22 veterans commit suicide each day. They pay a heavy price for defending our country. They are always there for us. We must be there for them.

-Leon Panetta, Former Secretary of Defense
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OUR MISSION IS TO GIVE TO PEOPLE OF ALL ABILITIES A BETTER LIFE. WE DO THAT WITH A COMBINATION OF RECREATION, THERAPY, AND CONTINUING SUPPORT.

We encourage. We empower. And we give everyone the tools they need to bridge the gap between disability and belonging.
WHAT IS RECREATIONAL THERAPY?

RECREATIONAL THERAPY:
Bringing together activities and health care to restore, remediate, and rehabilitate a person’s level of functioning and independence in life activities. Using goal-oriented techniques and counseling, recreational therapy promotes health, wellness, and social happiness.
Physical therapy will help you function with mobility.
Occupational therapy will help you with your daily living.
Recreational therapy helps people get back to being themselves.
We can be the glue that holds people together."

—Jason Schwab,
Recreational Therapist at New York-Presbyterian Hospital
Justin Patterson served active duty in Iraq between 2002-2009. In 2004, Justin took shrapnel through the eye. In 2005, he was shot through the foot. In 2006, he was hit by a suicide bomber. In May 2007, his Bradley Fighting Vehicle was hit by an IED. He took shrapnel to the face and pelvis, was knocked unconscious, and medevaced out. Four months later, his vehicle was hit by a large IED, overturned, and caught fire. Justin was ejected, but his crew members were burned alive. He was knocked unconscious and woke up in Langstuhl, Germany. He spent the next few years in and out of hospitals for his Traumatic Brain Injury and other combat injuries. He was medically retired 100% P&T (permanent & total) and has continued his healthcare at the VA since.

Justin attended the Higher Ground military snow sports program in Sun Valley in 2017. He lives in Colorado with his wife, Elisa, and their son, Maximus. He enjoys the outdoors, metal detecting, and treasure hunting.

“You won’t get to be the person you were. You’ll get to be a better person.”

- Justin Patterson, HG Participant 2017
A PURPLE HEART AT HIGHER GROUND

JUSTIN’S STORY
As told by Justin at the 2017 Higher Ground Hero’s Journey Gala

H-h-h-aving a b-b-b-b-brain injury m-m-m-m-m-makes me often st-st-st-st-stutter...and I st-st-st-utter r-r-really w-well.

But more importantly, it’s made me forget a lot of things. I have early signs of dementia and Alzheimer’s because of all the tissue being gone. But my wife...I don’t understand how she loves me...I wasn’t always like this until a few years ago when I had another stroke. My speech was very good. But after my recovery I asked her why she loved me and she said, “All men are like parking spots. The only ones left are handicapped or way the heck out there.” I knew right then and there she could put up with my stuff.
The real heroes are the women who put up with us... who put up with us during our bad days.

Everyone handles their PTSD differently...that’s one of the problems we have with brain injury...it’s like being a toddler all the time, you just can’t express yourself. Now I have constant mini-strokes and I’m kind of deteriorating. My wife has pointed out I’m only going to need one book, one movie, and I’m constantly meeting “new people.”

My name is Justin Patterson; this is not about working here in God’s Great Army. I wasn’t cool enough to be a SEAL...every SEAL gets a book deal. I was injured in Iraq. I was shot. I was blown up. But I don’t want to talk about that. I want to talk about an amazing journey I got to take right here in this lovely town. (One of the problems with a brain injury is you get sidetracked and forget where you were going...bear with me).

I had the privilege of...my wife and I...had the privilege of attending a Higher Ground retreat. I want to tell you about Higher Ground, it was an amazing experience. The lucky few that are allowed to attend are truly blessed. I say this because all of us veterans are on a budget, and we’d never be able to attend something like this. And to come through what we did and meet the people we get to meet; it was outstanding.

I have to be honest when I say that Higher Ground was a life-changing experience for me. Through the bonding, through the people I met... I’ve been to a couple of other retreats but none were like this where the staff stays in touch with you and makes an impression on you...and parts of your soul.

I want to give a round of applause to the people of Sun Valley. This is just the greatest place on Earth. This is the way every community should be.
As far as the donors go, you do so much for us. I’m tempted to give you my first born.

I’ll have to be honest with you, when my wife first told me about Higher Ground I was skeptical, thinking this would be another retreat where you have to promise to be someone you’re not. But here, it was awesome. And my wife told me that a Navy SEAL was running the program, I said, “Let’s go meet a super hero.” And I think that’s what you are: my idols.

I was just an electrician in the army. From the moment I touched down here in Sun Valley, I was treated first class. It was the coolest thing. I felt important again. I don’t know if you guys understand what it’s like to lose your self worth when you come out of the military and start being treated like a child because of your injury. But here, you remember what it’s like to take part in something bigger than yourself again.

