



# ENRICHING VETERANS' LIVES

THROUGH AN EVIDENCE BASED APPROACH

A Case Illustration of  
Team Red, White & Blue

Caroline Angel, Ph.D., R.N.

Nicholas J. Armstrong, Ph.D.

February 2016



## About the IVMF's Measurement and Evaluation Series

IVMF's Measurement and Evaluation series focuses on the critical topics of program evaluation, performance measurement, and evidence-based practice. The series aims to promote greater learning, application of leading practices, transparency, and ultimately impact in service delivery across our nation's community of organizations serving veterans and military families. The series will highlight examples of organizations employing various approaches to evaluating and communicating impact. It will also include briefs and related tools to inform both providers and donors on leading practices, methods, and noteworthy developments in evidence-based practice.

## Acknowledgments

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## About the Authors

### **CAROLINE ANGEL, PH.D., R.N.**

Caroline M. Angel is a Masters prepared psychiatric mental health nurse who holds a Ph.D. in Nursing and Criminology from the University of Pennsylvania. She is the Research Director for Team Red, White & Blue and has led Team RWB's Central New Jersey Chapter since 2014. Angel is currently a Visiting Scholar at the University of Cambridge. Her research has focused on posttraumatic stress, resilience, shame, forgiveness, health, and mortality. She has longitudinally followed a series of randomized controlled trials and was in a research or teaching role at the University of Pennsylvania between 1999 and 2014.

### **NICHOLAS J. ARMSTRONG, PH.D.**

Nick Armstrong is the Senior Director for Research and Policy at the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University where he leads the IVMF's growing portfolio of applied research, policy analysis, and program evaluation efforts. Armstrong is also an affiliated adjunct faculty member in Public Administration and International Affairs at Syracuse University's Maxwell School. Armstrong was previously a research fellow at the Institute for National Security and Counterterrorism (INSCT) for six years where he led government and privately sponsored security projects. Prior to this, Armstrong served for eight years in the U.S. Army with tours in Iraq (2005-2006), Afghanistan (2003-2004), and Bosnia (2001) with the 10th Mountain Division. Armstrong is a graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point and the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University (Ph.D., M.P.A.).

## Contributors

### **MICHAEL ERWIN**

Mike Erwin is the Chairman of the Board and Founder of Team RWB; President of the Positivity Project (a non-profit organization whose mission is to strengthen leadership and relationships through a deeper understanding of character); and a Major in the U.S. Army Reserves. For the past year, Mike has served as the CEO of Susan Cain's Quiet Leadership Institute. He is the co-author of a forthcoming book from Bloomsbury Press, *Solitude, Leadership, and Character*. Mike graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 2002. He was commissioned as an intelligence officer, serving in three combat tours with the First Cavalry Division and 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne). His service includes deployments to Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2004-2005, Kandahar, Afghanistan, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2006-2007 and 2009. Mike currently lives in Pinehurst, NC, with his wife and four children.

### **LOU NEMEC**

Lou Nemeć is an active duty Soldier stationed at Fort Benning, Georgia. He became a volunteer leader with Team RWB in the spring of 2012 while teaching at West Point with Mike Erwin. At West Point, Lou taught Intro to Psychology and Anthropometrics/Biomechanics. He has been an integral part of welcoming all new members that join Team RWB and is passionate about Team RWB research and Veteran research as a whole. Lou's research interests include wellness, resilience, human performance, and the broad field of positive psychology. Lou and his wife Lindsay have three boys that they raise in the spirit of 'other people matter'. They enjoy running together when possible and have had the pleasure of engaging Team RWB members at events all across the country.

### **CAROLYN WESTLAKE**

Carolyn Westlake is currently obtaining a Master's degree in Healthcare Data Analytics from Clarkson University. Prior to Clarkson, Carolyn earned a Bachelor's degree in Exercise Science from Guilford College and a Masters in Biomechanics from the University of Tennessee.

### **LAURA WERBER**

Laura Werber serves in two volunteer roles for Team RWB: she has been the Athletic Director for its Los Angeles chapter since May 2013 and joined the organization's Board of Directors in January 2015. She is a Senior Management Scientist at the RAND Corporation, a non-partisan, nonprofit research institution, and also a Professor at the Pardee RAND Graduate School. At RAND, she applies organizational theories and methods to a wide array of policy issues, including community partnerships, Department of Defense workforce management, military families, and veteran reintegration. Laura is a graduate of the Wharton School of Business, University of Pennsylvania and earned a Ph.D. in organizational behavior from Stanford University.

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## Overview

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This paper marks the launch of a new IVMF series focused on the critical topics of program evaluation, performance measurement, and evidence-based practice (EBP). The purpose of the series is to inform the broader community of veteran and military family serving organizations by highlighting examples of veteran and military serving organizations employing various methods of EBP, program evaluation, and assessment. By highlighting leading practices across the U.S., this series aims to promote learning and greater impact in service delivery across our nation's evolving and maturing community of veteran and military organizations.

This case illustration highlights the evaluation efforts of the rising veteran and military serving organization Team, Red, White & Blue (Team RWB). Team RWB is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 2010 with the mission of enriching the lives of America's veterans by connecting them to their communities through physical and social activity. Despite its relative youth, in 2014, the George W. Bush Institute's (GWBI) Military Service Initiative and the IVMF both identified Team RWB as a leading organization in building a robust measurement and evaluation program. The paper highlights how Team RWB integrates theory and research to drive its programming as an evidence-based wellness intervention and, in turn, produce data to inform its own organizational practice.

## Key Highlights

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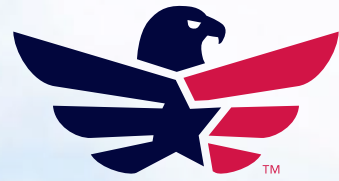
- Team RWB is an organization that values, at all levels, trust and transparency with its partners, funders, and community. This culture—embodied by the 'Eagle Ethos' of positivity, passion, people, community, camaraderie, and commitment—exists throughout the organization from the senior executive down to the community level.
- Research and evaluation of RWB's programs is and will remain vital to communicating its impact and improving how it targets resources to improve and grow its programs. The Team RWB "Eagle Research Center" is building an evidence base by quantitatively measuring its outcomes and using data to improve its program delivery.
- More than 1,800 veterans surveyed in 2014 and 2,500 surveyed in 2015 self-reported increases in creating authentic relationships with others, increasing their sense of purpose, and improving their health, by participating in Team RWB. Veterans also noted that participating in Team RWB had indirect benefits in their family relationships and work. Improvements on these dimensions contribute to an enriched life, with more program engagement leading to more enrichment.
- Team RWB achieves these results through local, consistent, and inclusive programs. The chapter and community programs provide opportunities for physical, social, and service activities. The Leadership Development Program is comprised of national athletic and leadership camps, and a newly launched tiered leader development program.



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TEAM  
**RWB**





## Introduction

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Today the nationwide community of veteran and military serving organizations faces an inflection point. Barring widespread outpouring of public support for the military over the past 15 years, the financial side of the “sea of goodwill” (R. Cohen, 2013; Copeland & Sutherland, 2010) seems more like a slowly ebbing tide. Given a closer look, the proceeds toward veteran and military-specific organizations remain flat since 2001 (P. Carter & Kidder, 2015a, p. 15). In fact, compared to a steadily growing nonprofit sector overall, veteran and military serving organizations now capture a lesser, and declining, share of total philanthropic support than they enjoyed in the months following 9/11. This trend suggests signs of consolidation, even in the midst of soaring, albeit uncertain, federal spending on military personnel and veterans programs (pp. 12-13).

Yet, given higher injury survival rates and the degree of veterans’ resulting physical and mental health needs, the costs of care for Iraq and Afghanistan veterans will “easily surpass \$1 trillion in the coming decades” (Bilmes, 2016, p. 14). Veterans’ needs, however, ostensibly occur in clusters (P. Carter & Kidder, 2015b; Castro, Kintzle, & Hassan, 2014; Schell & Tanielian, 2011; Zoli, Maury, & Fay, 2015), such as, the concurrent need for housing, a job, and legal or financial assistance. And for the local organizations who serve veterans daily, competition for increasingly scarce resources is very real. As a result, veteran and military serving organizations, most of which are small in size and revenue, confront a likely future of learning to do more with less. Donors, too, are sharpening their focus on the impacts of their investments by demanding grantees measure outcomes and, in some communities, employ evidence-based practices, or measure the combined, or collective, impact of multiple organizations working together (Armstrong, McDonough, & Savage, 2015).

The implications are clear. Organizations that clearly demonstrate their outcomes will not only remain attractive to current and future donors, but also position themselves to best serve veterans’ needs. Evidenced-based practice (EBP), as adapted from the field of medicine, applies the best available research, provider expertise, and clients’ values and circumstances to deliver high-quality programs and services (Sackett, Rosenberg, Gray, Haynes, & Richardson, 1996). EBP is essential to gauge program effectiveness, establish leading practices and benchmarks, garner insight for learning and innovation, and provide transparent reporting to key stakeholders (i.e., funders, partners, and clients). EBP is also a core component of ethical practice (A. Taylor, Harold, & Berger, 2013) and a clear sign of organizational maturity, especially for organizations that seek evidence and impact measures beyond their funders’ minimum requirements (GWBI & IVMF, 2015).

### **THE IVMF MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION SERIES**

Given the current environment, this paper marks the launch of a new IVMF series focused on the critical topics of program evaluation, performance measurement, and evidence-based practice. The purpose of the series is to inform the broader community of veteran and military family serving organizations by highlighting examples of veteran and military serving organizations employing various methods of EBP, program evaluation, and assessment. In addition, the series will also include briefs and tools to inform both providers and donors on leading practices, methods, and noteworthy developments in EBP across the veteran and military community. By highlighting leading practices across the U.S., this series aims to promote learning and greater impact in service delivery across our nation’s evolving and maturing community of veteran and military organizations.

## **TEAM RED, WHITE & BLUE: A LEADING EXAMPLE IN DEVELOPING AN EVIDENCE-BASE**

This first paper is a case illustration of the rising veteran and military serving organization Team, Red, White & Blue (Team RWB). Team RWB is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 2010 with the mission of enriching the lives of America's veterans by connecting them to their communities through physical and social activity. Despite its relative youth, in 2014, the George W. Bush Institute's (GWBI) Military Service Initiative and the IVMF identified Team RWB as a leading organization in building a robust measurement and evaluation program (2015, pp. 24-25). To follow from this prior research, this paper reveals how Team RWB integrates theory and research to produce data that informs its own organizational practice.

