

Veteran Voices: SITREP - Episode #25 - Travis Manion Foundation and Merging Vets and Players

[Amy Tiemeyer]

They went down to a place called the Pizza Slice in Flusia and it was an ambush. And two marines were shot and he stood right in front of them and turned and engaged the sniper and he was the only one that was killed that day. So what we're trying to do is recreate, like instead of having a locker room or squad, we have a huddle.

So you have a new group to identify with and belong to.

[Tom Faust]

Welcome to Veteran Voices SITREP with your hosts Tom and Chris Faust. Welcome to Veteran Voices SITREP. I am your host Tom Faust with my son and co-host Chris.

We're both Army veterans. Our mission is to empower fellow veterans by connecting them with the tools they need to thrive in civilian life. Together we can build a supportive community that honors the service and sacrifices of our fellow veterans while paving the way for a brighter future.

Today we have Amy Thiemeier and she's joining us from the Travis Manion Foundation and we might also talk about another organization she works with called Merging Vets and Players. Amy, I believe you are the manager of the Travis Manion Foundation in the Pacific Northwest. Do you want to go ahead and tell us a little bit about yourself and how you got involved with this?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

Sure, thank you. Thank you for having me on. I'm also an Army veteran and a Navy Reserve veteran.

I started working with the Travis Manion Foundation back in 2019, kind of during the pandemic. I always joke that I kind of got bamboozled. A lady who had my position was at an event that I was doing and she was like, oh, I think you need to learn about the Travis Manion Foundation.

Because I'm such a volunteer-holic, I kind of had felt like I was at my bandwidth. I'm like, oh, that sounds nice, but I'm not that interested. She's like, no, just kidding.

You are. We did a couple things together and then all of a sudden she's sending me links for e-courses. I was like, did I agree to something?

The last thing that we did was a fundraiser and there was wine. I'm like, did I say something and I'm not remembering it? What's happening?

She's like, oh, you're so funny. She just kept on sending me the links. The content was really, really great.

It's the first time that working with veterans and working with youth came together for me. I'd always done my youth development, safe spaces, different things like that over here and they didn't even know I was a veteran. I did things with veteran organizations over here that was tied more to work.

I finally went through everything and then I was getting a background check, which kind of made me laugh. I'm like, I really need to know, did I volunteer for a program, an event? Cool story, bro, but I just need to figure out how to go forward because I didn't fully understand what the Travis Manion Foundation was trying to accomplish.

Now I get that all of those could be true. When somebody goes through the training process, it then kind of puts the ball in their court to where they can do a series of character courses with kids or they could do a one and done presentation or they could do a service project coordination and different things like that. It really was just like opening the door to opportunities versus I'm going to do this one thing kind of thing.

It just hadn't been anything I had seen before, so I wasn't quite grasping what she was saying when we were talking about things. Then I started, like I said, volunteering for them for about two years before coming on staff. That person is still with the Travis Manion Foundation.

She's now over volunteer engagement and lives in Texas. Her husband retired out of the army and they moved to Texas, but that's kind of how I got involved with the Travis Manion Foundation. It is amazing just the impacts of getting and the vision of getting veterans and families of the fallen invested in community and working with kids because we've learned that one in three kids don't feel like they have an adult mentor.

Then 60% of those who leave service feel like they have a loss of purpose and oftentimes families of the fallen don't really feel like they fit in anywhere. I love that the kids that we work with don't have to be military, so it's kind of the sky's the limit. It could be a basketball team or a football group or baseball or basket weavers of America.

So it's just a really neat organization because the number one thing is to get people involved in the community and also to take their own personal development seriously.

[Tom Faust]

Yeah, and you're talking about working with youth, whether military, families or not. That's great. Just all the youth needs the help, I'm sure.

Can you tell us something about basically the mission? What is the mission of the Travis

Manion Foundation? Besides working with youth in general, is there more of a specific mission?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

Well, the overall goal is to improve our nation's character. I think it's just really that simple. We want to improve ourselves so that we're the best versions of ourselves and then we want to get involved in our community.

It is veterans, families of the fallen and inspired civilians. So we're open to all, but the Travis Manion Foundation really pours into the veteran and the family of the fallen community in order to empower them to do some really great things within their local areas.

[Chris Faust]

Okay, so how does it, how does the foundation empower the veterans and the families of the fallen to develop the character of the future generations?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

So we do it in a couple different ways. One, we have a program called the Spartan Leadership Program. And so it's a cohort every year, about 35 people made up of those two groups.

