



Sun Valley Adaptive Sports

We change lives and make people smile!

Testimonials – Higher Ground

“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, US Army*

“I can’t explain it in words. It was like a dream. When I woke up the Monday morning after the event, I was thinking, ‘Oh, my gosh, I’m back in reality.’”

– *Ryan Dollar, Marines*

“Higher Ground was an amazing, fun experience. It was the best, stress-free getaway I have ever been on. I was able to enhance my snowboarding skills and learn new sports like sled hockey. Higher Ground helped me have a new outlook on life and inspired me to shift my focus and help other people with disabilities realize their potential.”

– *Joseph Danes, Marines*

“Higher Ground was an amazing experience that I will never forget. It was incredible to watch these veterans have a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence. They were able to realize that they still have huge potential to do whatever they set their mind to. Thank you Higher Ground and the wonderful people who both run and sponsor the program”

– *Ashley Danes, wife of Joseph Danes, Marines*

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

– *Keith Deutsch, Marines*

“My experience with Higher Ground was one the greatest displays of appreciation for wounded servicemen I have ever seen. My wife, my fellow Marines and I were treated like royalty for our entire trip. Everyone that we met greeted us with genuine interest of getting to know us and concern that we were all recovering well.”

– *Nathan Spaulding, Marines*

“My Higher Ground experience was a big confidence booster! It inspired and assured me that I could still do normal things such as archery, horseback riding, paragliding, and rafting, and have as much fun as I did before my injury.”

– *Daniel Seefeldt, Army*

“My husband was very active before his injury (long-distance runner). Learning to adapt to his disability was heart rendering. But thanks to you, I now know we’ll again be able to enjoy the sports we love to do together. We love you guys!”

– *Christine Seefeldt, wife of Daniel Seefeldt, Army*

“Higher Ground gave us hope. The program showed us that just because you have a disability doesn’t mean you can’t do sports and activities you’ve always dreamed of doing.”

– *Stacy Ezzell, wife of Jerry Ezzell, Army*



“My wife and I had the best time of our lives! Sun Valley Adaptive Sports showed me that there are endless opportunities for amputees and people with disabilities. I now believe, I can accomplish anything!”

– *Corporal Matthew Houston, Army*

“I learned to fly-fish! The skills I learned at Sun Valley Adaptive Sports will help me reconnect with my brothers, give me patience to reconnect with family, and the self-confidence to help my disabled friends as well as help me feel more confident as I’m out and about in the community.”

– *Sergeant Luke Wilson, Army*

“My fly-fishing experience in Sun Valley helped me learn an entirely new set of physical skills that will allow me to pursue this activity as a lifelong endeavor.”

– *Lieutenant Colonel, Dennis Walburn, Army*

“At other programs, we feel like we meet people – in Sun Valley, we feel like we made friends! Higher Ground provided an experience of a lifetime!”

– *Brenda Walburn, wife of Lieutenant Colonel, Dennis Walburn, Army*

“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 months and have a blast!”

– *Sergeant Luke Wilson, Army*

“Words can’t describe my experience . . . it changed my life!”

– *Sergeant Jared Biesner, Marine*

“Wow . . . it was a five-day rush I’ll never forget!”

– *Lance Corporal Mitch Ehlke, Marine*

“It was the best rehabilitative experience I’ve ever had!”

– *Lance Corporal Joe Lowe, Marine*

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

– *Sergeant Joe Danes, Marine*

“I can't give to these soldiers as much as you can Tom but I do pray everyday of my life for the men and women of the armed forces and their families. I will add you and your cause to my prayers in hopes that you can reach those who need you the most.

Thank you for making a difference in the world and giving so many hope. If there is one thing that makes Jesus smile it's those who give of themselves and ask for nothing in return. I am sure the smiles and determination you see are payment enough...”

– *John Kelso, Desert Storm Veteran*

“All the activities I did with SVAS made me realize I can live a more active life. Since I’ve been home, I started going to the YMCA two to three times a week. I’m trying to live better and be happier. I can feel my energy increasing and I’m spending more time playing with my son outside – and I’m sure he’s happier too. I’m not sure if it was the skiing or paragliding, but SVAS was the key I was missing for my recovery. My wife and I had the best time together – ever!”

