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5-1-2023

The WQW Annual Program Report – May 2023

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Recommended Citation

Sears, Kicia; Spaulding, Keoki; and Cantor, Gilly, "The WQW Annual Program Report – May 2023" (2023).
Institute for Veterans and Military Families. 452.
<https://surface.syr.edu/ivmf/452>

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The WQW Annual Program Evaluation Report

PREPARED FOR:

2022



WARRIORS
& QUIET
WATERS





▲▲ *When I showed up at the WQW Ranch, everyone made me feel loved and welcome. Above all, I felt safe and relaxed. Being able to achieve that feeling outside of my own home was a huge relief and allowed me to truly enjoy the other veterans and the amazing fly-fishing opportunity. Thank you WQW for providing me with a great experience and making everything seem less stressful. I am retiring with a new zeal for my everyday life and fond memories and new friendships!* ▼▼

—First-Time Warrior

About the project

In early 2021, Warriors & Quiet Waters (WQW) engaged the Evaluation and Capacity Building team at the D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) to gain a clearer understanding of their program impacts, improve the participant experience, and better communicate the story of the warrior's journey to thriving. This report reflects the findings from the second year of the WQW-IVMF partnership.

Year One:

In year one, the IVMF team focused on developing a theory of change, defining focus areas for metrics, and measuring outcomes through a series of surveys given at strategic points in a participant's journey with WQW. Overall, the year one evaluation found that survey respondents reported improvements in nearly all domains investigated, including the value of being out in nature, the value of community, and well-being outcomes.

Year Two:

The IVMF and WQW reflected on the lessons learned from the quantitative and qualitative findings from year one. Based partially on these reflections, over the past year WQW has been in the process of updating their current programmatic structure to enable participants to experience even greater personal growth across the domains of their lives. Accordingly, the IVMF had two goals in year two: 1) to investigate findings from year one; and 2) to expand based on year one results, while keeping the program's 2023 goals in mind.

PRE-FX AND POST-FX SURVEY RESULTS: FIRST-TIME WARRIOR PARTICIPANTS

Anger



There was a **5.6x** reduction in feeling angered, with **12%** of First-Time Warriors reporting before attending WQW that they were very often angered because something was out of their control, compared to **2%** after attending WQW.

Nervousness and Stress



There was a **4.3x** reduction in feeling nervous and stressed, with **67%** of First-Time Warriors reporting before attending WQW they were fairly often or very often nervous and stressed, compared to **16%** after attending WQW.

Rest



There was a **3x** improvement in sleep, with **54%** of First-Time Warriors reporting after attending WQW that they very often or fairly often had a good night's sleep, compared to **18%** before attending WQW.

Problem-Solving



There was a **2x** improvement in problem solving, with **27%** of First-Time Warriors reporting after attending WQW that they very often felt confident about their ability to handle their personal problems, compared to **13%** before attending WQW.

Clarity



There was an **1.9x** improvement in clarity about what a meaningful life is for them, with **55%** of First-Time Warriors reporting after attending WQW that they strongly agree they continue to gain clarity about what a meaningful life is for them, compared to **30%** before attending WQW.