And it's a deep dive into your professional life. It's about seven months long. It is free for the veteran and family of the fallen.

And you go out on an expedition and then you spend weekly doing homework, working with different speakers that they do like a Zoom call every single Sunday evening. And then they have a, they call it a CIP community impact project, each person. And so then when they graduate, they actually graduate at NASA in Dallas and they present what their community impact project is.

So then, you know, as region staff, we're there to support and help ensure that the project comes to fruition. And so that's one thing, one big way is our Spartan Leadership Program. But even our Character Does Matter, which is the working with youth doing either the presentation or the character courses, you have to do some personal development courses.

And then we do a background check on you and then you can work with them. So that volunteer or that mentor gets that initial training. Then we do summit, a local summit and a national summit every year.

So we're still talking about, you know, best practices, self-care, well-being, different things like that. We're studying the impacts of mindset on our Spartans to make sure,

you know, and having open conversations about not taking on too much. But also, you know, we found that if you do like two different areas of service within TMF, that's sort of like the secret sauce where people have the most increase in well-being.

When you're doing just one thing, it helps, but it's sometimes you can kind of get pigeonholed. If you do like five things, then maybe you're doing too much. And so trying to balance that, you know, like when you're a non-profit, not just take and we're empowering our veterans and we're really concerned about their well-being, what does that look like for us?

And so just being cautious that we're making sure that people are enjoying their volunteering. Because I always say, if you're volunteering is doing what it's supposed to, you should feel energized when you're done. Like when I work with kids, high schoolers, which a lot of people don't love.

I love working with high schoolers. I walk out of the school on cloud nine. Like that is my favorite place to serve.

If you have me serve with kindergartners, they suck my life force. You know, you have other people who absolutely love liberals and I'm a grandma and I love my grandkids and stuff like that, but it just takes so much energy from me. I love those dynamic conversations.

I love pushback on dogma, different things like that. So I just really enjoy the high school or middle school and high school. And then, but it's learning that.

So you're touching base with your volunteers, your mentors and making sure they feel that way. If they don't feel that way, they're not in the right space. And so maybe they wanted to do their kid's basketball team or something like that, but it's arduous for them.

So if they do that once in a blue moon, that's okay. But if they do that, you know, for too long, it's just going to be too much.

[Tom Faust]

The organization is named after first Lieutenant Travis Mannion. What, how does his name or how does he come into this, that the foundation is named for him?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

Okay. So the foundation was created after he died in Fallujah back in 2007. And so his personal ethos was if not me, then who?

And he really believed that, you know, we need to spend some time developing our character and then we need to get more involved. Like, you know, there's a lot of, well,

that's not my problem. You know, I didn't get it that way, whatever kind of attitude he felt even in the military.

And so he loved the movie 300, loved just the philosophy of, if not me, then who? And he was at a sports game and his brother-in-law actually had said, if I push you down the stairs, you'll break your ankle and you won't have to deploy. And his exact statement was, but if not me, then who?

Someone who's less ready, who's less prepared, you know, different things like that. And even on the day that he passed, he wasn't even supposed to be there. He was supposed to do a humanitarian mission, handing out school supplies.

And his buddy was like, I'm wiped. Can we trade places? I'm just exhausted.

And so he's like, sure thing. And so his buddy went and handed out school supplies. They went down to, it's a place called the Pizza Slice in Fallujah.

And it was an ambush and two Marines were shot and he stood right in front of them and turned and engaged the sniper. And he was the only one that was killed that day. So he lived and died his ethos.

[Chris Faust]

Yeah. That's amazing. Yeah.

Do you happen to have any examples of how the foundation's mission has positively impacted veterans in the communities?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

I have in this area. Yeah. It's getting veterans that are like, oh my goodness.

I had one that did a CDM and was like, this is amazing. I could do this every day. And I'm like, yes, you're in the right spot.

I've had a mentor say that, you know, this saved their life. Like it made them reflect on themselves and then get involved. And they didn't realize how much that would pour into them.

You know, a lot of people will agree to something because they're doing it for you as a buddy, you know, or I think you're doing a great thing, but they don't realize how much they're going to enjoy it once they start doing it.

[Chris Faust]

Yeah. I think that's with a lot of things too. It's like, you don't really know how, something like, hey, this looks cool, but you don't really know until you actually do it.

So you might go in initially thinking, all right, I'm going to help out a buddy. No problem. Or yeah, you know, it's just going to see what it's about.

And then something about it catches you and then you're like, oh, okay. Wow. This is much better than I was thinking.