The paper is organized into three sections. First, we provide a background of Team RWB's founding story and evolution to its current operational model. The story is important to highlight, not only for background, but to explain how the Team evolved—through trial and error, learning, and reflection—to develop a clear mission and 'theory of change'. Second, we present the underlying psychological, biological, and social theories that support Team RWB as an evidence-based, community health intervention. Finally, we outline recent findings from member surveys to demonstrate Team RWB's programmatic outcomes on participating veterans' enrichment and discuss broader implications for practice and policy.

## **The Founding Story of Team Red, White & Blue**

This section highlights Team RWB's founding story and serves two purposes. First, it offers insights into how and why the organization emerged, how it's organized, and the range of activities and programming it delivers nationwide. Second, and more importantly, it reveals how Team RWB has evolved to develop a clearly defined mission and a "theory of change" (Poister, 2003, pp. 35-38) for how its various activities and programs produce positive outcomes for veterans and communities.

### **THE ORIGINS**

Former U.S. Army Major Mike Erwin founded Team RWB in July 2010 while attending graduate school at the University of Michigan, studying positive psychology under the field's co-founder, the late Dr. Chris Peterson. With roughly 200,000 service members transitioning out of the military each year (VA, 2007, 2014) and roughly two in five departing for communities other than their former hometowns (DMDC, 2015), Erwin observed that many veterans, particularly wounded warriors, desired support in building connections within their new communities. Erwin, having

realized an apparent gap in services, embarked on creating an organization that provided a consistent and inclusive support structure for veterans, embedded within local communities, and centered on physical and social activity. The organization would be appropriately named Team Red, White & Blue—or better known as Team RWB.

Team RWB has evolved and matured considerably in short time from its genesis in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The organization initially launched as a one-on-one, veteran and advocate relationship program designed to help struggling veterans in communities. Physical fitness was viewed as the core element within a broader model to raise public awareness, sponsorship, and fundraising to support the initial mentorship program's delivery. Team RWB concentrated its efforts on participation and promotion in endurance events (e.g., marathons, triathlons, etc.), to grow a national network of leaders and advocates through which to build one-on-one relationship with veterans in communities.

To raise awareness, RWB recruited athlete-fundraisers to compete in endurance races. To promote a supportive community, RWB created local networks of advocates to concentrate their efforts and connect wounded veteran families to donors, athlete-fundraisers, and supporters. The one-on-one relationships were essential—they linked veterans and their families to other local community members and veterans able to provide tailored support.

### **EARLY LEARNING, REFLECTION, AND EVOLUTION**

Despite the best intentions of many, however, this initial push led to inconsistent support to veterans and misplaced sponsorship over partnership. This early learning experience shifted Erwin's and Team RWB's mission focus to providing consistency of social interaction for veterans by growing a social leadership-based community.

Still, as with many young start-ups, Team RWB evolved with time and sharpened its focus through reflection and learning from its members and advisors. In the summer of 2011, Dr. Brené Brown visited West Point where Erwin was teaching at the time. Brown, a research professor at the University of Houston's Graduate College of Social Work, remains a respected and sought out expert on vulnerability, courage, authenticity, and shame. From her visit and continued dialogue with Erwin on the indiscriminant nature of pain and suffering emerged the realization and potential value of Team RWB as a resource, not specifically for visibly wounded veterans, but for all veterans reintegrating back into society.

In addition, later that fall, veterans who had joined Team RWB were attesting to the benefits that physical activity played in their reintegration and, for some, recovery process. Team RWB leadership also recognized the opportunity to expand outreach through greater inclusion and decided to build a team that would



allow its members to open up or reach out for support on their own as they achieved a level of comfort with others.

In May 2012, a leading consulting firm conducted a strategic planning assessment of Team RWB. The firm interviewed members from five of its existing chapters at the time (Washington, D.C., Ann Arbor, Syracuse, Houston, and Chicago). A strong theme emerged. Local leaders and members held the firm and consistent belief that relationships—between team and community members—were the core of Team RWB’s purpose and long-term impact. While this was not explicit within Team RWB’s mission statement at the time, the strategic assessment clearly revealed that building quality relationships captured how the organization was enriching the lives of America’s veterans and their families.

Erwin’s leadership team grew following the strategic review in October 2012, starting first with the hire of Blayne Smith as the Director of Operations. By January 2013, Erwin stepped down as Executive Director as he was still serving on active duty and sought to charge one leader with full-time responsibility to implement the new strategic vision and manage the organization’s rapid growth in membership. Consequently, he hired a new Director of Operations, J.J. Pinter, and appointed Smith to Executive Director.

Team RWB’s new strategy included several changes to the population it served. Team RWB leadership realized that the majority of members were joining as volunteer advocates rather than self-identifying as wounded veterans (regardless of their disability status). They also found those volunteer

advocates were reporting a renewed sense of unity and purpose through their participation. Team RWB leadership sought to instill a greater sense of camaraderie, identity, and purpose through regular physical activities and social events that would drive veterans to connect to a chapter within their communities.

In all, the insights gained in the early years allowed Team RWB to evolve into a more inclusive organization that serves all veterans, active duty military, military families, and civilians. Team RWB’s inclusion of civilian members (and leadership) distinguishes it from most veteran organizations. Simply put, being more inclusive to those without prior military service puts veterans at a greater advantage than if the Team was exclusive to veterans only. In theory, these expanded social connections—beginning as “weak ties” (Granovetter, 1973) and transforming over time into powerful forms of social capital (Coleman, 1988)—ideally provide veterans greater access to local resources, knowledge, and opportunities (e.g., schools, jobs, services) in their new communities.

Civilian team members benefit too. RWB provides an outlet for local citizens seeking opportunities to meet, demonstrate their support for, and build authentic relationships with veterans in their community through genuine interaction. Although Team RWB’s principal goal is to enrich veterans’ lives, broad inclusion also facilitates communication across the often-cited ‘civilian-military divide’ and promotes greater societal understanding of military service.

**NOT JUST ANOTHER RUNNING GROUP—ADVANCING UNDERSTANDING OF TEAM RWB’S “THEORY OF CHANGE”**

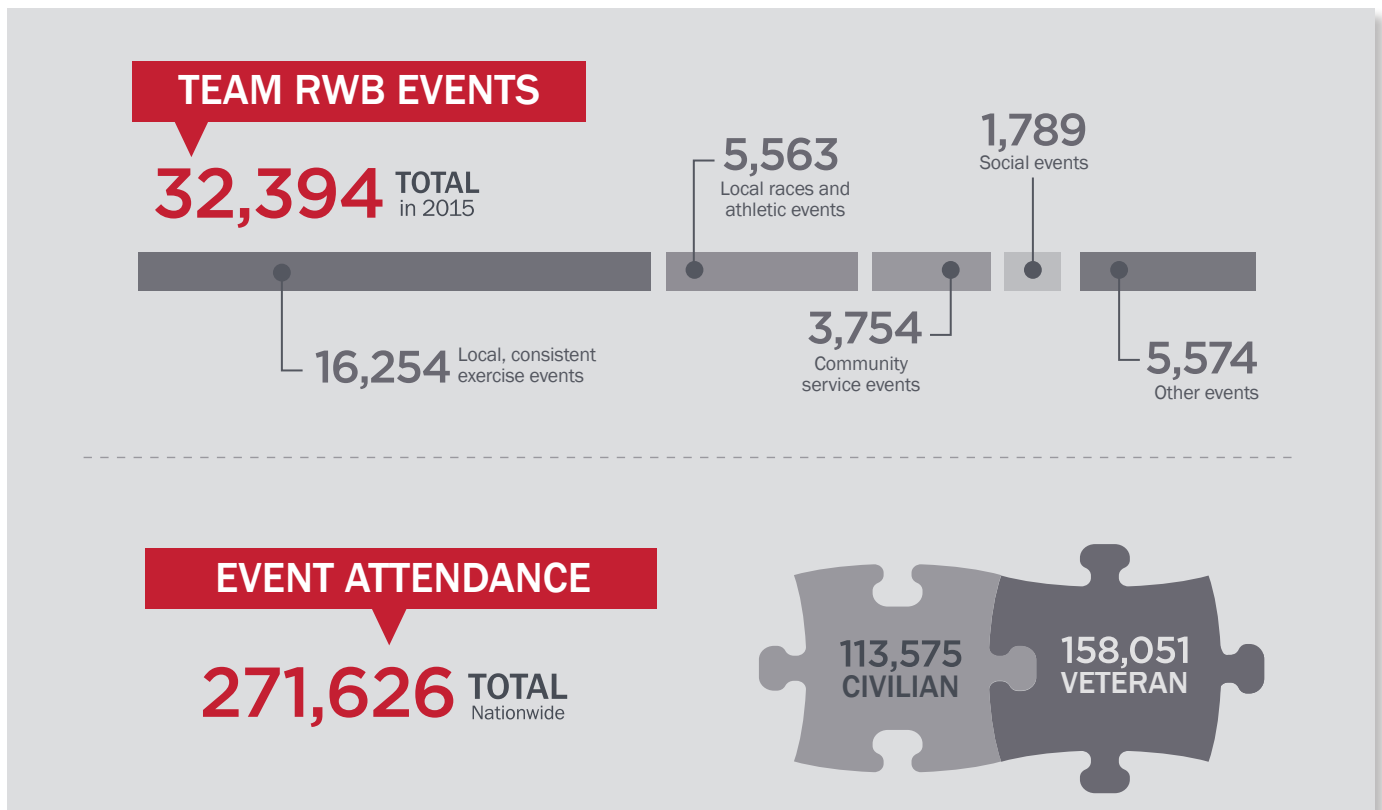
By 2013, Team RWB saw an explosion in new membership. But with this rapid growth, arose a perception that the group was just a physical fitness group for veterans who mostly run or do CrossFit workouts together. While running and functional fitness are two popular activities for some, this perception misses Team RWB’s true purpose and intent—its *raison d’être*—and captures, at best, a surface-level understanding of its founding vision. Team RWB’s activities, in fact, go well beyond physical fitness for fitness’s sake. But as many RWB leaders attest, communicating the organization’s broader theory of change has been and remains a high priority.

