COMING HOME TO THE ARTS

Bringing Creative Arts Opportunities to Wounded Warriors, Their Families, and Military Hospital Staff

Judy Rollins & Ermyn King
Society for the Arts in Healthcare
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Overview

The military experience

Implications for the arts

Allies in the Arts programming at Walter Reed Army Medical Center
The Military Experience

**Difficulties**

- Frequent military deployments
- Frequent training exercises
- Long duty days
- Weekend duty
- Frequent military moves
- Fear of death and/or serious injury
- Distance from extended family
- Financial strain
- Family separations
# The Military Experience

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## Benefits
- Financial stability; retirement benefits
- Health care
- Community and sense of belonging
- Education and job training
- Overseas assignments
- Part of a tradition
- Resilient families
- Pride and patriotism
Features of OIF/OND and OEF

1. All volunteer Army
2. Changes in operations
3. Some different stressors
4. Higher rate of survivors
5. Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) signature injury
6. Amputations
7. Psychological toll disproportionally high compared to physical injuries
Realities of Combat

- Combat is sudden, intense, and life threatening.
- It is the job of the Soldier to kill the enemy.
- Innocent women and children are often killed in combat.
- No Soldier knows how he or she will perform in combat until the moment arrives.
### Wounded in Combat as of March 2011

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<th>Country</th>
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<td>Iraq</td>
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<td>Afghanistan</td>
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#### Military Service

- **Army**
- **Marine Corps**
- **Navy**
- **Air Force**
Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
Frequent memories of trauma
Avoidance
Heighten arousal
Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Decreased levels of consciousness and amnesia
Blast or motor vehicle
Mild to severe
Difficult to diagnose and distinguish from other psychological issues

- Headaches
- Memory problems
- Word-finding
- Fatigue
- Changes in emotions

- Environmental overload
- Changes in sleep
- Impulsiveness
- Concentration
- Organization

- Dizziness
- Balance problems
- Ringing in the ears
- Vision change
- Seizures
Coming Home: Transition From Deployment

- Bonds (social support)
- Adding/subtracting family roles
- Taking control
- Talking it out
- Loyalty and commitment
- Emotional balance
- Mental health and readiness
- Independence
- Navigating the Army system
- Denial of self (self sacrifice)
Implications for the Arts: Life Experiences...

- Before deployment
- Deployment
- Transitioning from deployment
- Hospitalization/treatment
- Looking ahead
PTSD and the Arts

- **Art therapy**
  - Greater symptom improvement for those with higher levels of PTSD symptoms than any of the other 14 interventions (Johnson et al., 1997).

- **Drawing**
  - Fewer and less intense nightmares
  - Improved ability to return to sleep
  - Reduction in startle response upon awakening (Morgan & Johnson, 1995).

- **Songwriting** and participating in a **music group**
  - Trends toward a decrease in avoidance and intrusive thoughts (Coulter, 2000).
“A Few Good Notes”

Dr. Mary Rorro, the Violin Doc

Veterans Affairs James J. Howard Community Clinic, Brick, NJ
TBI and the Arts

- Appropriate expression of thoughts and feelings
- Processing grief, loss, anger, and issues emerging from health crisis
- Supporting personal strengths, growth, and self-acceptance
- Encouraging imagination, creativity, and spontaneity
- Impulse control and behavioral issues
- Perseveration
- Concentration, attention span, and focus

- Memory
- Sequencing, reasoning, and decision-making skills
- Initiation skills
- Speech and language issues
- Motor skills
- Sensory awareness
- Interpersonal/relational skills
- Social support

(Wissing, 2009)
- **Writing poetry**
  - Enhanced the development of the expression of thoughts
  - Enabled the initiation of ideation and restoration of language for individuals with aphasia (Pinhasi-Vittorio, 2007)

- **Music therapy sessions**, first half listening to music, second half playing an instrument
  - Improved mood
  - Reduced anxiety/depression (Guetin et al., 2009)