That's the best way to go about anything that you do. Whether you're giving your time for something is when you go into it and you realize, wow, I didn't realize that this was what it was and I want to do it more.

[Amy Tiemeyer]

Yeah. Yeah. And I think like, like I said before, I think the amazing thing about this is actually the, the kid component where, you know, like you have a lot of veteran service organizations doing great work, but sometimes it kind of feels, it can also get very politicky and mundane where I feel like we're like, okay, so we did junior ROTC at Lincoln high school last couple of years, but I've changed the mentors that go there. So it's newer for the kids, but the mentors there for the whole school season. So they get that relationship opportunity going on both sides.

But then the next year it's that one mentor and putting them maybe at a different school. So they get new kids to work with and new relationships with teachers and different things like that. And that's how we're making bigger impacts.

You know, I was at a backpack giveaway yesterday with the Tacoma police department. And when the kids came up and he goes, I have like 10 pins from this organization because they're at my school all the time. And it was really good.

My boss was there. And so he goes, that's what I like to hear. And I'm like, I know.

Right. So you should know exactly what your top character strength is. Tell us about you.

And he's like, oh, well, yeah, this, you know, and so I think it was really great because, you know, the kids that we were serving were so grateful. Like we had them putting their top character strength on this board and then we give them a backpack with school supplies. And I was showing that there was so much top character strength as hope, as gratitude, humor, teamwork.

And it was just really interesting that this demographic that has it a little bit harder had just some real beautiful character strengths that I thought was very true. You know, like we had one young lady that came up and hers was teamwork. It was the oldest of seven kids.

I'm like, I bet it is.

[Tom Faust]

Yeah. Wow. So and you've been mentioning the character does matter, that program.

How do how do veterans families and, you know, so you're talking about the mentors and stuff. How do people get involved with this to to do the mentoring, to join into these programs?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

Yeah, it's all online. Great question. Thank you.

And so you just join the mission and then you do it shows online learning and then you put in an application and it's a couple hours online. You take a character kind of assessment test through the VIA survey, find out what your character strengths are, and then you do courses. So you learn basically how to lean into your strengths.

So it's leading with your strengths is one of the course names. And that's really good because a lot of times here again, we get confused because you're good at something doesn't necessarily mean that you enjoy it. Right.

You know, you talk to a lot of accountants about that or even lawyers, you know, different things. But if you find out what your character strength is and you lean into your top strengths, that's where it's way more fun. You know, I always say I can lift a 500 pound weight 100 times a day.

I can lift a 300 pound weight once, but we get used to sometimes lifting the heavier weights and we need to learn to to really enjoy our personal strengths. But a lot of people don't even know what they are to know how to navigate. So you go through that and then they teach you how to use the website to download curriculum, look at, you know, a presentation versus character courses versus even doing an op legacy, which is like coordinating the service project, different things like that.

And it's all free. And you know, you're completely done when you get your background checked. So but you will do one Zoom meeting that is with some co-workers of mine, and that is just to talk about best practices and make sure you understand how to get to curriculum.

And then it really depends if I will get notified that you've gone through it. And then I like to set up, depending on where you are, either a Zoom or go out and get coffee and find out like what things you're interested in. You know, I have a CDM mentor who is not actually interested in doing the character courses with kids.

You know, okay. But I can appreciate that he because it's just like that heavy lift. It's not that you can't do it.

It's just that you don't like to do it all the time. He wants to do op legacies. He wants to

do the service projects.

So and he has a like a restoration company. And so he would love to do something for a veteran's house or something like that. So I keep that in my mind.

So when I can get the perfect scenario, he can still do a character brief, which is like a 10-15 minute conversation about character strength at his service project and still be an up-to-date character does matter mentor. But also make sure that I'm not putting him in where, okay, so every two weeks for the next six months, you're going to teach a character course, you know, watch his eyes roll back of his head. And then I never see him again.

[Chris Faust]

That actually segues great into another one of the initiatives, which you just mentioned briefly, Operation Legacy. So you'd mentioned that, you know, working on somebody's house and something like that. How does it actually bring communities together?

Can you kind of describe that in a little more detail?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

Okay. So Operation Legacy is really great for building community, depending on and also like what you want to do. Like I did an Operation Legacy event a couple years ago when I was a volunteer.

And I had actually written a grant to pay for a new roof for a veteran. And it was a veteran-owned roofing company that partnered with me. And he went to his supplier and he got all the supplies for cost.