Ultimately, Team RWB was founded on the simple, yet significant, truth that “other people matter” (Peterson, 2008). More than any other factor, strong ties to individuals and a larger social network are the key ingredients to living a happier and more fulfilled life (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008; Diener & Seligman, 2002; Valliant, 2012). And connectedness to others, that is, secure attachments and social support (Pietrzak & Cook, 2013) is a major protective factor against developing physical and behavioral health problems, including early death (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2014; Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton,

2010). The transition from active military service to civilian life marks a significant disruption in a veteran’s sense of social connectedness. Accordingly, RWB’s mission to enrich veterans’ lives by developing authentic connections through physical and social activity translates decades of multidisciplinary research, spanning the fields of psychology, neuroscience, and sociology, into best practice. We discuss this firm grounding in research in greater depth later in the paper.

Through much internal discussion, Team RWB’s leadership team has developed a well-formulated outcome concept of ‘enrichment,’ defined as creating quality relationships and experiences that contribute to life satisfaction and overall wellbeing. Consistent with Berglass and Harrell’s (2012) veteran wellness model, the concept of enrichment consists of three core components—people, health, and purpose—that define a rich life (Smith, 2016). True to its roots, Team RWB’s focus on ‘People’ relies on creating authentic connections (defined as genuine, quality, supportive relationships that generate mutual trust and accountability), reflected in an increased number of close relationships and improvements in teammates’ sense of belonging, purpose, and community engagement. Team RWB’s ‘Health’ focus creates frequent opportunities for team members to connect through fitness, sports, and recreation to improve physical, mental, and emotional

Figure 1. Team RWB Events and Attendance (2015)



wellbeing. Team RWB also enhances members' 'Purpose' by engaging them in meaningful team and community-based experiences such as leadership and service that, beyond physical and social activities, renew self-identity and purpose in life.

### OPERATIONAL MODEL

Team RWB's operational model focuses on delivering local, consistent, and inclusive activities designed to build a community-of-communities. Headquartered in Tampa, Florida, Team RWB is a registered nonprofit organization staffed primarily by volunteers. As of early 2016, the organization has only seventeen full-time paid employees dispersed nationwide across six regions: Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, Midwest, Pacific, and South Central. The organization continues to grow since its official launch in 2012 and has reached new heights with 172 chapters and communities worldwide, covering five countries (United States, Italy, England, Korea and Japan) and territories (Guam) and registering approximately 500 to 700 new members per week.

The operating model is guided by a unique set of fundamental beliefs and ideals referred to as the Eagle Ethos and embodied in the following: passion, people, positivity, commitment, camaraderie, and community. Operating from these principles and the overarching mission to connect veterans to their community, a Board of Directors, Advisory Board, and Executive Staff provide national guidance, resources, and oversight for all of Team RWB's programs. Given the focus on community, the majority of programming occurs at the local level.

### Chapters and Communities

Local Chapters and Communities are charged with delivering consistent, local opportunities for team members to connect through physical and social activity. These typically include weekly fitness activities, monthly social and service events, and participation in local races. Figure 1 reports the number of physical, social, and service activities reported in the monthly chapter reports between January and December 2015 by 181 Chapters. Overall, the majority of activities occur as regular weekly scheduled physical events, followed by athletic, social, and service events, respectively. Veteran engagement on an individual level is targeted at veterans seeking individualized support from team leaders or other members or outreach conducted by RWB members with veteran non-members in an effort to support a veteran where he or she is at, regardless of whether he or she has joined the team. Figure 2 also illustrates the member participation in various events, broken down by veteran, civilian, and guard, reservists, and active duty personnel (GRADS) self-reported in the 2015 Team RWB member survey.

The Veteran Ambassador Program is also a valued component of Team RWB's Chapter and Communities, as it



serves team members who do not have a local chapter in their neighborhood but still want to be informed. The program welcomes new team members and ensures them regular updates, information, and resources to stay connected. This inclusive program allows the veteran, anywhere in the world, to become a member of this organization.

Chapter and community level leaders are predominantly volunteers. The only exception to this model occurs where paid national or regional leadership members reside, as they are expected to play a dual role. The Chapter Captain is entrusted with the overall responsibility of the chapter's conduct and mission accomplishment, the recruitment and management of other leaders, controlling chapter expenditures, assisting the Outreach Director in networking and establishing key relationships, and maintaining consistent communication with national headquarters. The Veteran Outreach Director is responsible for increasing veteran enrollment and involvement in the chapter, establishing relationships with veteran referral sources, and collecting data to measure impact. The Community Outreach Director drives community membership and participation, develops relationships with local businesses and organizations, managing the chapter's social media, assists the Veteran Outreach director in promoting the chapter, and facilitating chapter communications. The Athletic Director maintains in contact with all athletes in the chapter, plans and executes weekly fitness activities, coordinates chapter participation in local events, communicates with local race or event directors, and assists Social Director to develop events. Lastly, the Social Director is responsible for the coordination of social activities, assisting the Community Outreach Director in building partnerships within the local community and creating cost-effective opportunities, creating synergy between physical and social activity, and mobilizing the team members to be actively involved.

### Veteran Athletic and Leadership Camps

In addition to the Chapter and Community Program, there are several Veteran Athletic and Leadership Camps held in the national and regional levels. Open to all members to apply, the athletic camps allow Team RWB members the opportunity to engage in a new sport or activity that they could bring back to their local chapter in a leadership capacity or as a highly active community member. Each camp is held in communities across the country and coached by world-class athletes and renowned experts. Participants leave each camp having learned a new skill and gained camaraderie with other team members. These camps are utilized to promote a healthy lifestyle, improve athletic performance, encourage team building, and hone on their leadership skills. It has become a critical component to the construct of the organization. The athletic camps, which have grown in number every year, have included a: Trail Running Camp, Functional Fitness Camp, Triathlon Camp, Rock Climbing Camp, Veterans Yoga Camp, and a Waves of Valor Surf Camp.

In 2014, the Team RWB Veteran Athletic Camp Program expanded from six to nine camps, with nearly 300 Eagles in attendance. Implemented changes included an application process, conducting leadership development at all the camps, and improving follow up measures on post-camp impact. Specifically, the leadership development workshop would be facilitated by Team RWB's executive staff (Executive Director, Director of Operations, or the Leadership Development Director).

A new model for the 2015 camp program has been implemented, which categorizes the camps into either National or Regional Camps. The National Camps are held throughout the country with attendees from Chapters and Communities across

the country. In addition, each region is allotted a small number of slots per National Camp. Similar to National Camps, Regional Camps follow the same model, but have fewer attendees whom come from the region hosting the camp. Per guidance, each Team RWB region would host between one and two Regional Camps with approximately 20 attendees each year. Overall, the Veteran Athletic and Leadership camps are viewed as an investment in the members and the organization as a whole.

### Leadership Development Program

Another component to the Team RWB operating model is its Leadership Development Program (LDP). The LDP's three primary goals are to: make members better leaders, improve Team RWB as an organization, and strengthen communities. This multi-tiered program allows select team members broad access to the program and a vigorous development experience, consisting of superior education and training, resilient mentorships, and tools to take away from the internal and external leadership experiences. Team RWB recognizes the importance of leadership and role models as important elements to any organization, therefore, Team RWB has developed camps, both at the National and Regional level, to train new leaders. The goal is directed on the hope that after attendance at one of the leadership camps, the attendee will return to their chapter and community to share and implement the leadership skills and knowledge gained. The course components include access to personality profiles, strength and weakness assessments, and individualized mentorships that promote growth. Designed to mentor potential leaders, the program prepares an individual to fulfill a leadership role in a local community organization upon completion.

Figure 2. Team RWB Member Participation (2015)



### Signature Events and Collaborative Activities

Team RWB also focuses its efforts on collaboration with outside organizations and participation in events and annual races. For example, the Old Glory Relay presented by Microsoft is an annual relay race in which thousands of veterans, family members, and community supporters carry one American flag on an Olympic torch-style relay across America. Participants collectively traverse more than 3,500 miles while communities and veteran-serving nonprofits organize celebrations and offer support along the way. Team RWB has also partnered with Team Rubicon and The Mission Continues for the annual Run as One, which honors the life of Marine veteran, Clay Hunt, an original member of Team Rubicon that committed suicide after battling Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and depression. This event serves to both ignite awareness and promote suicide prevention for combat-stressed military men and women, and to celebrate the collective impact, partnership, and leadership across the veterans support spectrum. Another key event is the “WOD with Warriors,” which involves two custom workouts of the day (WODs) on Memorial Day and Veterans Day. These functional fitness workouts are hosted in over 300 community locations (gyms, CrossFit boxes, parks) and connect thousands of Americans to veterans in a meaningful way. Other events include the Warrior Sporting Clays Tournament, hosted by Conoco Phillips in Houston, the American Odyssey Relay, various Ragnar Relay races, top-ranked Trail Running Camp (delivered by Liza Howard and other champions of the ultra and trail running world), Triathlon Camp, the Army Ten-Miler, and the Marine Corps Marathon.

### Team Emblem and Gear as Symbol of Unity

Team RWB has made effective use of its logo—the Eagle—and branding materials as tools to build both camaraderie and national awareness. Team RWB has an online store with Nike brand Team RWB eagle-embazoned athletic gear and products, from shirts, socks, hats, to stickers, car decals, and custom triathlon suits. The recognizable logo on the red t-shirts worn by its members is a display of pride in the organization, their community, and what makes this nation great. Every new veteran Team RWB member receives a free red t-shirt upon joining the team to wear at weekly events. With such distinct, patriotic gear, local groups are often easily spotted in public while exercising and, as an organizational tradition, often carry an American flag to build awareness and a greater sense of community. The iconic red Team RWB shirt also provides veterans with a regained sense of identity. Similar to wearing their uniforms in service, upon joining the Eagle Nation, the veteran is once again given their ‘uniform’ to stress that they are still an important member of the team.