Purpose

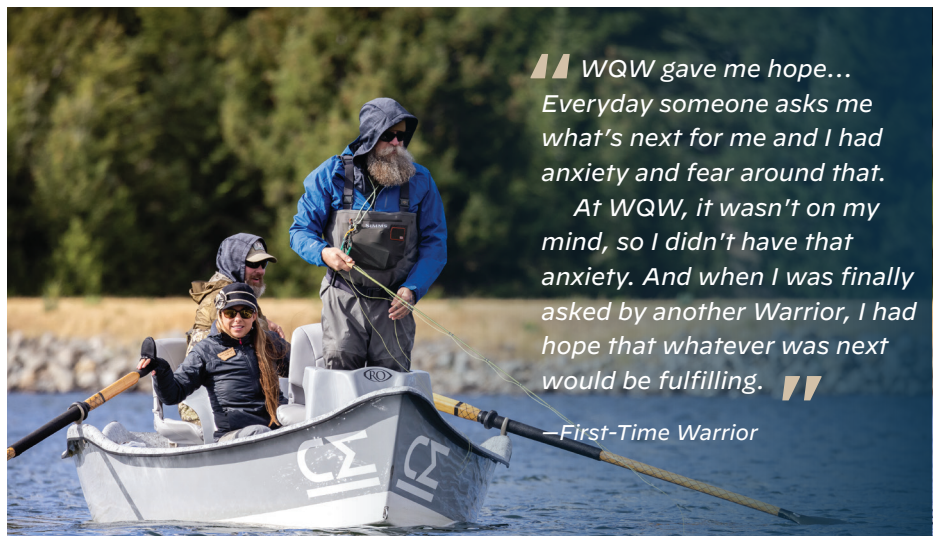


There was a **1.8x** improvement in sense of purpose, with **55%** of First-Time Warriors reporting, after attending WQW, that they strongly agree that their sense of purpose continues to grow, compared to **30%** before attending WQW.

Nature



There was a **1.6x** improvement in feeling nature helps them think clearly, with **90%** of First-Time Warriors reporting after attending WQW that that they feel represented extremely well by the statement, "Nature creates a space where it is easier for me to think clearly," compared to **55%** before attending WQW.



“ WQW gave me hope...
Everyday someone asks me
what's next for me and I had
anxiety and fear around that.
At WQW, it wasn't on my
mind, so I didn't have that
anxiety. And when I was finally
asked by another Warrior, I had
hope that whatever was next
would be fulfilling. ”

—First-Time Warrior



“ This whole entire experience is really special. It gave me a renewed appreciation for the outdoors and how good it feels to your soul to reconnect like this. To disconnect from technology, eat well, and be active and outdoors all day just felt so good. I felt so relaxed and peaceful. ”

—Warrior Spouse



POST-FX SURVEY RESULTS: FLY FISHING

Participants were asked about their experience with fly fishing directly following the in-person FX. Across the board, participants reported positive results.





PRE-FX AND POST-FX SURVEY RESULTS: COUPLES/FAMILY FX

One of the goals of WQW is to play a role in improving the relationships in a participant’s life. Regarding those who participated in Couples or Family FXs, respondents reported positive outcomes after attending WQW (n=59).

Relationships and Connection



97% somewhat or strongly agreed that they would like to repeat the experience with their spouse or partner.

95% somewhat or strongly agreed that they felt connected to their spouse or partner after attending WQW.

93% somewhat or strongly agreed that they felt the experience brought them closer together with their spouse or partner.

“ I can honestly say that this experience will benefit me for the rest of my life. What was considered to be a real “Happy Place” for me is now also a Happy Place for my wife, and now we can get out of the house and spend quality time unwinding and doing something we both enjoy, in an environment that promotes relaxation. ”

—Alumni Warrior





▲▲ I love being in the outdoors! Learning to fly fish absolutely sparked a fire in me for fishing using a different style. Once returning home, I used the gear provided on the trip and purchased fly rods for my area....Thank y'all for giving me the drive back! ▼▼

—Annual Survey

2022 Annual Survey Highlights and Results

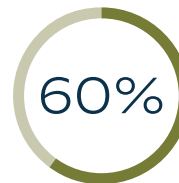
Respondents to the 2022 Annual Survey reported positive outcomes across nearly all surveyed outcome areas. As in year one, survey questions focused on nature and connection, stress and well-being, and identity and purpose.



Nature and Connection



88% somewhat or strongly agreed that they have tried to spend more time in nature since attending WQW.



60% somewhat or strongly agreed that they are still connected to the people they met at WQW.



59% somewhat or strongly agreed that they feel a sense of belonging in their community.

ANNUAL SURVEY 2022: FISHING OUTCOMES

Results from the 2022 Annual Survey showed that respondents are continuing to find time to fly fish frequently.