And then we had an excavation company that was part of our networking group too that came. So we did, his team did the roof. We did all the cleanup.

I think College Hunks, which is a trucking company, they brought big bins for us to put all the old roofing. And we actually built a fence and did all this work because the veteran actually had passed and his wife needed to move and the house needed all this work done. And she didn't have the funds for it.

And so we did this whole thing. But because we all worked together, it actually, we ended up paying for four veteran roofs to be done. In the amount of, we had TMF youth there.

We had, like I said, people from a networking group I was a part of with about four or five different companies. That's the perfect way to build community to show all of it. I think Maniac Meatballs, which is a local company here, actually donated lunch for the whole thing.

And it was really neat. That's cool.

[Chris Faust]

Nice. How does one get involved in this part of the foundation? How does an individual or group get involved in it?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

So that would be just emailing me. And on the Travis Mannion website, if you go like the team about us, you'll see a picture of me for the Pacific Northwest. And that email, my email should be right there.

So that's the easiest way. Or we have Facebook groups, different things like that, my name, or even any of the Travis Mannion Facebook groups. We all communicate so well that from this area, but went to the the TMF West region and put a request or something on that, they would let me know.

Washington is part of the West.

[Tom Faust]

It's not part of the West. Wait, what?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

Part of the Pacific Northwest, but not part of the West.

[Tom Faust]

Okay. Sure. That makes sense.

Okay. So you also do a lot of work with youth, as you said, you work for the high school age kids particularly. Is that part of, I know I read about your, about Travis Mannion Foundation, about youth clubs.

Is that part of what this is, or is that yet another thing?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

So that's yet another thing. Youth clubs is fairly new. We have two new programs, but youth clubs are where youth.

So say at, if we use Lincoln High School was an example, if a couple of the kids wanted to create a youth club in their school, we have a handbook for, they need just one mentor. So say that one mentor that was working with junior ROTC last year, if there was kids that wanted to create a youth club, Joe could do, could be the mentor for that youth

club. And the youth club actually would need to do one community project a year.

So that would be whether it's a cleanup around the school, painting, whatever, what have you. And then we have a new program, which is called CIP, Community Impact Program for, so it's one mentor with one to two youth, and the youth have to coordinate a service project on their own. So maybe if there was a youth in a school that didn't, there wasn't enough kids to do a club, but this one kid had like a passion project they wanted to work on, and I found a mentor to work with them one-on-one, they could do that.

Or I like the buddy system, I like two kids, because I just always feel like that they can feed off each other in a positive way.

[Tom Faust]

Is there a way that the foundation measures the impact of these things, so you can kind of track what's really working and what needs to change? Is there anything like that, do you know?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

They do track different groups each time. So remember when I said they were tracking the veterans, the impact on the veterans, this last year they are tracking the impact on youth. So if we do a whole series, how do they say they were impacted?

Which is always kind of like a scary thing to ask a teenager. But that impact survey is almost ready to be disclosed, and that will be interesting. But I also think like even when they did the one with the veterans, it was interesting to know that if you went too many things, it didn't have as much of an impact on your well-being.

And so the youth impact report, I think will be really interesting. And they asked some really unique questions, I thought. They asked one of the questions they asked was, is bullying ever okay?

You know, and so they asked these different questions. They asked questions about like whether they felt they had an adult mentor in their life, whether they felt people cared about them, all these different things. And then the impact of the coursework, but they also asked all these other things about bullying, about drug use, alcohol, all of that.

And I do feel the ones that we sent in were very honest. And so, you know, because so we had a handful of kids that were like, yes, sometimes bullying is for the best. And I'm like, wow.

[Tom Faust]

The best for who, I guess would be the question. Right.

[Amy Tiemeyer]

And it was interestingly enough, it was only boys that said sometimes bullying is okay.

[Tom Faust]

Yeah. I guess that doesn't really surprise me.

[Chris Faust]

So can you kind of discuss any like long-term professional or personal growth opportunities that the foundation offers to the veterans and families?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

So I think the long-term one would be the SLP program would be, other than the, if staying connected with us, every time we do a summit, we're trying to make sure that we're bringing new content, new speakers, different things like that. And even doing the character does matter work, that curriculum is being updated. New soldier and service member stories are being added.

New things are being included so that even you as a mentor, it's not the same 24 lessons. Now we have, I think, 48. So each character strength has at least two different options.

But then we also have Women's History Month. We have Black History Month. We have different ones so that you can have.

