



# Sun Valley Adaptive Sports

Children, Teens, Adults, Veterans

We change lives and make people smile!

## *Higher Ground*

**Program Overview** (updated December 2006)

### **Helping severely injured Service members**

Higher Ground helps Service members who have been severely injured in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Global War on Terror. In collaboration with military medical centers, military service organizations, and advocacy groups around the country, the purpose of Higher Ground is to use sports and recreation as a means of rehabilitation therapy for disabled Service members.

The program accomplishes this by helping Service members develop the physical skills and self-confidence they need to enjoy sports and recreational activities of their choice. The program also inspires Service members to have belief in themselves and hope. The result is improved relationships with family, peers, and their community; improved performance at work and school; increased ability to face the challenges of their disability; and increased ability to cope with combat-related stress.

We believe Service members experience a healthier and more rapid recovery through outdoor recreation. In order to make a sustainable difference in the lives of Service members, Higher Ground encourages return visits, helps connect Service members to sports and recreation organization in their hometowns, and makes regular follow up calls to check progress and provide encouragement. We hope each Service member returns home excited to share his or her experience with family, Service members, and people with disabilities.

### **Dreams Come True**

Our goal is to provide the most meaningful, enjoyable, and therapeutic experience possible. To do that, Higher Ground centers on “needs based” programming. We talk with Service members before they visit Sun Valley. We ask them about their goals and objectives. We ask them about their dreams and aspirations. We discover what sports and recreational activities they want to learn or do. We then engage the resources of Sun Valley Adaptive Sports, volunteers, businesses, professionals, and the community to make their dreams come true—no matter what it takes!

### **Program Structure**

Higher Ground introduces Service members to—or reacquaints them with—all sorts of sports and recreational activities. We offer instruction in more than 50 sports. We also offer 15 arts and crafts activities. Some of the more popular activities include, alpine skiing, snowboarding, Nordic skiing, sled hockey, fly-fishing, whitewater rafting, cycling, hiking, camping, horseback riding, tennis, paragliding, and skeet shooting. However, we'll try to make any activity available to help a Service member's dream come true. We use certified recreational therapists, experienced coaches and instructors, and professional guides.

The program begins by contacting injured Service members. In some cases, Service members learn about Higher Ground through our relationship with a major military medical center like Brooke Army Medical Center, a regional Veterans' Administration hospital, Military Severely Injured Center, Department of Defense State Liaison Office, the National Guard, or one of our partners such as Disabled Sports USA. In other cases, case managers, liaison officers, or physical therapists contact us and provide the names of Service members they feel would benefit from Higher Ground.

Initial contact with a Service member is made by a member of our Veterans Committee, a former Service member participant, or our staff recreational therapist. This person often remains the personal contact for the Service member throughout his or her entire Higher Ground experience—and beyond. We believe this provides a meaningful and lasting social component of the program. It also creates a platform to facilitate a sustainable, long-term impact on the life and rehabilitation of the Service member. After the initial phone call, the Service member determines what type of Higher Ground program he or she would like to attend:

***Individual.*** We find some Service members prefer privacy during rehabilitation. In this case, Service members visit Sun Valley alone, or with a spouse or family member. The focus centers on one-on-one instruction and customized training to help the Service member achieve a goal or dream.

***Group.*** This includes small groups of three to five Service members (and significant others) who may have served in the same military unit, or a group of Service members who have a common sport or recreational interest. Gatherings include camping trips, ski trips, rafting trips, adventure camps, and training camps. They also include one-on-one instruction to help Service members achieve specific goals. These gatherings often create a “reunion” atmosphere for the Service members and their significant others.

In some instances, we invite local youth with various types of disabilities to join the Service members during some of their activities. This is another meaningful social component. It always turns out to be inspiring to the children and rewarding to the Service members.

## **Working in cooperation with premier organizations**

In an effort to provide the best programs and services available to Service members with disabilities, SVAS is working with three premier organizations. The **Military Severely Injured Center** is a 24/7 confidential referral and information service provided by the Department of Defense to prepare severely injured Service members to return to duty or to reintegrate successfully into their hometowns.

Visit: [www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/troops/injuredsupport](http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/troops/injuredsupport)

**Wounded Warrior Project (WWP)** is non-profit organization dedicated to assisting those men and women of the United States Armed Forces who have been injured during the wars on terrorism. Beginning at the bedside of the severely wounded, WWP provides programs and services designed to ease the burdens of these heroes and their families. Visit: [www.woundedwarriorproject.org](http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org).

Founded in 1967 by disabled Vietnam veterans, **Disabled Sports USA** provides opportunities for Service members with disabilities to gain confidence and dignity through sports, recreation, and educational activities, through its network of more than 80 chapters in 35 states. DS/USA is the nation’s largest multi-sport, multi-disability organization, serving more than 60,000. Visit: [www.dsusa.org](http://www.dsusa.org).

## **Costs and Logistics**

Higher Ground is free to qualified Service members. This includes all expenses related to airfare, lodging, meals, ground transportation, equipment rental, instruction, event fees, and other program related costs. The average stay for each of the programs ranges from five to seven days. SVAS coordinates all logistics.

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“It puts your life into perspective, and lets you know that even if you think you’re alone, there is always someone there to help.” – *Eduardo Chavez, Army*

“One of the greatest displays of appreciation for wounded warriors I have ever seen.” – *Nathan Spaulding, Marines*

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