



WHERE MILITARY FAMILIES RECONNECT

## Why Soldiers Eat Bullets

By Heather Ehle, Founder and Executive Director

“Why Soldiers Eat Bullets,” or for us civilians, why in the world would a service member choose to commit suicide? The newly reported veteran suicide rate has climbed to an astonishing 22 veteran suicides a day.

Here’s a clue: it has nothing to do with finding a job or crafting a one-page “declassified” resume.

I am no expert, and I am often wrong, but I am an amazing listener. As the Executive Director of Project Sanctuary, I have the honor of hosting military families. And during our six-day therapeutic retreats, between the Healthy Marriage and financial classes, after the horseback riding and before the s’mores, I have the unique opportunity to get to know military families... families who are living “reintegration” every day. And I listen.

At our last retreat, we had a blunt and frank discussion about “Why Soldiers Eat Bullets.” The consensus was that the problem is buried in that year-long gap for service members, waiting for benefits, trying to land with their feet on the ground, navigating a confusing and painfully slow system of benefits and care. Makes sense, doesn’t it?

All the focus on jobs and creating that perfect resume misses the point. Maybe there should be more focus on, “*Now that you are no longer a soldier, WHO ARE YOU?*”

So... without spending hundreds of hours with a psychiatrist, discussing “*who am I, and what do I want to do,*” the service members who are successfully transitioning are finding those answers by getting outside, by climbing, by hiking, by practicing yoga, by meditating, by taking art therapy, by being with other veterans, through EMDR, with hyperbaric treatments, with acupuncture, going fishing....

### **THAT IS WHERE THE HEALING AND ANSWERS ARE FOUND.**

And guess what? What works for one service member may not work for another! Tricky! You see, we are all different, but I believe that healing is an innate part of us all. Within, we all know what we intrinsically need. Sometimes we just need that quiet, that chance to hear, to listen to ourselves without the rattle and confusion of day-to-day busy work. Sometimes we need trial and error.... Either way, there is hope. There is healing.

Soldiers do not have to eat bullets, but it will take a community of support for their families to guide them through the buffet of nonprofits and options as they redefine, grow and heal. It will take all of us to support and empower and to give hope to these service members and their spouses (wingmen).

A long, long time ago in an Industrial/Organizational Psychology class, it was pointed out that during any type of change, survey or study, productivity always went up. It didn’t matter if the light bulbs were brighter or dimmer: it all had a positive effect. It was the attention and knowing something was being done that had the effect.

So, maybe a little less press on “the suicide rate” and more focus on what works is what we need now, because it all works. And that is the good news.

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