### The Importance of Civilian Membership

Team RWB recognizes the critical importance for civilian membership within each community to assist each veteran’s reintegration and provide a network of support. Over time, Team RWB has observed that both veterans and civilians have been significantly impacted by their participation with the organization with a greater sense of unity and purpose. To be fully reintegrated, veterans must regain a level of comfort within, and with individuals, in their community—not simply with other veterans and military family members. Having a strong and supportive community that can provide broad assistance in the transition process is key, especially for returning combat veterans that may be managing a mental health condition, anxiety, or depression. Studies have found that exercise and physical activity can be a natural equivalent for treatment of some conditions. By encouraging more civilian participation, Team RWB promotes active involvement in another’s recovery and a diverse community standing by to enrich the lives of veterans in the communities in which they reside. Civilian membership is essential for the veteran to feel a sense of connectedness and purpose, a fundamental drive in humanity.



## Team RWB as an Evidence-Based Wellness Intervention

Building authentic individual connections through physical and social activity translates decades of multidisciplinary research, spanning the fields of psychology, neuroscience, and sociology, into leading practice. Team RWB roots lie in positive psychology, a field dedicated to the scientific study of “what goes right in life” (Peterson, 2012) and was founded on the simple, yet significant truth that “other people matter” (Peterson, 2008). Restated from above, strong ties to individuals and a larger social network are the key ingredients to living a happier and more fulfilled life (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008; Diener & Seligman, 2002; Valliant, 2012). And connectedness to others (Pietrzak & Cook, 2013) is a major protective factor against developing physical and behavioral health problems, including early death (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2014; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010).

As a positive psychology intervention, Team RWB assists veterans seeking connection to develop authentic relationships through physical and social activity. It is through such new or strengthened social relationships that Team RWB supports better mental health by mitigating against challenges resulting from a lack of connection (such as depression and suicide) and facilitating newly transitioned veterans into socially supportive communities to prevent social isolation (Rook, 1984). This emphasis is particularly important given the large effects that social support has on immune function and chronic disease prevention.

More than two decades of research has revealed a high correlation between health outcomes and “social determinants” (WHO, 2015) of health and wellness—e.g., employment, education, housing, social cohesion, crime, and the environment (Bartley & Plewis, 2002; Berkman & Syme, 1979; Kawachi & Berkman, 2003; Marmot & Wilkinson, 2006; Moser, Fox, & Jones, 1984; Stansfeld & Marmot, 2002). Communities that “enable citizens to play a full and useful role in the social, economic, and cultural life of their society will be healthier than those where people face insecurity, exclusion, and deprivation” (Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003, p. 11; Wizemann & Thompson, 2014). Yet, in a 2011 Robert Wood Johnson Foundation survey of 1,000 primary care physicians, 85 percent of doctors agreed that their patients’ unmet social needs are leading to worse health, while four in five doubted their ability to meet their patients’ social needs (RWJF, 2011). Accordingly, Team RWB is an organization with the express purpose to build relationships and community, thereby addressing several “social determinants” of health and wellness for veterans.

RWB’s focus areas mutually reinforce greater wellness. First, RWB’s focus on social activity, especially on volunteering, provides an opportunity for veterans to participate in

meaningful interactions with others and continue to serve their communities. Research has confirmed that veterans, as a whole, are more civically engaged than their civilian peers and Team RWB provides such opportunities (Mettler, 2002; Tivald & Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2015). Second, RWB’s focus on physical activity draws on the clearly established health benefits of exercise. Finally, by connecting veterans to their community—with an express emphasis on civilian inclusion—RWB offers the opportunity to strengthen civil-military ties and foster a greater sense of understanding between veterans and an American public with diminishing family ties to the military. A century of sociological research suggests that groups of individuals who regularly engage in positive, shared experiences and emotions will develop trust and build solidarity—a sense of belonging—among the group (Collins, 2004; Durkheim, 1912; Goffman, 1969).

### STRIVING FOR OUTCOMES VIA THE TEAM RWB ANNUAL MEMBER SURVEY

In 2013, Team RWB established a core volunteer research team to measure, analyze, and communicate its programmatic outcomes on veterans and American communities. The Eagle Research Center proactively measures the organization’s outputs and outcomes<sup>1</sup> to improve the quality of members’ experience with its programs and to continuously inform and refine its programming at the community level. Part of its success thus far is having a clearly defined mission statement and a solid theoretical grounding, detailed above, to inform its data collection efforts.

As an evidence based organization, RWB aims to measure and communicate its programmatic impacts on participating veterans’ enrichment. Program evaluation as a field is focused on the design of social programs, the ongoing monitoring of program functioning, and the assessment of program impact with the overall goal of providing the most accurate information to the public and stakeholders. Successful evaluation research therefore provides the best information possible on the key questions given the practical constraints and real world design challenges (Berk & Rossi, 1999).

The cost of feasibility, however, is validity, which is the level of confidence that researchers have in attributing outcomes of the program under study to program participation and not alternative factors. To that extent, the research conducted by RWB has methodological limitations inherent of non-randomized research designs. The primary methodological limitation being is that there is no comparison group of veterans who have not signed up to participate in Team RWB upon which to contrast outcomes. This limitation introduces the possibility of biased estimates of program effects. However,

<sup>1</sup>Output measures include indicators such as the number of activities conducted, number of people attending events, and the number of veterans who engage with their programming, while outcome measures include items such as personal enrichment, life satisfaction, wellbeing, and leader development, among others.



even what would be considered weak methodological design can be of enormous practical success if very little is known about the effectiveness of a program (Berk & Rossi, 1999).

The data reported here is based on two studies conducted in 2014 and 2015 demonstrating the impact Team RWB is having on veterans, civilians, and active duty military members (see methodology specified in Appendix A). We limit our current report to self-identified veteran Team RWB members, surveying over 1,800 veterans in 2014 and 2,500 in 2015. Since our analyses consistently establish a relationship<sup>2</sup> between program participation levels and enrichment, we included information on how “frequently to very active” members differ in enrichment from those who report less frequent engagement with their chapters and programs.

### Team RWB Builds Authentic Connections

Team RWB’s primary focus is to build authentic connections between people and communities. Having a “sense of belonging,” that is, “the experience of personal involvement in a system so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of it” (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992, p. 73) is a fundamental human need. A sense of belonging is characterized by feeling valued, needed or accepted, and sharing values or purpose. It is created through frequent, positive, and enduring interactions with other people (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Loneliness or disconnection, in both an emotional sense (lack of close emotional attachment) and a social sense (minimal social contacts or network) affects an estimated 40 percent of all Americans (Bernstein, 2013; Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008). Veterans are susceptible to disconnection as part of a challenging reintegration process. This may be compounded by a reluctance to appear vulnerable or share feelings. Veterans transitioning to civilian life may feel they are “coming from a different world,” that those “who haven’t been there” “can’t understand” and that “there are no words” to describe the experiences of those who have been to war (Stein & Tuval-Mashiach, 2015). These views may lead to feelings of isolation and estrangement, despite being surrounded by loving and well-meaning friends and family (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008).

Brown’s (2010) decade-plus work on vulnerability, shame, courage, and worthiness reiterates how the unspeakable emotion of shame, characterized by stories hidden in “secrecy, silence, and judgment,” perpetuates long term psychological harm. People tend to engage in comparative suffering—downplaying their own suffering and their deservedness of compassion or empathy compared to those they perceive to be worse off (2010). Such sentiments are particularly true for service members and veterans who are coming from a pervasive



military culture of mental strength. The most salient takeaway from Brown’s research is that shame cannot survive the empathy of being spoken to by a trusted friend.

Building authentic connections, even new friendships, between veterans, civilians, and their larger community is the cornerstone of Team RWB, and the driving force in framing the organization as a ‘Team.’ Executive Director Blayne Smith in his testimony before the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee on “Mental Health and Suicide Among Veterans” explained the rationale for the team-centered approach:

*“Shared accomplishment, accountability, and even shared hardship are powerful drivers of connection and friendship. This team concept is very attractive to veterans because (unlike therapy) on a team, everybody contributes and everybody benefits. Team RWB members will generally tell you that they are participating in order to support their fellow veteran, and that is just fine. We do not require them to identify themselves as in-need or wounded or broken. At Team RWB, we don’t rank-order suffering or injury. Put more positively, we don’t rank-order ‘deserving.’ We simply provide veterans an opportunity to be part of a new team, to engage in positive activities, and to support their community.”*

By focusing on an activity, and not on forced person-to-person relationship building itself, satisfying personal relationships develop as a byproduct of the shared experience (Pilisuk & Minkler, 1980). ‘Best friend’ type relationships have been found through research to be the most important to develop, but diversity of relationships in a combination of strong and weak ties provide the greatest benefit in protecting against disconnection (de Jong Gierveld, Van Tilberg, & Dykstra, 2006). While major RWB events can typically draw anywhere between two and 50

<sup>2</sup> For all chi-squared statistics p values were less than or equal to 0.05.

or more 'Eagles' depending upon the nature of the event, its organizational focus is on the regularly scheduled weekly events held in chapters. Consistent, routine social engagement creates opportunities for veterans to establish close interpersonal bonds within the larger RWB community.

Relationship building is also key to increasing social support, defined as a social network's provision of resources intended to provide instrumental support (i.e., material aid), information, and emotional support to benefit an individual's ability to cope with stress (S. Cohen, 2004). Social support buffers against the development of stress, which activates the human stress response, resulting in the suppression of immune function thereby increasing the susceptibility to infectious disease. Social neuroscientists have also found that the hormone oxytocin, known as the "bonding hormone," which is released during social situations, enhances social behaviors, which, in combination with social interactions, can reduce cortisol production (C. S. Carter, 1998; Southwick & Charney, 2012). Lack of social support effects life expectancy comparable to cigarette smoking, hypertension, obesity and lack of physical activity (House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988).