And I think that actually helps with still character development, even in myself. And some of the activities are really fun because we forget sometimes that, I don't know, the humor in teaching maybe, you know, like teaching teamwork and having one kid has a picture and the other kid, you have to say how to draw something as a teamwork build. You know, another one was, I brought like all these supplies, spaghetti, cups, plates, balloons, tape.

And I can't remember one other thing. And it was build an Oedipus. And so you give very little instruction.

That one was hilarious. It was messy, but it was hilarious.

[Tom Faust]

That sounds great.

[Amy Tiemeyer]

And so, you know, I just, I love watching kids. I had one kid and this one team, he's like,

can I get everybody just to agree we need 10 more minutes? And just, you know, like the antics and stuff like that.

And like I said, we don't have to have military kids, but that was actually a National Guard Youth Summer Camp. But I do have a mentor that's who they're passionate about. And so they do all the summer camps for Gold Star kids and Wounded Warrior kids and stuff like that.

And that's fun. So even though it's not a requirement of us, that's where he's passionate. So that's where I want him to stay.

[Tom Faust]

Travis Manning Foundation, that's what I'm reading here, says you emphasize entrepreneurial spirit as one of the core values. Do you encourage, is this like working with the youth or veterans in general to learn about entrepreneurship or how does that play?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

I think when they say entrepreneurial, I mean, it's like the example of doing the roofs and stuff. Travis Manning didn't donate \$10,000. I found another grant, worked with all these different people.

And so that, to me, we have just amazing Spartans across the U.S. that are very entrepreneurial in their way of seeing a vision and getting it to fruition, if that makes sense.

[Tom Faust]

Okay. So, yeah. So it seems like it's more of taking initiative, doing things as opposed to a business entrepreneur.

It's more of an attitude, it sounds like. Okay. So the other organization that you said you work with is called Merging Vets and Players.

Can you tell us something about that?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

Yes. So I'll go back just to go forward. The Travis Manning Foundation is absolutely wonderful, but it's not necessarily the place that you go when you're having a mental health crisis.

We reach out to other partners. And one of the other partners that has been very helpful, at least in my area with me, is Merging Vets and Players because it is peer-to-peer

support. And a lot of the people locally here within the mental health space and veteran resource space attend MVP meetings.

So the way it was until real recently was only combat veterans and professional athletes. They just opened and changed the bylaws to where it is now open to all veterans, active duty, and currently playing professional athletes and retired professional athletes. So it kind of opened a little bit on both sides.

And what we do is we meet at a gym and we work out for about 30 minutes. And then we have a huddle where we go through a lot of, or we set it up in a specific way. So I always say, we want to make sure that nobody leaves here with a bigger burden than what they came.

So we want to make sure that everyone has a chance to talk. We try to stay away from religion and politics, unless it's a part of your story. And then we'll try not to have any crosstalk.

We talk about being brothers and sisters in arms, so we support each other and, you know, don't slide into other people's DMs, that kind of thing. We talk about meaning what you say, say what you mean, but don't say it mean. You know, and that we come from all sorts of different backgrounds, so don't try to convert people to your mindset, whether that be, here again, political or religious.

And then we're very inclusive. So we have a lot of adaptive athletes on both sides. So we look when we're working out or working with a new gym to make sure that we have adequate accommodations.

And so here in Tacoma, at Armor Athletics, it is very accessible. And that's a piece of it, is that we can scale. So even if you're like, oh, my God, I haven't worked out in 10 years, you can come and be a part of it.

And even if you're just doing step ups or something like that, you're still a part of it, and you feel the energy of everyone else. And there's just been so many studies that talk about when you work out, you're endorphins, you just had a better place to both share and listen and be able to work through life's challenges.

[Chris Faust]

So kind of a two-part question here. So how does merging vets and players, how does it address the similar challenges that both veterans and former athletes or current athletes may face when transitioning out of their careers? Because an athletic career and a military career are definitely going to be two different things.

So kind of how are they similar and how does this program address that transition?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

Okay, so where they're similar is it's in your identity. So I think there's two parts. One, it's your identity.

So you're no longer a service member. And do you let your hair grow? Do you not let your hair grow?

Like where am I going to work? Different things like that. When you're a professional athlete, it's kind of you've done football for 30 years or wherever it was when you stopped, and you don't know what else to do because you've not done anything.

And I think in the sports world, it's almost very similar specifically to almost like an infantryman. Like there's not a great alternative job market for that skill set, right? So you played football.