– *Bill Congelton, Marine*



“It was an experience I’ll never forget . . . Thanks for a new and exciting outlook on life.”
– *Dan Acosta, Air Force*

“Awesome program! . . . It lifted my confidence, spirit, and hope to a new level.”
– *Eric Jordan, Army*

“It was the best rehabilitative experience ever! . . . SVAS epitomizes the saying, ‘No Service member left behind.’”
– *Thomas Green, Army*

“For me to watch my son do things I never knew were possible was a dream come true. This wonderful program enables people to grow in positive direction – both physically and mentally.”
– *Carry Moore, mother of Eric Jordan (paraplegic), Army*

“I’ve never experienced such helpful care-giving and rehabilitation!”
– *John Rhimer, SEAL*

“Amazing! It inspired me to try sports I never thought I’d be able to do again!”
– *Sergeant Martin Patterson, Ranger*

“One of kind! Encouraged me to step out of my comfort zone to learn activities!”
– *Staff Sergeant Eric Ezell, Air Force*

“I have never felt so appreciated – ever! The whole week was mind-blowing!”
– *Sergeant Major Colin Rich, Special Forces*

“It was so . . . healing.”
– *Lauren Patterson (wife of Sergeant Martin Patterson)*

“Our time in Sun Valley was the pivotal point for us to start another part of our lives both Eric and I. Since our time there, we have had the courage to embark on other endeavors that not only helped Eric but others as well. We are so blessed to have been able to be a part of the wonderful program that you provide and I don't think that words will ever convey just how much it changed us forever. We think of you often and speak of our time there and about the program fondly to others on a regular basis.”
– *Carry Moore, mother of Eric Jordan (paraplegic), Army*

“I was scared and afraid the first day. This event built my confidence and courage. I now believe I can do any sport, given the chance.”
– *Travis Fugate, Army (blind)*

“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 (blind)*

“This is the most therapeutic and fun event I’ve attended since my injury. Adaptive Sports is setting the standard for helping service members heal.”
– *Ivan Castro, Special Forces (blind)*



“I sacrifice my eyes for American freedom. After attending this snowsports camp, I’m inspired to sacrifice even more to help others heal who don’t have the chance to benefit from something like this.”
– *Casimir Werda, Army (blind)*

“All the instructors, volunteers, and staff—even the lift operators—were positive and encouraging . . . I haven’t had this much fun since my injury.”
– *Jason Waterhouse, Army Ranger (blind)*

“The format of this event was like no other. I had no idea it would have such a profound effect on my wife and me . . . I’ll be a better husband and father because of it.”
– *John Crabtree, Navy (blind)*

“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 (blind)*

“The community of Sun Valley showered us with compassion and love. We now know we are not alone in our efforts to heal.”
– *Marshall Crabtree, wife of John Crabtree, Navy, (blind)*

“I have never been to a city where the people have been so welcoming and friendly . . . It’s a wonderland of giving, love, and compassion—just what these wounded service men need.”
– *Jamie Pope, friend of Casimir Werda Army (blind)*

“I would like to personally thank you and the entire staff of SVAS for all you are doing in support of our wounded Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines. Words cannot express the gratitude I feel in seeing the great work you and your team are doing – the video brought me to tears. Please keep up the magnificent work!”
– *Capt Key Watkins, USN, Commanding Officer, Safe Harbor*

“I think the week at the watersports camp did more for Doug than his three-month stay at the VA!”
– *Jill Franklin, wife of Doug Franklin, Special Operations (traumatic brain injury)*

“Many think that a warrior’s spirit is broken beyond repair once they suffer such traumatic injuries. This event [watersports camp] showed any spirit can be restored.”
– *Jordan Parker, cousin of Jasmine Perry, Army (amputee)*

“It’s difficult to put into the words about the impact it had on John’s life. For the first time in years, I saw John do things I never thought he would do again. I now have hope John can share his new sports skills with our children. It’s all a blessing beyond belief!”
– *Kristin Henry, wife of John Puletasi, Army (polytrauma, traumatic brain injury)*

“The watersports camp showed me I can do things I never thought possible. It also showed me that all the pain and suffering of my injuries and my sacrifice in the war was worth it for people like the SVAS staff who work so hard to help and inspire others.”
– *John Puletasi, Army (polytrauma, traumatic brain injury)*



“Whatever the guys talked about during their therapeutic ‘boys only lunch’ has changed him. I’ve never seen him laugh and have so much fun in years! ‘Thank you.’”