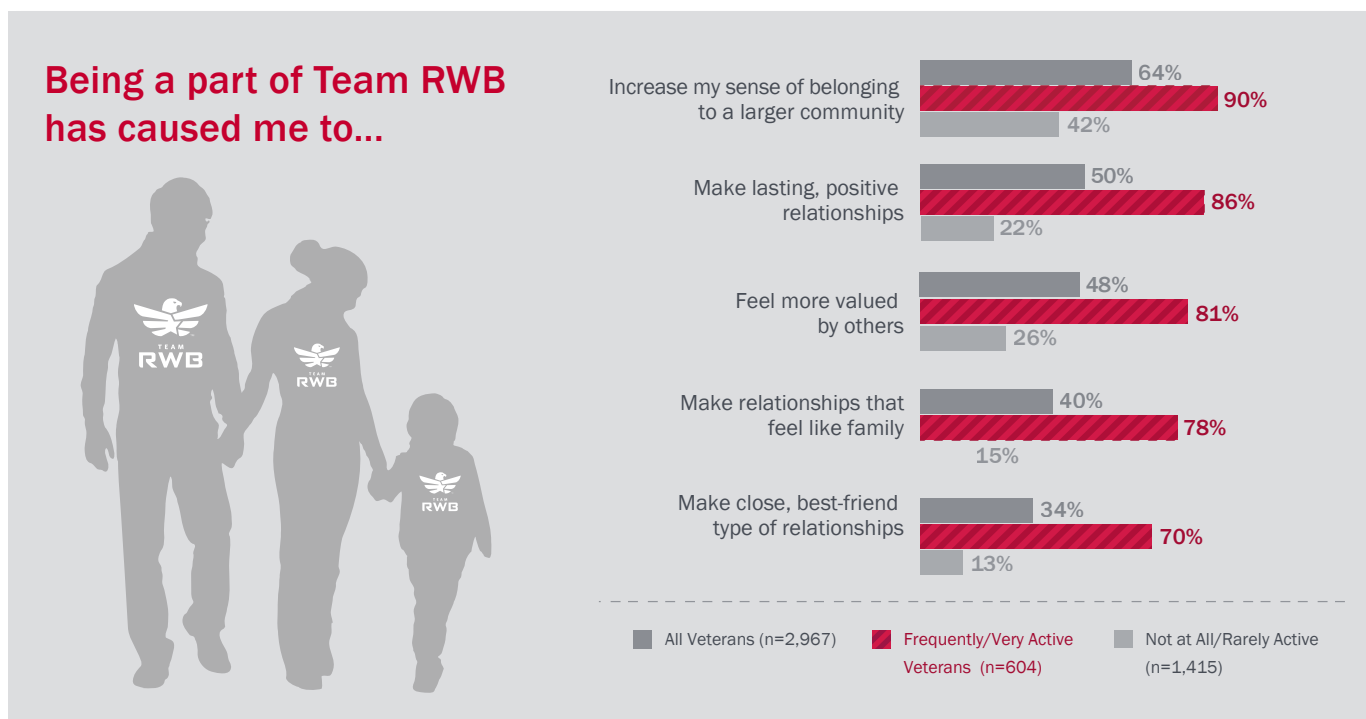
Team RWB's surveys have captured the impact of participation on team members sense of belonging (2015 data) and social support

(2014 data). RWB has also determined ways in which members help each other through socially supportive, altruistic behaviors<sup>3</sup> including veterans who haven't joined the team (2015 data).

Veterans build authentic relationships through participating in Team RWB. Veterans develop close friendships (34%) in a larger network of individuals who feel like family to them (40%). This increases their feeling valued by others (48%) and increases their sense of belonging to a larger community (64%). Half of RWB veterans report making lasting, positive relationships, which increases to more than three out of four veterans (86%) for those who are frequently to very actively involved with the Team. Even veterans who describe themselves as inactive or rarely active, experience personal relationship growth.

Veterans also report increased social support since joining the team in the form of access to information (72%), emotional support (57%), and resources (64%) (2014 Impact Survey). Veterans say that as a Team RWB member, they have supported other veterans, even those not on the team (52%), provided personal advice (37%) and career advice (25%) to their teammates, including helping them to find jobs (11%). Those who are frequently to very active are twice as likely to help their teammates in this way.

Figure 3. Impact on Personal Relationships (2015)



<sup>3</sup> Defined as "positive social acts carried out to produce and maintain the wellbeing and integrity of others" (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Shin & Johnson, 1978).





### Team RWB Increases Sense of Purpose through Civic Engagement Opportunities

The authentic relationships created by participating as an RWB member extend to the local communities in which RWB chapters operate through volunteering. RWB increases veterans' sense of purpose through creating volunteer leadership and service opportunities. Volunteering also instills a sense of purpose and meaning (Greenfield & Marks, 2004) in addition to belonging to RWB itself.

RWB members serve communities by taking on leadership roles within their Team RWB chapters and attending a leadership development camp. Team RWB members also perform service and provide support to other organizations and programs through community engagement.

Based upon monthly report data submitted by Team RWB Chapters, 1,200 individuals are volunteering in official RWB leadership roles, resulting in 156,062 hours of Team RWB service. From the 2015 survey, 13 percent said they have led an event, four percent stated they have attended a team RWB leadership camp, and one percent have applied to the Eagle Leadership Development Program.

Sims (2014, p. 10) describes Team RWB's powerful community service impact, stating that RWB is "quickly becoming recognized for providing 'legions of volunteer manpower, enthusiasm and creativity' to community events." More than two-thirds (68%) of all veteran members have observed that the Team RWB supports other organizations through sharing resources or providing volunteers (2015 Team RWB Impact Survey). Veterans report opportunities to serve or volunteer (46%), lead (25%), and be more involved in their community (40%). Volunteering further connects the individual to their community, carries its own health benefits, and is known to increase life satisfaction and physical and mental health (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2007).

Based upon the monthly reports filed by Chapter Captains, between January and December 2015, RWB Chapters have participated in 1,789 community service events. Being part of Team RWB increases veterans' sense of purpose<sup>4</sup> and has helped veterans feel greater life satisfaction.<sup>5</sup> Veterans involved with Team RWB find more purpose in life (45%), create more meaning (45%), and have a stronger sense of direction (41%).

<sup>4</sup> Defined as having more "meaning and direction in life" (Ryff, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> Defined as "a cognitive judgment process of an individual's quality of life according to his or her own criteria" (Diener et al., 1985; Shin & Johnson, 1978).

Figure 4. Impact on Member Community Engagement

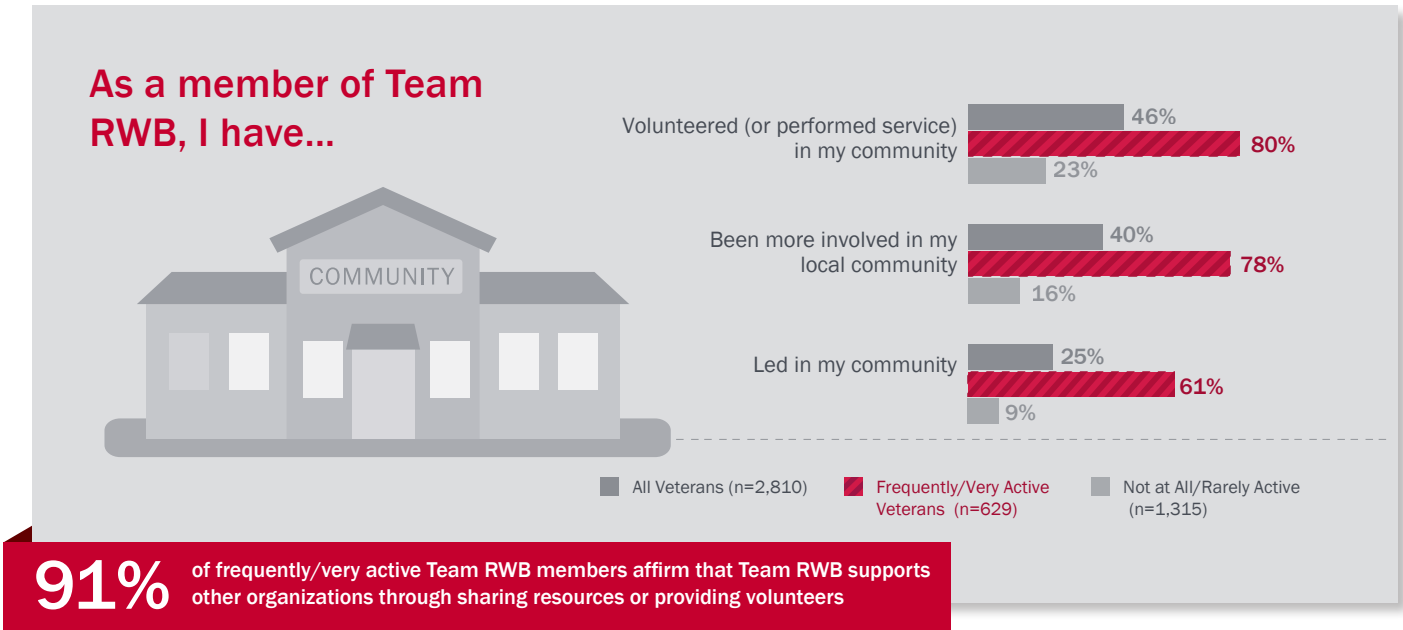
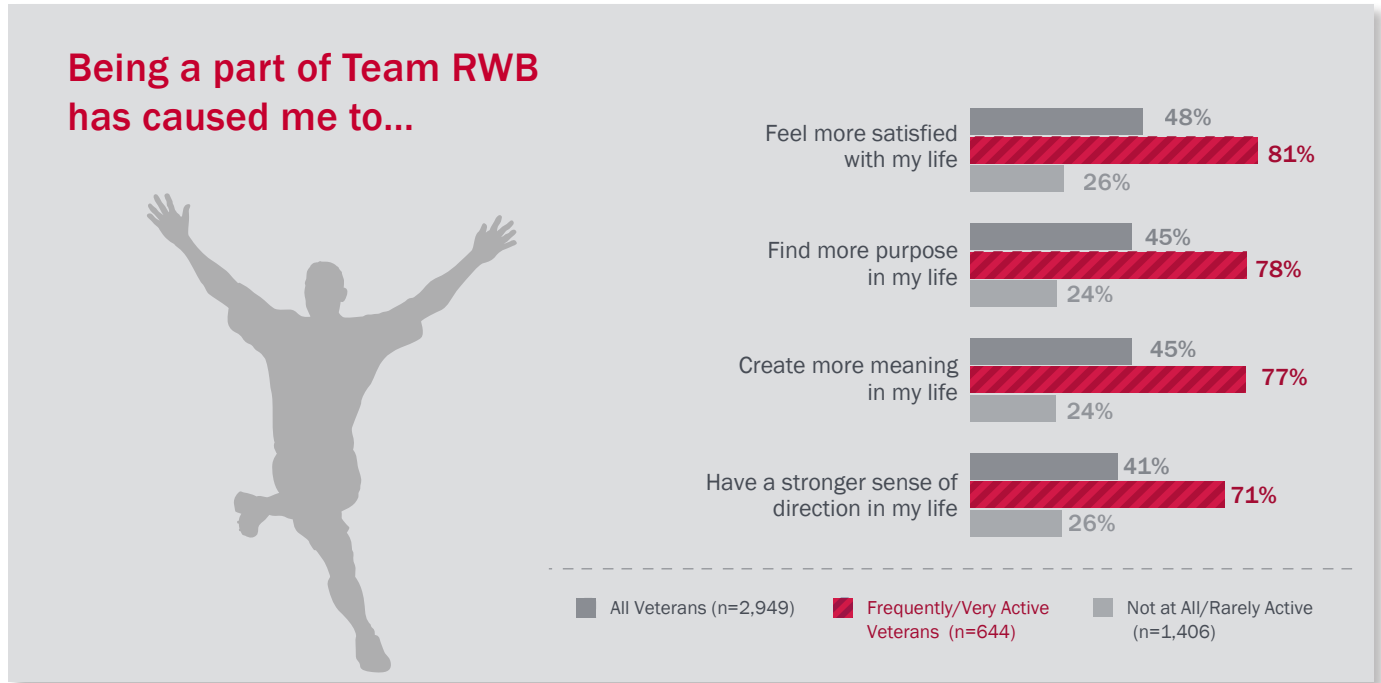


