



# Higher Ground

## Healing America's wounded veterans through sports

A program of Sun Valley Adaptive Sports

## *Higher Ground*

### Healing and restoring severely wounded veterans

In collaboration with military medical centers, military agencies, and service organizations around the country, Higher Ground is a program designed to use various types of sports, family, and coping therapies to heal, restore, and rehabilitate men and women of the armed forces who have been severely wounded in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Global War on Terror.

The goal is to build physical skills and confidence as well as to provide a fun, healthy, and meaningful experience so veterans can more easily transition into their home communities, or back into military service.

We inspire hope and encourage veterans and their significant others to take the skills learned in Sun Valley and apply them to their daily lives. The results are astounding: veterans return home with a restored sense of independence, a renewed athletic spirit, a desire to improve work and school performance, an eagerness to improve family relationships, an increased ability to cope with stress, depression, and isolation—and a new set of friends!

To ensure their experience and new outlook on life is sustainable, we help connect veterans to sports and recreation organizations in their hometowns once they return. We also help connect them with work, school, and community resources. We follow-up with each veteran for three years! Our therapists make regular follow-up calls, conduct assessments, and provide ongoing support and encouragement.

### Program Structure

To provide the most meaningful, safe, enjoyable, and therapeutic experience possible, Higher Ground centers on “needs based” programming. Our therapists talk with veterans before they visit Sun Valley. We ask them about *their* goals and objectives. We ask them about *their* dreams and aspirations. We discover what activities *they* want to learn.

Then, after a detailed assessment of their injuries, medications, and current therapy, we engage the resources of SVAS, volunteers, businesses, professionals, and the community to make their dreams come true—no matter what it takes!

Camps last five to six days and include six or seven couples. We also invite one couple from the previous years' camp to return as mentors. Camps are 100 percent free for both the veteran and their significant other. We're proud to pay the cost for significant others to attend because we believe they undergo just as much—if not more—trauma during recovery as the veterans.



Higher Ground offers instruction in more than a dozen sports and recreational activities. Our goal is to reacquaint veterans with sports and activities they once enjoyed before their injury, or to introduce them to new activities.

Some of the more popular activities include alpine skiing, snowboarding, Nordic skiing, sled hockey, snowshoeing, ice skating, fly-fishing, water skiing, wakeboarding, kayaking, whitewater rafting, horseback riding, mountain biking, skeet shooting, and paragliding. All our camps and trips include one-on-one instruction to help veterans achieve specific goals.

Our small group setting creates a comfortable, friendly atmosphere to facilitate conversation and peer-to-peer bonding. Veterans open up and share their struggles and frustrations while significant others share challenges about health care, parenting, and their new roles as caregivers.

Mentors play a key role at the camps. They provide a level of guidance, empathy and inspiration that can only be derived from a veteran and significant other who have learned to adapt and adjust.

An event begins by contacting wounded veterans. In some cases, veterans learn about Higher Ground through our relationship with major military medical centers such as Bethesda, Walter Reed, or Brooke Army Medical.

Veterans may also learn about Higher Ground at Department of Defense agencies, Veterans Administration hospitals, veterans service organizations, or Disabled Sports USA. In some instances, it's a case manager, liaison officer, physical therapist, occupational therapist, or one of a dozen organizations with whom we have a partnership.

## Testimonials

“This is the most therapeutic and fun event I’ve attended! SVAS is setting the standard for helping injured veterans heal.”

– *Ivan Castro, Special Forces*

“I have never felt so appreciated – ever! The whole week was mind-blowing!”

– *Colin Rich, Special Forces*

“For me to watch my son do things I never knew were possible was a dream come true.”

– *Carrie Moore, mother of Eric Jordan, Army*

“It was the best rehabilitative experience ever! . . . SVAS epitomizes the saying, ‘No warrior left behind.’”

– *Thomas Green, Army*

“There are experiences in life that completely transform a person’s life . . . this was one of those experiences.”

– *Joe Danes, Marines*



“Higher Ground showed me that I no longer had to hide from winter months. I now have the confidence to go out during the cold wet winter days and have a blast!”

– *Luke Wilson, Army*

“The experience made me realize I want a future in the type of work people at Higher Ground are doing.”

