



**FOUNDATION  
FITNESS**

Veterans Wellness Program

## OVERVIEW

In response to the epidemic of veteran suicide, homelessness, and mental illness, the Foundation Fitness Veterans Program is designed to provide veterans with the knowledge and skills needed to lead a healthy lifestyle and transition to civilian life. Foundation Fitness provided a pilot training and fitness program to seven veterans in Idaho to test the efficacy of this approach. After the six-month pilot program, all of the participants were in a stable living environment (four of these veterans were previously unemployed, homeless and living on the streets) and reported being more physically and mentally stable than they were prior to entering the program. Six of the seven veterans successfully gained employment (the other veteran was retired and not looking for employment). We received testimonials from the participants themselves and their healthcare providers attesting the positive changes as the result of the program.

The success of this pilot program inspires us to continue and expand to help more veterans for longer periods. We currently have huge demand from veterans wanting to participate. We also wish to expand our program to include a nutrition component (in partnership with Pantry Fuel) and a sleep component in partnership with Washington State University), so that we can offer veterans a truly holistic and comprehensive health plan, free of charge. Furthermore, we will include a rigorous research component to evaluate the success of the program. In summary, our goal is to improve veterans' physical condition, mental state, and self-esteem. We strongly believe that no veteran who has served our country should ever have to sleep on the streets.

## BACKGROUND:

According to the U. S. Department of Veteran's Administration, it is estimated that nearly 200,000 veterans are homeless on any given night and nearly 400,000 experience homelessness over the course of a year. About one out of every four homeless men/women who are sleeping in a doorway, alley or box in our cities and rural communities has put on a uniform and served this country. Veterans account for 23% of all homeless people in America, with 45% suffering from mental illness, and half having substance abuse problems. More than 67% served our country for at least three years and 33% were stationed in a war zone. Based on statistics found by a major study done by the RAND Corporation, 20% of Afghanistan and Iraq era veterans have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and these numbers climb when combined with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and depression. These three disorders are often considered the "invisible" wounds of war, and yet they permeate veterans' ability to function and can cripple their ability to reintegrate into civilian lifestyle. The RAND study found that among previously deployed service men and women, about one third suffer from at least one of these disorders, and 5% from all three. They also indicate that these numbers may be higher for veterans who are no longer serving. RAND emphasizes that this group is understudied, and needs more researcher and practitioner attention.

One of the alarming things about mental illness, is that an estimated 57% of veterans who report symptoms of TBI have not been evaluated by a physician for a brain injury, and about 53% of veterans with symptoms of PTSD or depression have not sought help from a physician or mental health provider (Tanielian and Jaycox, 2008). The prevalence of mental illness among veterans is likely to remain high unless greater effort is made to get veterans the quality care that they need to combat mental illness, improve self-esteem and resilience, and support veterans in the transition from military to civilian lifestyles.

Using a basic "cost-of-illness" approach, RAND estimates that every veteran with PTSD results in costs of up to \$10,298 in the two years post-deployment. These costs increase to \$25,757 per veteran with major depression, and over \$60,000 per veteran with TBI. These costs of course do not include the cost of life to suicide (an estimated 20 veterans per day according to 2016 VA statistics), or factor in later costs of substance abuse, domestic violence, homelessness, and involvement in the criminal justice system. In other words, finding new and promising ways to help veterans is not only necessary to support the men and women who have given so much, but also to help alleviate what totals to about \$2.5 billion a year nationwide.



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## FOUNDATION FITNESS VETERANS PROGRAM PILOT STUDY:

The goal of this pilot program was to test the efficacy of using physical training as a basis for not only improving the physical condition of veterans, but also to alleviate chronic pain, increase resilience, improve self-esteem, combat mental illness, and generally support veterans acclimatize to civilian life.

Seven veterans were enrolled in the pilot program (which was free of charge to the veterans). When these veterans were in the service, protecting our country; they learned to rely on the soldiers on either side of them, had access to the best equipment and were in the best shape of their lives. When they left active service they lost those benefits. Four of the seven were homeless when they enrolled in the program. All seven were unemployed. Two suffered from chronic physical pain, and two from significant mental illness.

Upon enrollment in the pilot program, the veterans came to Foundation Fitness performance facility 3-5 times per week. This facility offers state of the art equipment and software systems. It has one-stop machines that offer a variety of different work out options. When the veterans arrived at the facility, they were given an initial assessment that was entered into the software program. This assessment evaluated range of movement, full body analysis, cardio, and basic nutrition. The full body analysis identified any existing body issues that would have prevented the veteran from successfully completing an exercise or stretch, for example; heart complications, missing limbs, or dizziness.