They gave us awesome tools like mindfulness...I had no idea what that was. But this awesome guy, Dooley, taught me mindfulness and a few other things that you can pick up here. You can get some really good relationship tools to use.

I could go on for days about the staff and volunteers that make this happen. But, I’m on a time limit. What you have done for my wife and I...is kind of like...to be disabled, you can’t do a lot. I’ve got nine doctors...speech therapy, physical therapy...all through the week you get so burned out. Coming here is a relief. Being in the VA, which is an awesome place, four times a week gets old.
After I came to Higher Ground I felt like I was filled with new life, a new breath of fresh air. My wife, who is also my caregiver..., coming through this program allowed me to fall in love with my wife and caregiver all over again.

When you go through treatment like this they say it’s like a roller coaster. The high is like when you’re skiing and having a great time; it’s just a lot of fun. But what is different about this program is the feeling continued. What’s different about this program is that after this program it lit a fire under my ass. I was putting the carriage before the horse. You’re doing a lot of things, and I’m sure there are more to come. Whatever you guys are doing, don’t change a thing.

In closing...and I don’t know how to drive this home...
I have trouble finding words anyway...

this is an awesome freaking program and if you can find ways to help other vets coming through, I swear to God you’re going to save lives. You put people in a position to be motivated and reach back for our fellow veterans.

I’ve told all my friends this is an awesome program and they’ve all wanted to come.

And I just want to give one last round of applause to all the heroes who never had a chance to come home. Please keep the round of applause going for my wife. 🎈
Back in 1999, people with challenges or disabilities had no options when it came to winter sports. We invested in the equipment and staff needed to make sure anyone who wanted to ski could. **Sun Valley Adaptive Sports was born.**
My son started in the skiing program a few years ago. Today he lives on his own and has a job and a ton of self-confidence. I don’t think we’d be here without Higher Ground.

- Parent of a Recreation Program Participant

Our adaptive ski program was such a success that a group of parents asked us to start a summer camp for their children. Until that summer, kids with autism, down syndrome, or other disabilities weren’t able to go to local camps.

But with our help, they came to camp, they learned new sports, played silly pranks, and felt like they belonged. They left camp with the tools they needed to feel empowered long after their program ended.

Today our Recreation Program continues, with the summer camp, after-school program, Special Olympics, and a weekly fitness club for adults.

“My son started in the skiing program a few years ago. Today he lives on his own and has a job and a ton of self-confidence. I don’t think we’d be here without Higher Ground.”

- Parent of a Recreation Program Participant
“BRAVE IN THE ATTEMPT TO WIN”

This is the motto that guides the Higher Ground Special Olympians. As the Wood River Valley’s official Special Olympics affiliate, we serve over 50 children and adults with this year-round program. Our recreational therapists work with the athletes to set goals, train hard, make healthy choices, and feel a part of the team. Through this, they gain self-confidence, physical skills, communication strategies, teamwork abilities, and better understanding of social cues.
MEMBERS ONLY CLUB
Weekly fitness group for local adults with disabilities.

SUMMER RECREATION
A program for ages 4 and up (adults, too!) that teaches life and social skills through a traditional day camp experience. We join other local camps so that our campers feel like vital members of the community, and the community becomes even more accepting of people with disabilities.

WINTER RECREATION
An individualized program for children, teens, and adults, focused on helping them enjoy winter activities at the highest possible integrated level. We are also able to provide discounts on ski passes, lessons, and adaptive gear for any local residents with disabilities.

“My brother has autism. He never went to camp, or played on a sports team. He didn’t get invited to many birthday parties or after school events. I can only imagine the experiences he could have had if our town had a program like Higher Ground — a place where he would have learned new skills, made new friends, and felt like he belonged.”

– Kayla Pedroliini, HG Youth Recreation Manager
WE REALIZED THAT THE EXPERTISE AND DEDICATION THAT MADE US GOOD AT HELPING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES WOULD MAKE US GREAT AT HELPING VETERANS.

In 2005, we held our first Military Program. We invited 10 veterans and their spouses or friends to come out for an adaptive alpine ski program. And something special happened. The group not only learned how to ski, but they came away feeling strong and optimistic again. They felt prepared to take on their next tour — the one at home with their families.
There are 21 million veterans in the U.S. today. At least 1 in 3 suffers from depression, anxiety, or other mental health challenges.

We are here to empower our veterans and ease this transition.

Higher Ground Military Programs are 100% free to participants and their caregivers.
“This organization has helped me open my eyes to what I am missing in my life.”