There's like five newscaster positions for sports in the entire U.S., you know what I mean? And you're really having to dig deep and figure out where you're going to, how you're going to pivot, where you're going to go. And so that sense of identity is very similar, even though the experience is completely different.

The second piece is I was a part of a team. I was a part of a team. And now I no longer go to the locker room.

Now I no longer have a squad or a company or a brigade. And everyone else's lives are going a million miles forward without me. So these are the places in which we really identify similarly, even though to your point, it's not at all the same, but it's identity and belonging, which are the biggest impactors for suicide and mental health right now.

We have identified that. Yeah. And so what we're trying to do is recreate, like, instead of having a locker room or a squad, we have a huddle.

So you have a new group to identify with and belong to. Yeah. And I also think like problems can be different, which can actually be really great in huddle.

Like, you know, traditionally speaking, soldiers don't buy homes for like five of their friends the way somebody in sports can, right. But then those five friends are no longer, they don't like you anymore because you are no longer providing for them, which is really unfair. So that's a really different scenario.

But soldiers can look at things and help them compartmentalize or see things differently. And so sometimes that completely, you know, 180 degree different perspective is really interesting and helpful for the other one. And the same thing with the soldier where, you know, like I'm having a problem being hyper vigilant or whatever, and the professional player can go, well, have you ever done breathwork?

And, you know, you have a professional athlete, so they're usually pretty big people and stuff like that, explaining breathwork to a soldier who might not have seen that it felt like maybe it didn't have enough machismo. But you see a mountain of a man who swears by it, and then all of a sudden they're like, you know, I will go to that class. And so you have a certain amount of just opportunity both directions, where they're being valued differently.

[Tom Faust]

You know, since you said there's like this relationship between the Travis Manning Foundation and in this case, Merging Vets and Players, is the if not me, then who come into it at any point? Is there something that the vets and players might use that ethos in a sense to give them an idea of something to move on with?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

Well, sure. And we have a lot of overlap, which I love. Like a lot of my mentors do go to MVP, which I really love, because then it's understanding how to take your mental health seriously.

We need to get to a point where we see it the same as exercise. You know, the funny adage, you know, I ate a salad, now I could be a nutritionist. I went to the gym, now I'm an athlete, you know, that kind of thing.

That's how we see mental health. I go to a counselor one time, I'm cured. Versus I take my mental health seriously, so I do things regularly.

Yeah, so I love it when, if I can invite my TMF mentors to MVP, because then I know they're at a good place. And, you know, vice versa. Now, not every person goes both ways.

Like not everybody loves group therapy, and that's fair. You know, so, you know, some people might do better with equine therapy, some to the one-on-one talk therapy, you know, different things like that. So I don't feel like one-size-fits-all ever, almost in every arena.

Right, you know. But this is something that works for me and a lot of people, and I'm really excited to be a part of it. Like, you know, you can either be in your circle of concern, or you can be in a circle of impact.

And so this helps me feel like I'm in the circle of impact.

[Chris Faust]

Do you have any, kind of like, do you have any examples of how it's positively impacted the life of a veteran or a former athlete?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

I do. We had two veterans who were experiencing homelessness, and at the huddle at the time, we had a whole bunch of people that were, we had somebody from the VA, we had someone from Nine-Line, we had a gentleman who was very familiar with VetCorp, and just different resources. And by the time he left huddle, he had a place to save for transition.

And then we got him on the short list at Permission to Start Dreaming, because he was dealing a lot more than what a traditional huddle could support him with. He had a dog, or has a dog, and one of the other veterans in the huddle took the dog so he could go to PTSD, the Permission to Start Dreaming camp for a week, because they can't take an animal that's not a service animal. And he then got to, went through the program, was, has been on the upswing, doing just fine, interviewing.

I got to reach out to Suits for Service members, and he didn't fit the traditional criteria, but I asked if we could have one suit, he's a very tall, skinny guy, they had one brand new suit in his size. So I went and picked it up for his interviews, and now he is still, knock on wood, housed and doing well. And so he's probably one of my favorite stories to talk about.

But even on Christmas this last year, I don't know if you know, saw on the news, a car went through an apartment, and that was one of our MVPers. She's a single parent Marine Corps veteran, and we all came down and helped pack her apartment up and gave her support, paid for a storage unit for her for the month, so that as she's finding new placement, and giving just the space for her to speak about her experience, her, she had two daughters, and the room that the car went into was the daughter's room. And one daughter was at a friend's house, and the other one had just walked out of that room.

And so she really felt like if they were in there, they would not be with us. And so that's an unusual thing, but I just felt like MVP really showed up well.