Once this data was entered into the program, the machine provided the correct amount of resistance, speed, weight, etc. tailored to the veteran. This customized blue print of the veteran was reflected visually on the machine. Furthermore, the machine asked the veteran when they arrived at the facility: "How do you feel today?" and the veteran's response customized his or her work out for the day based on current mood, pain levels, etc. Paired with the personal trainer that assisted each work out, this resulted in a training program that met veterans' physical and emotional needs. While the veterans were at the facility it was closed to other customers, to maximize their comfort. In addition, the veterans were encouraged to support each other and hold each other accountable for reaching personal goals, remaining invested in the program etc.

Results from the pilot program indicated the success of this approach. All of the participants (four of whom were homeless and all of whom were unemployed at the time of enrollment) were in a stable living environment at the completion of the pilot program and reported being more physically and mentally stable than they were prior to entering the program. Six of the seven veterans successfully gained employed (the other veteran was retired and not looking for employment). Furthermore, we received testimonials from the participants themselves and their healthcare providers attesting the positive changes as the result of our program. Below are several examples from the pilot program.

## VETERAN: BY

Before enrolling in the program, BY was dealing with constant arthritis symptoms to the point of requiring pain management therapy. She had a chronic back pain issue that was the result of an injury in the Navy. This prevented her from returning to her civilian career as a teacher, and led to a period of depression as her physical and mental health declined. She was unable to remain in the Navy as her back issues worsened. Her quality of life had severely declined by this time. Then she joined the WITH Foundation Veterans Program.



Within one month she progressed to a point where she could be on her feet for hours at a time at a new job. Her pain medication dosage was reduced, and she reported better overall wellbeing than years of pain management therapy. She entered the workout program with very little hope but a great willingness to try anything to improve physically. She is getting stronger by the day, and her self-esteem has improved thanks to her involvement in the WITH Foundation Veterans Program.

<b>BY</b>	<b>5/8/2015</b>	<b>9/22/2015</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Body Weight	186.2	184	2.2
FMS Score	10	12	2
% Body Fat	40.8	38.8	2
Fat Mass	76	73	3
Muscle Mass	104.6	107	2.4
Visceral Fat	8	7	1
Metabolic Age	57	56	1
% of Fitness Improvement		15%	
Number of Visits	35		

*"To the individuals who are responsible for the training program at Foundation Fitness, I would like to say thank you, and tell you about how this program has affected my life.*

*I am a Navy veteran that served in active and reserve components for a total of 14 years. When I was approached with the program from Foundation Fitness through St. Vincent de Paul, I jumped on it. I had the chance to see what the facility was like and was impressed with how the workouts are "prescribed". It's not just some high intensity, kill yourself workout created by someone who has never been fat and has never been injured. This workout was made for me. Shawn, the owner, saw me attempt to give up at times. He didn't let me. Instead, he found ways to help me by giving me alternate exercises, letting me utilize compression/massage pants to reduce the swelling in my legs and hips and my favorite,*



*the anti-gravity treadmill that took my body weight off of my injuries. This allowed me to actually RUN for the first time in years. I cannot express to you how amazing that felt. As a result of my workouts, I am strong, my self-esteem has improved and I take fewer pain meds. I have recently started a job where I am on my feet for hours on end. Something I don't think I could do if I weren't constantly working out and keeping my body limber. The prescription workouts and support at Foundation Fitness has greatly improved my quality of life and I wanted to sincerely say, THANK YOU".*

*Sincerely,  
~BY*

## VETERAN: SB

SB had open-heart surgery in 2014. She had a difficult time with general recovery, and was only able to function with a medication regimen that included a high dosage of blood pressure medication. After 2 months in the Fitness Foundation Veterans Program she had lost weight and significantly improved her strength and muscle tone. For SB, however, other changes were more important. Her doctor dramatically reduced her blood pressure medication dosage. Her mental clarity improved, and this led to a significant improvement in self-confidence and willingness to try new things. She has a whole new level of motivation in her daily life due to participation in Foundation Fitness.

