impact

Team RWB has grown rapidly since its inception in 2010. Executive Director Blayne Smith feels that the direction and structure of the organization is on the right track, but acknowledges that "it's the human and financial capital...that's really holding us back." The organization is highly dependent on unpaid volunteers, and Smith would ideally like to incorporate more paid Regional Directors who could help support the local Chapters.

The rapid growth in awareness and membership will be a challenge for Team RWB leadership unless this growth is paralleled by an increase in funding. A subtle challenge to increasing prospective funders and partners is that many of these organizations look for immediate, identifiable impact. For example, providing sponsorship or funding to help alleviate homelessness among veterans and providing them with accommodation is more easily identified than creating a sense of community belonging and connectedness, which RWB sees as critically important for many veterans to keep them engaged in education and employment. While Team RWB strongly believes that their programming restores a sense

of camaraderie, identity, and purpose, and that the provision of these lost qualities helps prevent veterans from a downward spiral, this can be difficult to articulate to potential funders. For example, the counterfactual is difficult to prove: Were it not for Team RWB, would a given veteran be homeless today? Creating an awareness of this type of service and how crucial a piece it plays in the veteran's successful reintegration will be a message that Team RWB will need to develop and communicate to current and potential sponsors. In support of this effort, Team RWB also seeks to expand and formalize efforts to collect data on the impacts of the varied services it provides both directly and indirectly.

Ongoing Efforts to Enhance Impact

One key area that Smith and his team will focus on as priority goals for Team RWB will be to grow the strategic partnership with current sponsors, in addition to exploring sponsorship opportunities through the newly created Director of Development position. Additionally, Team RWB seeks to hire a Communications Director in order to create consistency at both the local and national levels, providing branding and direction for the organization and its members.