[Tom Faust]

So I'm going to go back a little bit to the physical activity. You talked about the huddle and the workouts that they do, and how the endorphins help you, kind of, it kind of brings you up and makes you feel better, which is probably, I guess, what helps them interact a little better with the group. So the physical activities that they do, I mean, you mentioned that, okay, if they just want to do the step ups or something, what other kinds of things are they doing in the gym, in the physical activity part before they actually sit down in the huddle?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

So we do, it's very similar to like a CrossFit class, ours is, in the Tacoma one. In the Renton one, it's called something else. It's not as close to CrossFit, but some of the other huddles, like in Vegas, they do like Muay Thai, boxing, they do all sorts of different things.

And we have done, we've also had the Veteran Yoga Project has come out and supported us like once a month. And we do all sorts of different, the gym, the power was out because of the city of Tacoma on Thursday, so we walked Chambers Bay. We've done all sorts of different things just to, one, keep it new-ish.

You know, you can showcase different types of abilities with different types of exercise. Yeah, we'll do anything, almost. But we all, it's only like 30 to 35 minutes long, so it's not a, you know, super lengthy workout.

But it is, I think just burning your energy off helps kind of reset you.

[Chris Faust]

So I was also reading up on this a little bit too, it looks like you offer both like virtual and in-person sessions. So kind of, I guess two questions, how do the virtual chapters operate? And kind of, can you explain the differences in effectiveness between those and in-person sessions?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

Well, I think that they're both really valuable. But the virtual sessions are so like you could be anywhere in the U.S. and participate. And they do run them on Zoom.

It is, the instructor is really a very thoughtful guy who figures out like how to incorporate simple things to work out. So it's not, you have to have a Bowflex and we're going to do this or, you know, a rogue rack set or anything. It's made to be scalable, but a lot of bodyweight things.

And then the conversation afterwards is really good. They have, they still have rules like, please, you know, don't do drugs or drink. Well, you know, you can't do that at our physical huddles, at least not do that with us knowing.

And you shouldn't do that on the virtual ones either, because it can change the conversation and different outcomes inadvertently. So then we consider the space to be gracious and safe. That's kind of what we're trying to accomplish with that.

But the, you know, the virtual ones are really great. And they, we have a virtual breathwork one that I think NFL football player. Here's the one funny fact about me.

I don't speak sports, even though I'm the program facilitator for MVP. I don't know who anybody is, which I think when you do a huddle is really good because I'm not like a

crazy fan person or aware or anything like that. But, and so the outreach coordinator is very important in this area because he does speak sports.

And so he does know when somebody says something, I don't always catch it. So it's kind of funny.

[Tom Faust]

That's cool. Are there any, I mean, you mentioned that, okay, so veterans, active duty, it's expanded up from active duty veterans and retired, but also active athletes involved, but is there any particular eligibility particular for veterans that they need in order to participate in this? Do they have to be recently, you know, like if they've been a veteran and out service for 15 years, is that, you know, that's still okay?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

Yep. Come on in. Yep.

Not, not a problem. And I think it's, I think it's good for the, the expansion because I feel like not all trauma came during war and people don't choose where they serve oftentimes or who gets chosen, different things like that. And so I think even with people who, who didn't go, there's a lot of survivors guilt.

MST is actually more common in garrison than it is deployed. You know, a lot of different things where mental health is concerned that, you know, is impactful if it were. And so I'm really excited for the changes.

I think it's, it's good. And I think it's good on both sides. The professional athletes can be currently athletes because, you know, you never know if they got sidelined, but they're still technically not retired or whatever, we could be a real benefit for them.

So they can just, you know, be ahead of the game. Same with the active duty of understanding mental health, the components and, and getting a new group of belonging.

[Tom Faust]

So it's not just combat veterans then. I think it was at one point. Yeah.

Okay. That's, yeah, it's good. It sounds great that they opened it up some.

Has there been like public recognition for, you know, for its approach or anything supporting the veterans and athletes? I guess I'm trying to say, you know, awards or anything like that to talk about.

[Amy Tiemeyer]

The VA has asked last year, Nate Boyer, who's founder of MVP and me and Mike Washington all spoke at the Washington state mental health summit. And I think the VA in Washington state at least has, has run articles about us a couple of times now. And so, and maybe even the VA nationwide.

So I do feel like we're being seen. I think, you know, it's, you know, it's nice to, to be recognized. But I'm not necessarily paying attention more than at least participating in what I think would benefit our membership.

