



Defining our Mission

The FVHD project titled “Resilience Grows Here” focuses on the need to develop community-based strategies that support mental health and ultimately reduce serious mental health problems including drug and alcohol abuse, depression, post-traumatic stress and suicide

Resilience Grows Here (RGH) is a veteran’s mental health initiative centered around a community garden that creates an environment that builds and supports relationships between veterans and families, while building resilience in men and boys. Veterans return to communities not programs; so we have a duty to meet them where they are. RGH is an innovative program that utilizes peer mentors to provide ongoing focus on building the healthy attributes of resilience for veterans in a nonthreatening and nontraditional environment. The aim of the program is to draw veterans out of themselves, to take pride in a project and to see the impact that it has on the broader community – focusing on what is possible instead of impossible. Peer mentors assist in shaping the conversations to focus on problem solving and successes while helping to re-frame challenges into lessons. The creation of a ‘safe space’ for veterans and their families helps shift the social norms and a targeted education campaign assists in re shaping the lens through which the community views our veterans and mental health.

RGH mission identified two overarching goals necessary to create sustained community change:

- Community mental health literacy
- Reducing veteran isolation.

Mission Statement:

“A Community that fosters the health and resilience of veterans across their lifespan” is the mission of RGH. To achieve this mission RGH strives to:

- Create community conditions that support good mental health
- Improve the understanding of the needs and sacrifices of veterans and their families
- Reduce veteran isolation
- Improve mental and emotional support for veterans and their families

The RGH mission statement grew out of the Steering Committee’s commitment to building a resilient community that not only supports those with mental illness but creates environments that support good mental health. Recognizing that the stigma of mental illness creates barriers for those seeking clinical help and contributes to social isolation, RGH wanted to ensure that



building an accepting and resilience community was a core objective. Understanding that veterans return to communities and not programs, a community wide approach to assist our veteran population was identified as being central to the work of RGH. Bringing veterans and their families into communities and not separating them out is fundamental to making them feel safe and accepted while recognizing that they also need a safe space to call their own. Recognizing that active duty military and veterans begin as young men and women, our school based RGH School Climate committee will adopt a preventative model as we engage and involve young men and women to build resilience characteristics before they make a career choice to join the armed services, hence the lifespan reference in our mission statement.

Core Values

Integrity: In recognition of the broken promises, disappointments and failings that many veterans and their families have experienced in seeking support and services, RGH values honesty and truthfulness in our efforts and reliability and follow-through as we build trust.

Inclusive: Our veterans, their experiences, needs and interests are diverse and RGH aims to create environments in which we respect and honor the differences and include different opinions and perspectives.

Safe: To ensure open and honest dialogue and sharing, RGH is committed to creating environments that are safe, where information is held in confidence and no judgements are made.

Compassion: The work of RGH will be done with empathy and kindness and consideration for the experiences and needs of those RGH serves.

Team Work: Our team is diverse and each member and organization brings unique talents, skills and resources. RGH values the contributions of everyone in the team.

Empowering: RGH seeks to create initiatives that mobilize community and enable all involved to contribute and benefit in ways that are meaningful to them.

Testimonials

- I feel honored to be part of this wonderful initiative
- Humbled, thankful and so very proud
- I feel honored to see so many veterans and in turn do my part. Thank you
- Touched by the outpouring of love and support for our veterans
- What an amazing project and testament to what a community can do when it works together
- Grateful for this experience and to be surrounded by this wonderful community
- Thank you for all that you have done and all that you still do. I feel blessed to be here to share this moment – thank you
- I am so glad this program is going into action – thank you
- Amazed for everything I have seen – way to go!
- I feel so happy for being able to take part in this and honored as well. I feel so grateful for all the veterans who risked their lives for this country. I am in awe at the selflessness and kindness of all the staff and veterans at this gathering. Thank you



- Grateful for this experience and to be surrounded by this wonderful community

RGH is an innovative program that utilizes a community garden and safe space to connect veterans and active duty military in an effort to reduce isolation. Ongoing activities/volunteer opportunities linked to the garden and veteran space will also provide veterans with a sense of purpose (mission) and connectivity in the communities where they live and return. Many veterans and servicemen report feeling socially isolated and emotionally disconnected when they return from service. No longer feeling part of a 'team' coupled with a perceived lack of purpose have significant consequences on mental health. Resilience Grows Here" focuses on the need to develop community based strategies that support mental health and ultimately reduce serious mental health problems including drug and alcohol abuse, depression, post-traumatic stress and suicide.

Thinking outside the box

RGH understands that one size does not fit all! Every individual has a unique experience and we work hard to connect active duty, reservists and veterans with the most appropriate resources for their needs and ensure that all aspects of RGH incorporate nontraditional approaches to mental health, embracing art, music, yoga, meditation, gardens and dogs to ensure that we respect the need for each individual to find the tools that best serve their own needs.

Peer Mentoring

A coordinated peer-to-peer mentoring program allows RGH to offer our veteran, active duty and reserve community an opportunity to spend time with others who understand the unique stressors of service and return to home – because they have been there too. Peer mentors assist in shaping the conversations to focus on problem solving and successes while helping to re-frame challenges into lessons. All of our peers have been trained and are supported by RGH and appropriate professionals to ensure confidentiality is maintained and the best support can be offered to our members. Our peers are trained in accessing community-based resources and can make appropriate connections to ensure access to services when needed.

RGH working with our schools

To advance the broader conversation of mental health at the community level, an RGH School Committee has been established that focuses on building the resilient attributes of boys and young men while building safe and inclusive school environments that support good mental health. RGH works with local schools to provide opportunities for growth and discussion around issues facing kids today and challenges them to address stereotypes within their own communities. RGH also proudly works with schools and parents to provide topical learning opportunities to address emerging social and psychological issues as a community of supportive and engaged role models.



Community Literacy in mental health

RGH sponsored community events use creative approaches including art to increase community understanding of mental health and the challenges faced by many of our returning veterans and what can be done. Community ‘conversation’ and ‘programs’ tackle the stigma of mental health and educate members in mental health literacy and the specific needs of our veterans and their families.

Supporting Families

RGH understands the importance of the role of families in the care and wellbeing of our servicemen and women. We know that it is important for a family to have support and a safe place to be when life is hard. RGH has a network of families to offer support, understanding and guidance to resources within the community for the families of our veteran, active duty and reserve community.

Creating Community Change

RGH recognizes that sustained generational change will only occur with the creation of strategies that leverage the power and connections already existing within a community and empowering them to grow and challenge the conditions that inhibit resilience. RGH has crafted a ‘road map’ for sustained change by not only addressing the individuals needs with peer support and safe spaces but challenging the higher level thinking of a community by engaging the schools, local military base and local governments to re think its approaches to not only mental health but also the need to build and foster resilience

Barriers to success

The most significant is the perceived reluctance of active duty and reserve military to seek assistance due to fear of career impact and stigma. The fear and misunderstanding of mental health issues coupled with the militarization process and socialization of males which emphasize stoic behaviors and frowns upon help seeking behaviors, is another potential barrier. The dominance and fragmentation of the medical model in addressing mental illness also presents a challenge as we work to shift the focus to community conditions that promote mental health while building a community literate in mental illness and better able to support those who have mental illness.