▶ **99%**

OF ALL PARTICIPANTS SURVEYED HAD FISHED IN 2022 OUTSIDE OF WQW



In 2022, the IVMF expanded some of the questions regarding the potential benefits of fly fishing to investigate what fly-fishing means to participants:



97% somewhat or strongly agreed that fly fishing provides joy.



94% somewhat or strongly agreed that fly fishing provides an escape from day-to-day challenges.



94% somewhat or strongly agreed that fly fishing reduces their stress.



90% somewhat or strongly agreed that fly fishing keeps them active.

“ I feel more focused now after my WQW experiences. My stress is under control and it allows me to do a high-stress job. I am still connected to a couple of close friends from WQW. ”

—Annual Survey



Long-Term Outcomes

Year two of the evaluation project allowed the IVMF to compare results from participants' earliest Pre-FX Survey to their 2022 Annual Survey results. In this analysis, the IVMF compared a participant's 2022 Annual Survey response to their first recorded Pre-FX Survey, either from 2021 or 2022.

Across four of the five stress indicator questions, the IVMF found that participants felt less isolated, angry, nervous, and stressed, and were sleeping better. This result suggests that outcomes in these areas persist past immediate program participation, and that participants may be forming stronger relationships when they return home after program participation.

▲▲ *Reconnection with nature and its elements are extremely therapeutic. It's a beautiful way to clear your head and get back on track with all the hustle and bustle everyday life brings. The stresses melt away when you're casting out a fly line with a simple goal of catching a fish in mind. It's not necessarily about the fishing, it's the silence in your head that you get from it. The demons go away, the haunting thoughts of missing fallen soldiers, or other stresses that creep into our lives disappears. The fresh air, the bubbling stream, the warm sun with the cool water its a beautiful thing and to be able to share that with my family is priceless time we'd be spending looking at our phones. The disconnect to reconnect. ▲▲*

—Annual Survey

Anger



There was a **6x** decrease in feeling angered, with **16%** of participants reporting before attending WQW that they were very often angered because something was out of their control, compared to **3%** after attending WQW.

Nervousness and Stress



There was a **3.5x** reduction in feeling nervous and stressed, with **27%** of participants reporting before attending WQW that they very often felt nervous and stressed, compared to **8%** after attending WQW.

Isolation



Participants were half as likely to feel isolated, with **16%** reporting before attending WQW that they very often felt isolated, compared to **8%** after attending WQW.

Rest



There was a **1.5x** improvement in sleep, with **33%** of participants reporting after attending WQW that they very often or fairly often had a good night's sleep, compared to **21%** before attending WQW.





“ When I attended WQW, I was shown and given a set of tools to better myself. The time I was picked to go to WQW actually saved my life. I was in a bad place, and when I went to WQW, it was just the right time. I almost canceled, but I figured I will try it. Never know. I’m glad I did. I meet some great people. I was taught how to fly fish by a great guide. Great man by the way! That man honestly saved my life. He gave me hope and meaning. By talking to me, showing me and having patience when I needed it. He gave me a sense of wanting to live and actually use the tools and the art of fly fishing to distract my mind and soul. ”

—Annual Survey



“ WQW has the best people that volunteer, staff, and participate. You can tell when a person is genuine, and without exception, every person I've encountered during these FXs with WQW has been focused on helping veterans. The “Moms” make every meal and clean up every dish at every meal. It really makes me feel valued that someone would volunteer their time and travel from wherever home is to cook and clean and converse with my wife and I for an entire week just to say thanks and support my healing experience. That to me is incredible and overwhelming. ”

—Alumni Warrior



Post-FX and Annual Surveys: Qualitative Themes

In both the Post-FX and Annual Surveys, participants are asked for feedback on their experiences with WQW.

Themes from both the 2022 Post-FX and 2022 Annual Surveys:

- **Gratitude and Appreciation:** Participants expressed how wonderful the experience and the WQW program was, and how grateful they felt for the opportunity.
- **WQW Staff and Volunteers:** Participants expressed how warm, inviting, and accepting the WQW volunteers and staff were, and how that positively impacted their time in Montana.