SB	5/8/2015	9/22/2015	Difference
Body Weight	230.8	218	12.8
FMS Score	7	9	2
% Body Fat	48	46	2
Fat Mass	108	101	7
Muscle Mass	111	122	11
Visceral Fat	16	14	2
Metabolic Age	78	76	2
% of Fitness Improvement		10%	
Number of Visits	46		

*To Whom It May Concern:*

*"The pilot program for veterans and Foundation Fitness has been a "success" for me based on my own personal goals and definition of success. The weight loss and muscle toning are normal expectations, however, this program has contributed to much more than that. My medications have been reduced dramatically, my mental clarity is improving, my confidence in myself and my path in life is strengthened, and the increase in motivation to get up and do something positive and constructive each day keep me going. You cannot stay depressed when there is so much going well! The staff at Foundation Fitness are encouraging and non- judgmental. They work with you based on your abilities and modify as need-*



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*ed. After recovering from open heart surgery this past year and going through multiple changes in my life, this fitness program has helped me feel the best I've felt in many years! Thank you for this opportunity and I hope more veterans will be served by this program"*

~SB

## VETERAN: CH

Before enrolling in the program, CH spent several months homeless, living in his car over the winter and spring months of 2014-2015. He was not eating well. He was very depressed and did not have a lot of hope in general, until he started at Foundation Fitness. In one month, he had lost weight, gained muscle, stabilized his metabolism, and was much healthier overall. He was eating better and exercising regularly. His attitude was more hopeful, and the Foundation Fitness workout helped him tone up for a new job. The debilitation in his joints eased and his metabolic age decreased by several years in just a few weeks.

CH	9/8/2015	9/21/2015	Difference
Body Weight	228.8	225	3.8
FMS Score	12	13	1
% Body Fat	26.3	23	3.3
Fat Mass	60.2	55	5.2
Muscle Mass	160.4	162	1.6
Visceral Fat	9	8	1
Metabolic Age	44	38	6
% of Fitness Improvement		17%	
Number of Visits	14		

*"It's a good program. I would like to see it grow with more involvement on the part of as many vets as possible. Three sessions a week is good, but I wouldn't mind more. In only a month, I have lost weight, gained muscle, my metabolic rate has stabilized, and my relative age has dropped several years. I haven't been in the program very long, but I can see major improvement in a very short time. I will continue to participate in the program as long as possible".*

~CH



## VETERAN: MM

Although MM had to leave the program early in order to tend to a family member that fell ill, he had some striking results, including a ten-year reduction in his metabolic age. The program had a profound impact on his sense of wellbeing.

MM	5/12/2015	9/18/2015	Difference
Body Weight	228.8	168	7.6
FMS Score	12	12	1
% Body Fat	26.3	26	2.3
Fat Mass	60.2	41	8.6
Muscle Mass	160.4	124	5
Visceral Fat	9	12	2
Metabolic Age	44	44	10
% of Fitness Improvement		12%	
Number of Visits	24		

*How do you physically and mentally fix a newly retired 67-year-old whose goal is to enjoy those golden years with grace and vigor? I had asked myself that question for 8 months after retiring, all the while sinking into a deeper depression and watching TV.*

*I did not have enough strength in my left leg to walk stairs without assistance, my body and muscles chronically ached, my balance was off and I was a high risk for falls. I was frail and de-conditioned until I was miraculously introduced to WITH Performance.*

*Shawn tailored a program specific to my condition and needs and worked with me 5 days a week with attention, patience and compassion. I felt safe and was able to stay motivated and enthusiastic about the sessions. The end result was improved balance and strength, ability to climb stairs without assistance and a whole new outlook on life. Shawn said that if I committed for one full year, he could have me prepared for a marathon. That was one of the most encouraging and flattering statements I have ever received. I simply cannot express enough appreciation and praise for this world class program and the leadership that translates a typical workout into growth for the mind, body and spirit.*

*God bless you.*

*~MM*



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## RESEARCH STRATEGY AND APPROACH FOR NEXT STEPS:

Because the pilot program showed such promise, we want to continue and expand to help more veterans for longer periods. We currently have large demand from veterans wanting to participate. We also wish to expand our program to include a nutrition component and a sleep component, so that we can offer veterans a truly holistic and comprehensive health plan, free of charge. For the nutrition component we are partnering with Pantry Fuel to offer nutrition training, cooking classes, and ready-made healthy meals for our participants alongside their physical assessments and training. Please see a letter of support from Pantry Fuel attached. Many veterans do not possess the knowledge or skills in order to eat a healthy and balanced diet. The veterans usually enlist right out of High School and go directly to boot camp and then service areas, where eating is done at either the mess hall, or in the form of Meals Ready to Eat (MRE's). By adding a nutrition component to the physical training, we hope the result will be sustainable healthy eating habits, that will result in long-lasting health benefits for veterans.