[Tom Faust]

I guess what I'm thinking is how, how do people find out about MVP in order to, you know, to even know that it exists, for instance, other than hopefully they watch this podcast.

[Amy Tiemeyer]

Yeah. This, the website, I think, you know, we each do flyers for the gyms that we work out. So locally in there, that area, I think Facebook also, especially for the virtual, I think virtual is really great.

Like I said, for the areas that we aren't in. So I would say probably the website is the easiest place to find out, like, if we're in your area, how to plug in different things like that.

[Tom Faust]

Okay. And what areas, I know you mentioned, well, obviously, you know, Tacoma area, you mentioned Vegas, what areas are currently covered?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

So there is Dallas, Texas, Vegas, LA. I, mine is called Seattle, but I did lobby for a name change since we're in Renton, Tacoma, and then I might be doing a yoga session once a month in Lacey. So I kind of like a PNW name rather than Seattle, because that gets confusing.

Atlanta, Georgia. And then we're trying to revive New York is basically kind of where we're at.

[Tom Faust]

Okay. So pretty much across the country, at least. That's good.

Yeah. Is there anything that you wanted to talk about that we haven't touched on? Pretty much any subject you wanted to talk about?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

No. Other than maybe my book, you know, *Stories of a Volunteeraholic*, just as ways to get in. I wrote that book to try to inspire people to think outside the box when they volunteer and to really, really shoot for their joy.

And like, I think as a nation, we need to stop judging one another. So if you want to work for a cat charity, you work for the cat charity. You want to work for the whale charity, work for the whale charity.

I'll work with the kids. You know, someone else can work for cleaning up our environment and, you know, different things like that. But if you're volunteering and you're overwhelmed and you're burned out, you need to reassess because your volunteerism should be what's pouring into you.

And I really, really believe that. And I believe that, you know, life changes us. So maybe once, you know, when I began, I love working with kids, but maybe I need a break right now and I need to go get involved with Mission Continues and do some gardening.

Said Amy never, ever in her life. But it could happen to someone else.

[Tom Faust]

Right. Okay. Cool.

So, all right. So I want to make sure we actually get the title of the book. When you first said it, I don't think we'd mentioned that you had a book until afterwards.

So the exact title?

[Amy Tiemeyer]

Stories of a Volunteeraholic.

[Tom Faust]

Okay. And if you have a link, I'll put a link to it along with the podcast in case people are interested. They might want to order it from wherever it is that you have it available.

[Chris Faust]

Anything else you got, Chris? No, I think that about covers it. A couple of really good organizations that seem like they can do a lot.

And it's good to see that there's things out there and, you know, places, you know, that people can go to to help and do what they need to, to, you know, kind of give back to, you know, other communities or their community. And it's just good to know that there's

places out there that do these things.

[Tom Faust]

Yeah. And I think it's great that you're working with the youth a lot because these days, it seems like they don't get a lot of really good, I don't know what to call it, but, you know, encouraging words, let's say, and need to give them good background and really help out get the youth because that's, I mean, that's the future. You know, we won't be here forever, and then it's going to be their world.

And it would help if they're in a good place to start. So I'm glad that you're able to do the work with them.

[Amy Tiemeyer]

Well, I appreciate that. I really feel like I implore everyone right now with this political season being what it is and all the divisiveness, really lean into volunteering in the area that you love. Like, I can't impress upon it enough.

That will help your mental health. That will help us see each other better. That will help how you feel about other people.

And so you took anything away from this. These are the organizations I love that have served me well that I enjoy tremendously. But finding your joy and getting people away from the devices and dissension and into making things better.

That's all.

[Chris Faust]

Well, okay. That's a good call to action.

[Tom Faust]

It is, yeah. Okay. So, well, we really, really thank you for being on here and talking with us.

It's been great. And that, I guess we are done. And, Chris, you have your little blurb at the end about sharing.

Go for it.

[Chris Faust]

Yeah. Yeah. We appreciate everyone who tuned into the podcast.

Spread the word out. Like, share, subscribe, do whatever you need to. Get the word out

there because these organizations need to be talked about.

And we're just one other platform that tries to gather some information that might not be out there. Or if it is out there, put it out there again to just get out there and spread the word. Spread the word.

That's what we need to do to help build a better foundation for everything.

[Tom Faust]

That's great. Okay. Well, again, thank you.

And on that note, we will talk to you next time.

[Amy Tiemeyer]

All right.

[Tom Faust]

Thanks. Thank you.