Figure 5. Impact on Member Sense of Purpose





### Team RWB Promotes Wellness through Physical Activity

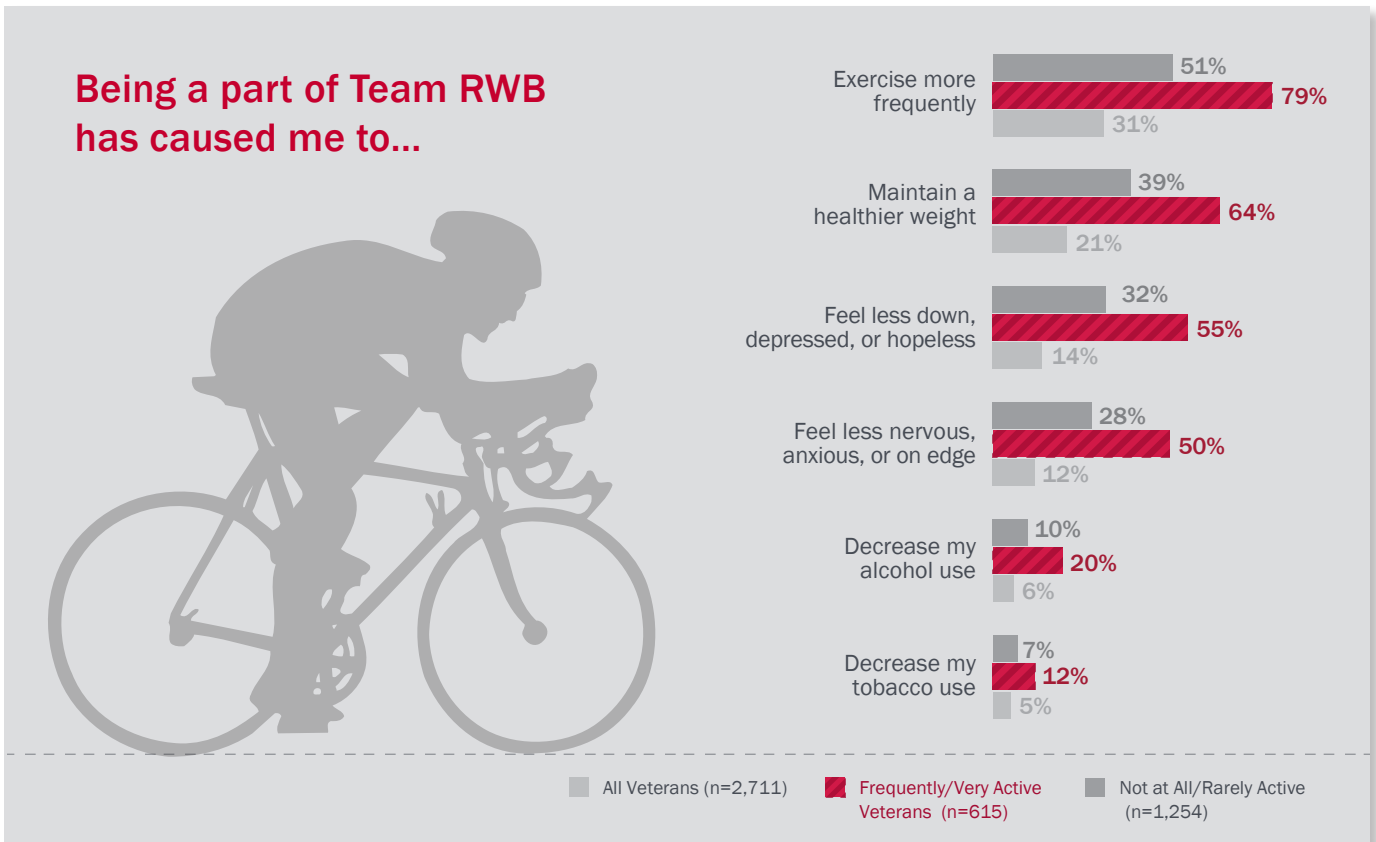
Routine physical activity (i.e., exercise) is an underutilized evidence based approach recommended by the U.S. Surgeon General to improve health (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). RWB’s focus on physical activity rests on the cumulative empirical evidence on the positive health benefits of exercise. The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges touts exercise as the “miracle cure” (Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, 2015). Systematic reviews of the most scientifically rigorous research have demonstrated that exercise reduces anxiety and depression symptoms and coronary heart disease (Asmundson et al., 2013; Heran et al., 2011; Jayakody, Gunadasa, & Hosker, 2014; Mead et al., 2009; Shaw, Gennat, O’Rourke, & Del Mar, 2006; Stathopoulou, Powers, Berry, Smits, & Otto, 2006; R. S. Taylor et al., 2004).

RWB physical activities are conducted in small to large groups as regular team training sessions or in a competitive based environment focused on individual performance. The evidence indicates that creating opportunities for face-to-face interactions focused on a specific physical activity supports individuals’ efforts to become active and fit (Richards, Hillsdon,

Thorogood, & Foster, 2013). Beyond this ‘peer-accountability effect’, team based exercise also promotes group unity and cohesion among the group.

In 2015, RWB created 16,254 regularly scheduled exercise events and participated in 5,563 races or athletic activities. Team RWB members have stated that their physical and mental health has improved since joining the Team. Health gains reflect an improvement in overall wellbeing, defined as “a dynamic and relative state where one maximizes his or her physical, mental, and social functioning in the context of supportive environments to live a full, satisfying, and productive life” (Kobau, Sniezek, & Zack, 2009; Kobau, Sniezek, Zack, Lucas, & Burns, 2010). Important improvements have been reported on veterans’ wellbeing since joining Team RWB. Veterans report a decline in tobacco usage (7%; 34% not applicable), a decline in alcohol consumption (10%; 25% not applicable), and maintain a healthier weight (39%). One out of three veterans reported feeling less nervous, anxious or on edge (28%) and have felt less down, depressed, or hopeless (32%). A majority of veterans report exercising more frequently since joining the team (51%), and 39% have maintained a healthier weight.

Figure 6. Impact on Member Wellbeing



### Team RWB Builds Civilian-Military Solidarity

RWBs capacity to build authentic personal connections between veterans and non-military connected civilians is theoretically grounded in the scientific study of solidarity in society (Durkheim, 1912). The cumulative insights of Goffman's (1969) "ritual interactions" and Collins's (2004) "interaction ritual chains" suggest how the RWB model of local, consistent, and inclusive activity to foster authentic relationships is effective as a social movement, even though it is focused on the individual.

Sociologists describe how face-to-face group interactions among a group of bonded people around a shared activity create strong—almost electric—positive emotion among participants. Positive experiences reinforce the desire for more interaction, creating a feedback loop. RWB's primary focus to create as many weekly opportunities to connect, especially in small groups (such as two-to-ten individuals at a functional fitness workout), provides an opportunity to regularly engage with members of the team. High 'emotional energy' (often experienced as confidence and enthusiasm) is sentimentalized by symbols of the group and shared sense of trust. The regular face-to-face engagement carries over to an online community via Facebook, which provide an opportunity for continued engagement as well as information sharing for the next scheduled event. Team RWB's emblem of the Eagle communicates team membership and commitment as does wearing RWB bracelets, and carrying the American flag during athletic events.

Team RWB's charge to connect veterans to their community has become a social movement. Based upon a civilian survey launched in December 2014, 75 percent of civilians joined Team RWB to support veterans as they transition out of the military into civilian life (n = 415). The data to this extent support this theoretical basis. Team RWB organizes more weekly events than any other type of activity. Typically, attendance is small at these events since proximity is thought to be a key-contributing variable to participation, yet small group environments allow for more intimate engagement. Nearly two-thirds, (63%) of all veterans participate in a Team RWB Facebook group, 80 percent wear the Team RWB Eagle shirt, with 21 percent (58% among frequently to very active veterans) reporting that they carried the American flag at an event. Team sentiment is high among Team RWB veterans, who take pride in their teammates accomplishments (66%) and push themselves outside of their comfort zones to do something for the benefit of the team (40%). Veterans have noticed that when Team RWB members participate in an event, it inspires national pride in their communities (71%).

Veterans report that participating in Team RWB is reducing the civilian military divide. We define the civilian military divide as the gap in knowledge and understanding of service members' skills, experiences, and values between civilians who have never served in the military and active duty military members and veterans,

resulting in mutual feelings of disconnection and lack of trust.<sup>6</sup> Veterans report that being part of Team RWB has given them an opportunity to share their strengths (54%) and challenges (47%) as a veteran with civilians, feel more connected to civilians (32%), and have more trust in civilians (25%).