- **Singing familiar songs**
  - Improved speech naturalness
  - Reduced length of pauses (Tamplin, 2008)
- **Dancing**
  - Reduced balance and coordination deficits (Dault & Dugas, 2002)

- **Creating visual art**
  - Improved attention
  - Improved concentration
  - Improved memory
  - Improved organization (David, 2000)
Arts Programming at Walter Reed Army Medical Center

Washington, DC
ArtStream’s Allies in the Arts

An Artists-in-Residence Project Serving Wounded Warriors, Their Families (including Children), and Military Hospital Staff

Allies in the Arts Logo Design for ArtStream, Inc.: Nancy Gurganus
Project Goal & Objectives

- **Goal**
  - To extend opportunities in the creative arts for **wounded service personnel hospitalized in military hospital settings** (e.g., Walter Reed Army Medical Center), their **families**, and **staff**

- **Objectives**
  - To **enrich the daily lives** of **wounded service members**
  - To increase **self-identity** and **self-efficacy** to help enable **wounded service members** to cope more effectively with their injuries and hospitalization
  - To provide opportunities for **family members** to engage in creative experiences as a means of **coping** with the stress of their situation and normalizing relationships
  - To provide opportunities for **hospital staff** to engage in creative experiences to facilitate **coping**
Current structural elements of Allies in the Arts…

- Project administration, grant writing/fundraising, artist payments, and purchase of supplies through ArtStream, Inc. (http://www.art-stream.org)

- American Red Cross facilitation for the process of Allies artists working in the military hospital setting (e.g., Walter Reed Army Medical Center)

- Trained professional artists working in multiple arts disciplines

- Professional development for artists
  - Periodic artists’ meetings (e.g., most recently, at National Museum of Health and Medicine)
  - Opportunities for joint attendance at relevant training

- Regular evaluation by expert consultant-evaluator, making use of required artists’ reports with metrics
Allies in the Arts Project artists have completed …

- an intensive general arts-in-healthcare course
- a supervised internship in an area hospital
- a minimum of two years of experience working in a hospital setting
- a special orientation course
  - military life
  - combat
  - common injuries of OEF and OIF
  - impact of these issues on Wounded Warriors and their families
  - implications for arts experiences
- American Red Cross orientation and requirements
Allies in the Arts Artists

- Visual artist
- Creative writer/poet
- Musician
- Improvisational storytelling/narrative expression in multimedia artist
Storytelling/narrative expression in multimedia cart may include ... 

- hand labyrinths
- Pocket Stones™ engraved with words, as “story starters”
- assorted world instruments and sound makers
- magnetic poetry stand and trough with healing words
- visual art materials
- knitting board and spool knitting supplies
- tissue collage materials for memento boxes

Walter Reed Wards (& Family Room)

- Ward 57
  - Orthopedic
  - Amputations
  - 24 beds
  - 90% OEF and OIF

- Ward 58
  - Neurology
  - TBI
  - 20 beds
  - 40% OEF and OIF
Kickoff
Introduction
Overlapped shifts

OPEN STUDIO
for
WARRIORS,
FAMILIES
& STAFF

Thursday,
June 24

3-7 PM

Ward 58
Dayroom

Allies in the Arts invite you to join us to make music, paint, write some poetry, tell a story, design a T-shirt, and much more.

Allies in the Arts is a program of ArtStream, a regional organization whose mission is to create artistic opportunities for individuals in communities traditionally underserved by the arts, in partnership with the American Red Cross.

Open Studio Invitation Design: Nancy Gurganus
Handout

Nurses’ stations on wards

Family Room

American Red Cross office
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<td></td>
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For more information, contact Judy Rollins, Arts Chair, at 202-258-8276. Allies in the Arts is a program of ArtStream, a regional organization whose mission is to create artistic opportunities for individuals in communities traditionally underserved by the arts, in partnership with the American Red Cross. The Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation honored Allies in the Arts with a 2010 Quality of Life Grant.
Participants by Category
June 2010–March 2011
665 arts exposures

Average of 8.5 participants in each Allies arts session
Special Considerations for Allies Artists Working with Wounded Warriors

- Accessible, adaptive materials & approaches, and straightforward processes are essential.