– *Megan Palmer, Wife of Jason Palmer, Army (Visual impairment, traumatic brain injury)*

SVAS gives wounded warriors and their families hope. Many of these families are broken and lost. I often see defeat in their eyes when they arrive to the VA Medical Center for assistance. Without hope for a brighter future, and the knowledge that they can have a quality of life despite their disabilities, the families split apart. The excitement of their adventures with your organization give them a light, and I’m able to glimpse into what they used to be like when they were “whole.” We help them feed off of the momentum that your program gives them and watch them soar!

– *Jennifer Allison-Oord, OEF/OIF Transition Patient Advocate, Spokane/Walla VA Medical Center*

Seeing DeWayne succeed helped me relax and open my eyes to growth I needed to pursue in my life. At the event, I was able to step back, take a breath and relax . . . and what I needed to do regain my identity and be a better person for myself and my family.

– *Jeannette Mayer, wife of DeWayne Mayer, Army*

“I’ve been home for three weeks and life is great!!! I don’t think you (SVAS) really understand the impact you’ve had on each of us who attended the watersports camp. You do it in a way, like . . . it’s your destiny!

– *Dee Andalio, wife of Jose “Doc” Andalio, Marine*

“This is a phenomenal week. I’m new to this whole winter sports thing . . . but I’m on the top of a mountain snowboarding . . . and I’m dancing baby, I’m dancing.”

– *Master Sergeant Dexter Durrante, United States Army*

Today I was in the ‘zone’ in the mountains, sitting, gawking, it was a great withdrawal from the real world. It was rewarding because I was surrounded by people who could understand what I am going through. I had others with similar problems expressing themselves but with different words . . . today’s experience will be my new safe place”

– *Staff Sergeant George Paniagua, United States Marine Corps*

“I was able to do something with my disability that I wasn’t able to do before my injury. I thought, wow, if this was attainable what else is out there?”

– *Corporal Jason Palmer, United States Army*

“The look of joy and accomplishment on the warrior’s faces is unforgettable and priceless. This was the experience of a lifetime.”

– *Corporal Houstin Meeks, United States Army*

“For the other Vets that haven’t experienced this yet . . . It doesn’t matter what your disability is, if you’re missing both legs you can still go skiing . . . This program says, if you want to do it, you can do it, don’t let anything hold you back.”

– *Sergeant Philip Knorr, United States Marine Corps*

“Snowboarding in Sun Valley was rewarding because I was able to do it without my sight. If you didn’t know me you wouldn’t know that I can’t see. It made me feel as normal as I have in a long time.”

– *Sergeant Chris Paiser, Army National Guard*



“After attending the SVAS camp, I know now that I can still enjoy life and have a good time.”

– *Sergeant Major Kristofar Kosem, US Army*

“Your snowsports camp was one of the more amazing and emotional things I’ve witnessed during my time at the BVA. The good you have done can never be matched or repaid in any way, shape, or form and BVA is very grateful for your service to our blinded veterans.”

– *Stuart Nelson, Manager of Communications, Blinded Veterans Association*

“The sports helped me realize that I can still do the same things I was doing before my injury. I’m surprised at how well I did. With this trip, I can honestly say I was triumphant!!!!”

– *Corporal Anthony Gilkes, United States Army*

“I have learned that even though I have been stuck in a hospital bed and locking myself in my house watching TV for the last year and a half, I am in better condition than I thought. I also realize that I do have quite a bit of mental drive. I can push myself much farther and harder than I thought.”