### Team RWB Indirectly Improves Veterans' Family Lives and Employment Outcomes

The value of an enriched life resulting from participating as an RWB team member can translate into profound spillover effects on other areas of life. The positive interdependence between different areas of life has been noted in which satisfaction in one area of life has additive effects in other areas, such as life satisfaction and perceived quality of life. Psychologists have focused on "work-life enrichment," defined as "the extent to which experiences in one role improves the quality of life in the other role" (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006, p. 73). Based upon the volume of anecdotal reports emerging from a 96,000-member organization, we hypothesized that these changes were also happening as a byproduct of authentic connections developed, increased sense of wellbeing, and a greater sense of purpose felt by team members indicated in the results of the 2014 Impact survey. As part of our 2015 impact survey, we investigated these outcomes as part of our membership assessment.

Veterans felt that being part of Team RWB helped them feel more personally fulfilled (42%) and improved their mood (42%), which resulted in them being a better family member. They also reported improved relationships with family and friends (36%).

Veterans reported increased work satisfaction (20%) (a strong positive predictor of employee retention) as a result of enrichment experienced by being a member of Team RWB, as well as increased productivity (21%), engagement (21%), and reduced stress (24%). Team members were able to build a better network of contacts (43%), with a small but meaningful percentage finding a job (5%), earning a promotion (5%), and/or salary increase (6%) as a result of participating on the Team.

## Discussion and Implications

Over the past five years, thousands of veterans have shared their stories on the profound impact that RWB is having on their lives by authentically connecting them to their communities, creating stronger relationships, improving their health, and facilitating a greater sense of purpose. Indirectly, participating in Team RWB programs has also increased veterans' work related outcomes. For the first time, these findings have been quantitatively documented through systematic inquiry.

While the inherent biases of the descriptive study rule out a cause-and-effect relationship (causal inference) that participation

<sup>3</sup> The political science field has a well-established civil-military relations literature that, in essence, describes the civil-military "gap" in terms of attitudes of alienation felt between the military and civil society. See the journal *Armed Forces and Society* or key texts such as Feaver & Kohn (2001), Huntington (1957), and Janowitz (1960).



Figure 7. Impact on Team Identity

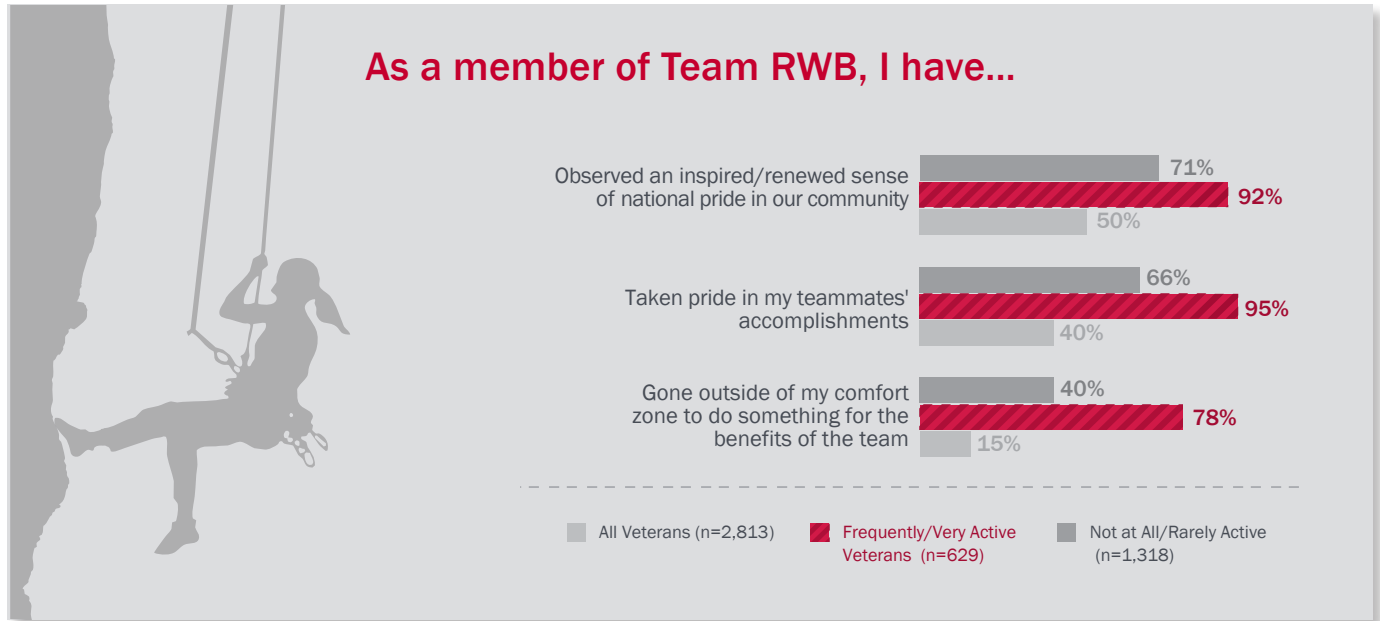


Figure 8. Impact on Civilian-Military Solidarity

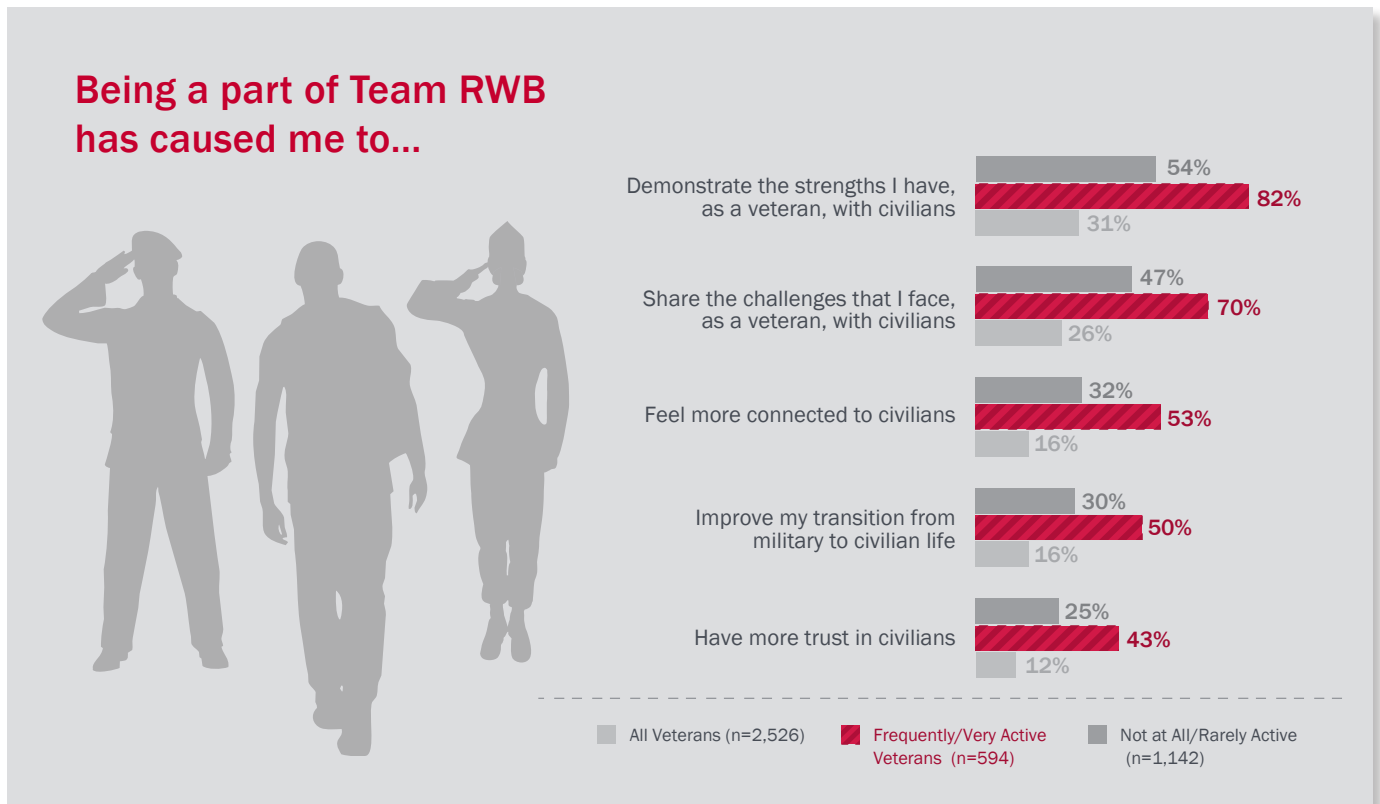
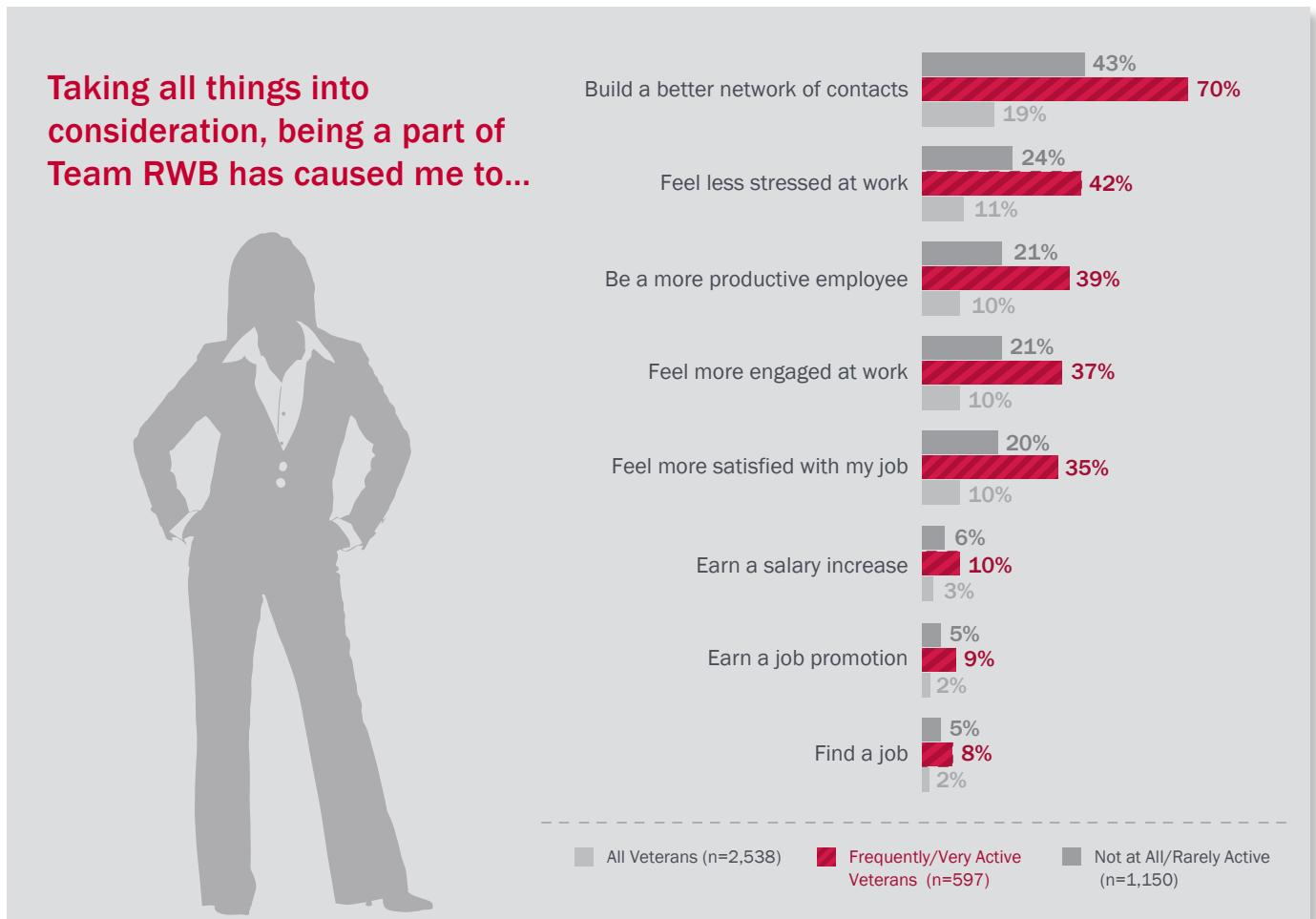