- Novelty is helpful, as are materials for short creative experiences.

- Art projects resulting in utilitarian objects (e.g., practical items of use to enrich hospital stay, or for giving as gifts) are appreciated.

- As their hospital stay is often extensive, creating items that enhance room décor adds value to the arts experience.

- Arts sessions are scheduled to factor in treatments & therapies and the need to rest (therefore, late afternoon schedule for one artist and evenings for others).

- Level of family support is a variable. It is important to make available arts projects that may involve family members (including children).

- Anticipate potential for wide-ranging emotions & graphic story sharing.
Sample Adaptive Arts Materials

American Printing House for the Blind, Inc.’s DRAFTSMAN Tactile Drawing Board


Suzuki Musical Instrument Corporation’s QChord® Digital Guitar
Allies in the Arts Visual Arts Projects
Created by Wounded Warriors

Metal-embossed frame

Hand color-tinted photo for a “personal retreat”
Sample Warrior’s Collage Poem

the journey

Several times a day I lose all—but not him.
He crumpled the skin on his forehead, Frowning—so did I.

What keeps them at it?

When nobody else is looking,
When despair for the world grows in me

I gather myself together
And I feel above
the fears inside

I come into the peace of wild things

Starting here, what do you want to remember?

When everybody else is gone she knows
the dark, of grief.

I come into the presence of still
Safe Places

I rest in the grace of
Courage

they just forgot to 
mention that I’m kind.
Special Considerations for Allies Artists Working with Family Members

- Factor in that they have often traveled long distances, and may rotate support to their Wounded Warrior among each other. (Three-hr. Allies sessions are useful in this regard).

- Helping them express and address their own experiences and emotions enhances their self-care and reinforces their supportive role.

- Arts projects around which they meet other military family members, converse, and discover common ground enrich well-being through social connections.

- They often enjoy creating gifts and room décor items to leave with their Wounded Warrior.

- They appreciate collaborative or simultaneous creative opportunities with their Wounded Warrior and other family members.
Family Member Creating Collaged Gift Box
Special Considerations for Allies Artists Working with Visiting Children

- “Normalizing” arts experiences help them with adjustment and visits to a beloved Wounded Warrior family member in the hospital.

- Factor in that, in addition to other family adjustments, they may have been enrolled in a new school near the military hospital.

- Arts sessions are helpful in hospital rooms where very young children are confined with their family.

- They often appreciate the opportunity to create gifts for their Wounded Warrior.

- They may benefit from intergenerational arts activities that engage family members (including their Wounded Warrior).
Talking Stick Created by Youth Participant
Special Considerations for Allies Artists Working with Military Hospital Staff

- They are interested in learning about adaptive arts for those they serve, and may even suggest or donate arts supplies.

- They value renewing, stress-relieving arts experiences themselves; some have also requested professional development about Allies/arts in healing.

- They suggest Wounded Warriors and families to benefit from arts sessions, provide advance notification re Family Room schedule conflicts, and advocate for the Allies Project.

- They appreciate arts activities never experienced in another context, as well as discovering the creative talents of colleagues, patients, and others.

- They enjoy making gifts for family and hospital room décor items for patients.

- They may serve as “arts mentors” for visiting children and others engaged in Allies activities.
Evaluation Results

Enriched the daily lives of Wounded Warriors

Increased self-identity and self-efficacy

Used by family members to cope with stress and normalize relationships

Used by staff to facilitate coping
Common Thread: The Stories

1. That of the battleground, their injury
2. That of who they were, where they are from, and
3. How to put the two parts together to move forward to create who they will become
“Wounded Warriors are able to go to what’s real very quickly; they are non-superficial. It is breathtaking … the stuff that movies are made of.”