– *Sergeant Charles Peterman, United States Army*

“Waking up with a headache, I pushed myself to go to the kayaking class anyway. Once I got out on the water, I was off. I had no limitations, no cane to walk with. It was just me, the boat and the water, free to go where I pleased. Man, I was in the zone, and I lost all sense of time.”

– *Doug Franklin, US Army*

“For years, I’ve been feeling like no one really understands what I’m going through. This is the first time since my injury I have been able to openly and comfortably share my pain, anger and anxieties with other warriors. The bond I’ve made with these guys has made me feel alive again!

– *Jose Andallo, US Marine Corps*

“It’s comforting meeting others who are going facing the same challenges as I am. This program has inspired me to find ways to mentor others. Through mentorship I can learn as well.”

– *Dominico Washington, US Marine Corps*

“During this week I found the confidence to try some of the things I used to do. I found confidence when I realized I am not alone. The other guys were trying new activities and had some of the same problems I do. It was reassuring to see their success despite their struggles.”

– *Raymond Andallo, US Marine Corps*

“This has been an amazing experience for me. I have shed my skin like a snake. I am now able to stand back and be myself again. I can take it all in and finally relax. For once I have no worries!”

– *Julio Quiles, US Army*

“Once I realized I was able to participate in these activities, I felt stress free, pain free and liberated. I forgot about the pain. I took a lot less medication during the trip than I do at home. In five days, I learned more sports—and learned more about myself—than I’ve learned in the last 42 years!”

Julio Quiles, US Army

“Before this camp, I was feeling more like a human calendar than a wife. The camp put things in perspective. I regained a sense of self-control. I’m now better prepared to face the challenges at home.”

– *Alicia Washington, wife of Dominico Washington, US Marine Corps*

“Like many of the women at the camp, we’re tired of feeling alone in our efforts to care for our husbands. The camp created a safe, intimate environment for the wives to create a “sisterhood” of support—one that will continue long after the camp is over. Finally!”

– *Katie Barefoot, wife of Jason Barefoot, US Army*

“My injury has placed 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, US Army*

“I actually learned how to fly fish. My courage and confidence went up this week. Fly fishing is the first sport I’ve learned that I can truly do on my own. For the first time since my injury, I am able to truly relax and enjoy myself.”

– *Sean Johnson, Army*

“Learning new recreation activities taught me that although it’s not easy, I can’t let my physical disabilities keep me from trying. It may take a little more effort and time, but I can do anything I put my mind to doing.”

– *Gilbert Magallanes, Army*

“When you are used to being the caregiver, it is hard to separate yourself from that role. Today, I watched my husband fly fish independently and truly enjoy himself. This was the best day of my year. You are giving me back my husband.”

– *Sherry Magallanes, wife of Gilbert Magallanes, Army*

“The quiet of the wilderness and focusing on the sound of river puts me in a relaxed state. When I get home and feel stressed, I will remember this experience and be able to let it all go.”

– *Emmanuel Rivas, Marines*

“While fishing, I had trouble reading the wind, seeing the fish and reading the water. It’s okay though, I enjoy the challenge without getting frustrated. I had the best day of fishing in my life, and I didn't catch a thing!”

– *Paul Haines, Army*

“This is not my first wounded warrior program, but this was the best. The SVAS staff and Silver Creek Outfitter guides showed me more attention than anyone ever has given me. This is a magical experience that will last a lifetime. I can’t wait to tell other warriors about my experience here.”

– *Bryan Fuller, Marines*

“When I arrived, I thought to myself, ‘This is stupid, I’m too disabled to fish.’ Then, today I caught eight fish on my own . . . and the biggest fish caught on the Big Wood River in a year! I now feel more ‘able’ than ever!”

– *Corey Thompson, 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*



“Learning to fly fish, I realized that there are things I can do on my own. I feel like I can do anything I put my mind to.”

– *Oy Rassavong, Marines*

“I have never been around other women who understand what I’ve been going through. Here I have had the chance to talk to other wives and see how they deal with their husband’s injuries and problems.”

– *Hope Riddle, wife of Jordan Riddle, Army*

“I have spent years since my injury avoiding society. Being here has changed my outlook on life. I’m ready to join the world again.”

– *David Antoine, Army*