—Higher Ground Participant, 2017
FORMING NEW UNITS

There is no other program in the country that offers the whole-life healing that we do at Higher Ground. We are the only program that invites the spouse or other supporter to be part of the journey. Together, the pair forms a new unit with other veterans and supporters in their program. They take on new challenges. They talk. They listen. They feel heard. They feel hope.

A PROVEN APPROACH

HIGHER GROUND AT HOME

The real healing begins when they head home. Higher Ground guarantees the veteran can stay active in recreation by providing the equipment and finances needed. We also commit to three years of follow-up support. We check in, we encourage, and we help them remember that they are not in this alone.
Nearly a decade after our first Military Program, word of Higher Ground’s incredible results had spread, and our waiting list has grown. **OVER 800 PEOPLE ARE ASKING FOR OUR HELP.**

**SO WE HAVE OPENED PROGRAMS IN LOS ANGELES AND WESTERN NEW YORK TO ANSWER THE GROWING NEED.**
Los Angeles

Los Angeles has the largest veteran population in the US. But an enormous lack of resources. With our local focus, HGLA helps form cohesive units of veterans and their supporters. And these new units are stronger than ever since they live near one another.

“We are creating a wonderful cycle of veterans nurturing their relationships with one another, which makes them feel less alone and more like themselves. And once they feel like themselves, they reach out and help others. The social support is growing exponentially. We are so excited about how HGLA is already transforming our community and making life better for these men, women, and their families.”

- Lauren Terschluse, Director of HGLA
New York

Western New York is home to another one of the largest veteran populations in the country. We chose to open HGNY to serve the thousands of local veterans and their supporters who live there, but also because it is a place of great natural beauty and a strong, family-oriented community — the elements that have made our Sun Valley program so successful. Working with the revered Beaver Hollow Conference Center, we are strengthening this community with a more comprehensive approach to care.

“Our Nation’s greatest assets have earned and deserve our support. Through this expansion, we’ve removed geographical and economic barriers so that we can serve even more of these heroes.”

– Director of Operations, Col. Rich Cardillo, US Army, Retired
OUR RECREATION AND MILITARY PROGRAMS

Skiing
Snowshoeing
Sled Hockey
Hiking
Deep Sea Fishing
Dance

Kayaking
Equine Therapy
Rock Climbing
Yoga
Biking
The Arts

Fly Fishing
White Water Rafting
Swimming
Tennis
Soccer
Archery
“Higher Ground helps vets like myself do things that we couldn’t afford to do on our own. It helps us push ourselves to do what is uncomfortable and move forward. Thank you so much for making my life a healthier and happier one.”

—Higher Ground Participant, 2017
You can see the smiles on the mountain or by the river. You can hear the laughter from the lunch table. And you can feel the breakthroughs happening in our daily debriefs.
RESEARCH HAS PROVEN THAT HIGHER GROUND PARTICIPANTS EXPERIENCE:

- INCREASED SENSE OF CAMARADERIE
- IMPROVED ATTENTIVENESS AND SLEEP QUALITY
- INCREASED CONFIDENCE
- DECREASED DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

Our participants and their families also tell us how much Higher Ground has helped them communicate. And we couldn’t be prouder of that. Because when people can talk to each other, they feel understood. And when you feel understood, you feel like you belong.
OVER 800 PEOPLE HAVE ASKED FOR OUR HELP. HELP US HELP THEM.

To serve everyone on our current waiting list, we must raise 1 MILLION ADDITIONAL DOLLARS.
5 RECREATIONAL THERAPISTS: $375,000

UNIT JACKETS, RODS, REELS, FISHING LICENSES, & GEAR: $150,000

OPERATIONS: $120,500

HG AT HOME EQUIPMENT & LESSONS: $120,000

2 TRUCKS: $75,000

PROGRAM INSTRUCTION & ACTIVITIES: $35,000

PARTICIPANT TRAVEL: $30,000

2 TEAMS OF MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS: $25,000

PROGRAM FOOD & SUPPLIES: $25,000

10 SLED HOCKEY SETS: $15,000

OFFICE SPACE: $15,000

STAFF & VOLUNTEER TRAINING: $10,000

5 ADAPTIVE PADDLEBOARDS: $2,500

10 ARCHERY PACKAGES: $2,000

TOTAL: $1,000,000
With a coveted 4-star rating from Charity Navigator, 89 cents of every dollar goes DIRECTLY into the programs. So you know your donation is going straight to the participants and their families.
For more information on planned giving, appreciated securities, or becoming a corporate sponsor, please contact:

Tyra MacGuffie
Director of Development
tyra@highergroundusa.org
(208) 726-9298 ext. 115

Higher Ground is a 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization. Our tax-exempt number is 82-0512146.
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