– *Keith Deutsch, Marines*

“This was a one-of-a-kind experience for the wives! It gave us a chance to share our feelings and struggles as we learn to cope.”

– *Mary Paiser, wife of Chris Paiser, Army National Guard*

“The format of this event was like no other! I had no idea it would have such a profound effect . . . I’ll be a better husband and father because of it.”

– *John Crabtree, Navy*

“The event showed me I wasn’t broken. It gave me the chance to feel like a soldier again. I can’t wait to go home and show my son I can snowboard with him.”

– *Chris Paiser, Army*

“One of the greatest displays of appreciation for wounded warriors I have ever seen.”

– *Nathan Spaulding, Marines*

“The SVAS team gave me a life changing experience! I thank them for their smiles, attitudes, knowledge, and patience. I now feel like a human and less like a freak with a TBI.”

– *Jerry Harbaugh, Army*

“My injury put a lot of stress on my marriage. This event has renewed our spirits and revived our marriage. The whole week was magical! We’re more excited than ever to do sports together . . . and for the first time in years, I can look my wife in the eyes.”

– *Jason Barefoot, Army*





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## FACT SHEET

- Higher Ground offers more weeklong, small group “therapeutic” sport camps for wounded veterans than any other adaptive sports organization in the nation. We serve veterans who were severely wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan. Injury specialties: traumatic brain injuries (TBI), blindness, visual impairment, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as well as amputations, spinal cord injuries, burns, and hearing impairment.
- Serve 100 wounded veterans and their spouses a year. Over the next two years, Higher Ground will hold 16 weeklong therapeutic sport camps, plus a handful of camps offering customized instruction for veterans with extreme disabilities. Higher Ground began serving wounded veterans in 2004. Sun Valley Adaptive Sports was founded in 1999.
- One of the industry’s early leaders to include spouses at sports camps. A veteran’s injury can be a traumatic experience for a spouse. We find spouses benefit from our therapeutic camps as much or more than the wounded veterans.
- Pay 100 percent of the camp expenses for a veteran *and* spouse. Higher Ground even pays for childcare back in the veteran’s hometown while the couple attends camp. Many camps do not pay for spouses or childcare.
- Have the industry’s longest follow-up care plan. Higher Ground provides a three-year follow-up care plan for every veteran and spouse attending a camp. We have a comprehensive strategy to connect veterans to recreational activities in their hometowns. We even budget funds to buy veterans specialized sports equipment.
- Nationally recognized as a “gold standard” adaptive sports organization by the Pentagon, military hospitals, VA hospitals, military care units, veterans service programs, and wounded veterans. Higher Ground camps are not “assisted vacations.” Rather, its camps center on therapy with an emphasis on impact and sustainability.
- Work with Brigham Young University and San Jose State University to conduct research—through Higher Ground programming—to measure the efficacy of sports and recreation on long-term veteran care as it relates to confidence, relationships, stress, fitness, independence, and community involvement. We will share the results and best practices documents with military centers, universities, and organizations working to improve the industries serving veterans.
- Offered free consulting services to more than a dozen organizations last year to help launch new programs or improve existing programming to advance the quality of adaptive sports services provided to wounded veterans.
- Started in 2005, Higher Ground programming and fundraising has grown ten-fold. Fiscal year fundraising goal for Sun Valley Adaptive Sports: \$1.75 million. Budget: \$950,000. The percentage of funding that goes to programs: 88%. SVAS complies with the Better Business Bureau’s best practices standards for charities.
- Higher Ground is the industry leader in media outreach to show the benefits of sports therapy that transforms wounded veterans into healing heroes. We also create awareness for some of the poignant issues facing wounded veterans: relationships, isolation, long-term recovery, community reintegration, combat-related stress, and the vast number of those with traumatic brain injuries (350,000). We have produced dozens of powerful videos and articles with well known media giants such as the Annenberg Foundation, CNN, Nightline, Newsweek, Associated Press, National Public Radio, American Legion Magazine, the editor of Warren Miller films, and many others.
- Beginning to work with legislators to secure a \$1.0 billion appropriation for sports therapy and fitness as part of the long-term recovery and care of hundreds of thousands of wounded veterans.