For the sleep component of the program we are partnering with the Washington State University (WSU) Sleep and Performance Research Center (SPRC) who have extensive experience monitoring sleep in the field and educating the community around healthy sleep hygiene. Please see a letter of support from WSU attached. Military life is not conducive to good sleep due to the long hours, unpredictable sleeping conditions, and chronic stress. Furthermore, when service men and women leave the military their sleep is likely to remain fragmented due to the negative effects of stress, PTSD, depression, TBI, and chronic pain on sleep. By adding a sleep component to the program we hope to improve veterans' sleep, which will ultimately increase their resilience and feelings of general wellness. We hope that by combining the health, wellbeing, nutrition and sleep aspects of this program we will create the ultimate package for success!

Finally, following the success of the pilot program, we will include in the next steps a program evaluation component (in partnership with WSU researchers) to quantify the success of the program. From this evaluation we will be able to answer questions such as: how much better do veterans feel following the program? On average, what are the improvements to physical health? What are the typical reductions in chronic pain? Are there specific reductions in symptoms of mental illness? Can veterans' sleep be improved by the program? Can veterans' eating habits be improved by the program? Can medications be reduced as a consequence of taking part in the program? In other words, all of the success that we have anecdotal and preliminary evidence for (based on the results of the pilot study) will be put to the test using a rigorous empirical design that includes pre- and post-program surveys on health and wellness, physiological measurements, physical conditioning monitoring, and sleep monitoring (using wrist watch type measurement devices belonging to WSU and sleep diaries that the veterans fill out morning and evening). Foundation Fitness would like to continue to offer the program free of charge to the current participating veterans as well as to additional veterans that would like to join. Participants will be selected through an application process that assists Foundation Fitness in determining those that will be invested in the program and benefit the most. Veterans that are selected will begin the free session that will be broken into 3 specific phases. A specific timeline is not placed on these phases, because each individual will progress at a different rate.

**Phase I** – Initial evaluation of beginning physical, nutritional, and sleep status. This will include a comprehensive survey asking veterans about their feelings of health and wellness, as well as their eating and sleeping habits. It will also include comprehensive physical measurements to determine level of physical conditioning, and objective monitoring of sleep (for 7 consecutive days) using a wrist watch type sleep monitoring device that is not invasive and gives precise sleep quantity and quality measures. After pre-program evaluation, phase I will consist of the development of workout plan, weekly assessments of progress, personalized training 3 days per week, meal replacement nutrition shakes after workouts, and healthy prepared meals to take home for five days/week. It will also include personalized sleep education for each veteran, based on their specific needs (identified by their pre-program sleep assessment).



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**Phase II** – Weekly assessments of progress, closer relationships with team members, personalized training 3 days per week, meal replacement nutrition shakes after workouts, nutrition lessons on grocery shopping and meal preparation, healthy prepared meals to take home for five days/week, and continued monitoring of sleep (via sleep diary review) and education around healthy sleep habits.

**Phase III** - Weekly assessments of progress, closer relationships with team members, increasing self-confidence, personalized training 3 days per week, meal replacement nutrition shakes after workouts, learning how to prepare their own healthy and affordable meals, continued monitoring of sleep (via sleep diary review) and education around healthy sleep habits, and a final assessment and exit interview. The final assessment will include all measurements that were taken in the pre-program evaluation (a comprehensive survey asking veterans about their feelings of health and wellness, as well as their eating and sleeping habits; comprehensive physical measurements to determine level of physical conditioning; and objective monitoring of sleep using a wrist watch type sleep monitoring device that is worn for 7 days).

## **FUTURE DIRECTIONS:**

Should this proposal be funded, we will take the data gathered across the course of the project and use it as the justification to apply for a large Department of Defense (DoD) funded grant. The goal of this future DoD project will be to set up a large-scale system to provide veterans with a comprehensive health promotion program (including physical training, nutrition, and sleep education). We hope that this future direction—and ultimate goal of the program—will help as many veterans as possible and make a significant impact.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The Foundation Fitness Veterans Program is designed to provide veterans the knowledge and skills needed to lead a healthy lifestyle and transition to civilian life. Based on the success of our pilot program, we feel it is reasonable to expect equivalent if not greater results from a more comprehensive program that includes a nutrition component and a sleep component, so that we can offer veterans a truly holistic health plan. Our strong partnerships with Pantry Fuel and WSU speak to our ability to implement and evaluate this program to get the most out of it, with the most benefit to the veterans who so desperately need it.