2022 Post-FX Survey Themes:

- **Well-being:** Many participants noted how the experience improved their overall well-being.
- **Veteran Peers:** Warriors appreciated being around others that had served.

2022 Annual Survey Themes:

- **Nature:** A common theme was the appreciation of nature, both during and after the FX experience.
- **Peace and Connection:** Participants noted how fishing provided them with an opportunity to relax in a peaceful environment and the ability to connect with their family and community.



Summary of Findings

The data suggests that for Warriors who participate in WQW, significant impact is felt across multiple outcomes related to well-being, nature, and relationships. Although the most dramatic effects are evident immediately following FX participation, the data indicates that some effects are sustained following participation. Furthermore, and importantly, participants have reported continuing to fish frequently after attending WQW.

Additionally, the incorporation of Warriors' families in WQW programming appears to strengthen their family relationships and provides them with an activity to engage in together.

Looking Ahead...

As part of the Built for More program, WQW is updating their participant experience and expanding on their stated outcomes. The new structure will merge the power of outdoor pursuits, the support of comrades, and the expertise of a proprietary personal growth process to guide veterans to their own definition of thriving. Over two transformative outdoor excursions and many months in evidence-based online coursework, veterans will build a thriving life of their own design from the ground up. This program is called Built for More and will launch in May of 2023. With these considerations, the IVMF will begin to measure outcomes related to Built for More's Pillars of a Thriving Life in more detail. These focus areas include: Security, Connection, Values, Identity, Potential, and Purpose.

▲▲ *WQW is similar to a mental reset but for life. WQW always impacts me positively and I couldn't be more appreciative to be part of the WQW family. The Family FX was absolutely perfect for myself and my daughter. WQW provided an amazing bonding experience for the two of us as well as with other similar families.* ▲▲

—Alumni Warrior



“ This experience is nothing short of AMAZING. My husband and I were able to participate in the Couples FX. Having this opportunity to disconnect from life and spend quality time alone with my spouse is what our marriage needed to reset. ”

—Alumni Warrior Spouse

About Warriors & Quiet Waters

Warriors & Quiet Waters (WQW) is a nonprofit organization committed to enabling post-9/11 combat veterans and their loved ones to thrive. WQW provides a secure environment that is created by their volunteers, guides, and other veterans that feels like a home. Through outdoor experiences, veterans find space to make meaning of their service and discover what a purposeful life means to them. Through this reflection, veterans can find a new mission in life after service as they step away from stress, learn new skills, find peace and meaning through nature, connect with a life-long community, and find their path to personal growth and resiliency.

To learn more
about WQW visit:
www.wqwf.org



About the D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families

Syracuse University's D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) was founded in 2011, as a partnership between Syracuse University and JPMorgan Chase & Co. Headquartered on the campus of Syracuse University and located in the Daniel and Gayle D'Aniello Building at the Syracuse University National Veterans Resource Center, the IVMF was founded as higher-education's first interdisciplinary academic institute singularly focused on advancing the lives of the nation's military, veterans, and their families. The IVMF team designs and delivers class-leading training programs and services to the military-connected community, in support of the transition from military to civilian life and beyond. Each year, more than 20,000 service members, veterans, and family members engage IVMF programs and services, which are provided at largely no cost to participants. The IVMF's programs are informed by the Institute's sustained and robust data collection, research, and policy analysis team and infrastructure. The D'Aniello Institute's work on behalf of the military-connected community is made possible by gifts and grants from individuals and corporations committed to those who served in America's armed forces and their families. For more information, please visit ivmf.syracuse.edu.

IVMF Evaluation & Capacity Building

The IVMF Evaluation and Capacity Building team provides a variety of evaluation services and technical assistance designed to empower organizations, government, and private sector partners to measure, improve, and communicate the impact of their programs that serve the military-connected community.

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SUGGESTED CITATION

Spaulding, K.I., Sears, K.K., Cantor, G.S. (2023). The WQW Annual Program Evaluation Report-2022. (B.R. Chapman Beers, L.R. Euto, Contrib.). D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF), Syracuse University.