Figure 9. Indirect Impact on Member Families



Figure 10. Indirect Impact on Employment



increases enrichment, the results are a first step in establishing Team RWB's evidence basis. But beyond the self-reported impact that veterans claim to acquire through Team RWB's programs, *the key takeaway from the research is that, for the study participants, the greater the degree of participation in Team RWB programs, the greater the level of reported enrichment—on all outcomes measured.* In other words, the more one participates in Team RWB activities, the more one gets out of it. The practical translation of this engagement-enrichment relationship is the organization's continued commitment and operational focus to create meaningful opportunities for interaction for the team members. In some chapters, this has led to increased use of virtual events and impacted chapter-level monthly reporting.

The initial surveys have also offered insights on future improvements to RWB's evaluation approach. An overhaul of internal surveys is already underway to pinpoint understanding of how new Team members desire to participate on the Team. The research team is also discussing the possibility of studying individuals over time (longitudinally). In addition, new understanding of Team RWB as an evidence based practice will be informed by the findings of the Teachers College, Columbia University randomized controlled trial investigating the impact of Team RWB and Team RWB plus trained peer mentorship on military to civilian transition stressors, psychological and physical health, mortality, and arrest (NIH, 2015).

Above all, Team RWB is an organization that values—at all levels—trust and transparency with its partners, funders, and community. Research and evaluation of RWB's programs is and will remain vital to communicating its impact and improving how it targets resources to improve and grow its programs. Executive Director Blayne Smith noted that, "Team RWB is committed to delivering the best possible outcomes for our members. Our research has been critically important not just to program improvement, but also in communicating our impact to partners, funders, and the community. It supports our goal of being the most transparent and trusted veteran-serving nonprofit in America." Team RWB's Director of Development Brandon Young added, "Our low cost, highly inclusive intervention has gained the trust and support of some of the most innovative organizations and philanthropists in the world. With transparency and collaboration as our north star, we have helped shape how Americans view the interwoven benefits of health, authentic relationships and a sense of purpose."

## Conclusion

This case illustration of Team RWB highlights the steps the organization has taken, despite its youth relative to other veteran and military family serving organizations, and preliminary results around developing an evidence basis to inform both its programming and its funders.



Highlighting leading measurement and evaluation practices is critical given the uncertainty around veteran focused philanthropy. In the coming years, veteran and military family serving organizations are likely to see increased competition for fewer resources, with an ostensible decline in individual, corporate, and philanthropic giving (P. Carter & Kidder, 2015a, p. 16). Meanwhile, the philanthropic community feels that nonprofits "should be held to higher standards of evidence than they are today to demonstrate the effectiveness of their work" (Benjamin, 2013; Buteau & Buchanan, 2011, p. 5). Since veterans' needs will undoubtedly persist into the future, veteran serving organizations, and other community-wide human service providers, will be under increased scrutiny to perform and to demonstrate—with supporting evidence—their outcomes and impact.

The good news is that, as a sector, nonprofit leaders strongly agree with grantmakers. They see the value and strive to understand their performance (Brock, Buteau, & Herring, 2012, pp. 4-5). However, a majority also feel that they could use more help from their funders to do so, not only in financial terms, but also in the form of non-monetary engagement and discussion around evaluation planning, methods, and reporting. (Brock et al., 2012, pp. 5-8). In practice, not every program is appropriate, much less feasible in time or resources, for the most scientifically rigorous, randomized controlled trial evaluation (Gugerty & Karlan, 2014). As a starting point, however, most grantmakers and grantees would agree on the value of working together to co-create cost-effective, data-driven decision making approaches that measure and drive performance.

With this practical lens in mind, the IVMF aims to sustain a discussion around measurement and evaluation, performance measurement, and evidence-based practice. In addition to highlighting veteran and military serving organizations employing various evaluation techniques, future products in the series will include briefs and tools that inform providers and donors on leading practices, methods, and noteworthy developments across the veteran and military community to promote greater learning, keener grantmaking, and more impactful services.

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## APPENDIX A

### Methodology

The research design implemented in 2014 and 2015 were a retrospective, descriptive studies. In 2014, the survey intended to assess the impact of Team RWB on veteran's reported perceptions of connectivity, shared purpose, civilian military divide, wellbeing, and life satisfaction. The 2015 survey was informed by and improved upon from the 2014 survey and was designed to understand how RWB members participate on the team, and impacted their personal networks, altruism to teammates, sense of purpose, work and life spillover effects of participation, civilian military divide, wellbeing, and life satisfaction.

The Team RWB 2014 and 2015 Impact surveys were online self-report surveys designed by the Eagle Research Center team. We consulted the academic literature and existing instruments, which informed the creation of survey items (Carlson, Kacmar, Wayne, & Grzywacz, 2006; Filo, Funk, & O'Brien, 2009; Grieve, Indian, Witteveen, Tolan, & Marrington, 2013; Kroenke, Spitzer, Williams, & Löwe, 2009; Lee & Robbins, 1995). We developed additional items to reflect measures of connectivity consistent with Brown's definition (2010), and ideas on the civilian military divide gathered from a review of concepts in the mainstream media available, but an area scant with academic attention or research. An additional reference on camaraderie contributed to item development. RWB Chapter Captains also participated in a focus group in 2015 to inform item creation. In 2014 and 2015, instruments were field tested by a volunteer senior research scientist with veterans, civilians, and active duty military members offered feedback.

Survey methodology remained consistent across both years: Likert scale questions were designed to measure participant agreement to each statement as a self-rating of "enrichment." Respondents were asked to rate the extent they "strongly disagreed" to "strongly agreed" with statements on a five-point scale. A final open ended question was included to further understand possible satisficing and social desirability response bias.

In 2014 and 2015, a mass online social media and email blast was the primary way we recruited a convenience sample. In 2014, 1,828 veteran Team RWB members (of the estimated 20,250 veteran member roster) responded in a between June 24, 2014 and July 1, 2014. We estimated that the sample size needed to achieve 95 percent confidence with a 3 percent margin of error was 1,014. 1,921 members began the survey (9% of the available population), and 95 percent completed it (1,828/1,921). In 2015, 19,000 of the 70,000 veteran, civilian, and active duty Team RWB members were reached via Facebook during June 22, 2015 and July 5, 2015. 3,186 veterans began the survey and 2,542 completed it (80% completion rate). Differences in completion rate between 2014



and 2015 are attributed to the increase in the length of the survey from 38 to 61 items.

After the sampling time frame closed, data was analyzed by members of the research team. For the purposes of data reporting, we collapsed the "Disagree" to "Strongly Disagree" responses into one category and "Agree" to "Strongly Agree" responses into a single category. For the subgroup analysis reporting enrichment by activity level, comparisons were made between those self-defined as "not at all active" and "rarely active" (collapsed into one category) and those team members who reported themselves as "frequently" and "very active" (collapsed into one category).

The limitations of this methodology merit comment. Self-report descriptive research cannot demonstrate causality between program participation and outcomes and future research will need to control for confounding variables. Additionally, questionnaires would benefit from psychometric analysis to enhance reliability and validity of measurement. The research team could not control participants who answered the survey more than one time. Additionally, we could not control for self-selection bias into the study or possible bias introduced through satisficing or reporting socially desirable effects. Therefore, our conclusions are not generalizable beyond the sample. We were, however, reassured about the data quality with the analysis of qualitative comments offered by participants who described the impact of Team RWB on their lives in their own words. We estimated that the ratio of "positive" feedback to "constructive" feedback thus far has been about 3:1, and thereby were reassured that program glamorizing by participants was not taking place.



## About The Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF)

The IVMF is the first interdisciplinary national institute in higher education focused on the social, economic, education, and policy issues impacting veterans and their families post-service. Through the focus on veterans programming, research and policy, employment and employer support, and community engagement, the Institute provides in-depth analysis of the challenges facing the veteran community, captures best practices, and serves as a forum to facilitate new partnerships and strong relationships between the individuals and organizations committed to making a difference for veterans and military families.



## About Team Red, White & Blue

Team Red, White & Blue (Team RWB) is changing the way Americans engage with veterans and strengthening communities across the United States. As a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization headquartered in Tampa, FL, Team RWB's mission is to enrich the lives of America's veterans by connecting them to their community through physical and social activity. There are currently 172 Team RWB chapters and communities located throughout the world. To learn more about Team RWB and how you can help, visit [www.teamrwb.org](http://www.teamrwb.org).

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p 315.443.0141  
f 315.443.0312  
e [vets@syr.edu](mailto:vets@syr.edu)  
w [vets.syr.edu](http://vets.syr.edu)



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