



Wyakin is a word of the Nez Perce, Native Americans of north central Idaho. Loosely translated, it means guardian spirit.

To receive a Wyakin, Native American adolescents embarked on a vision quest. They'd travel to an isolated spot, usually in

the mountains, and were left without food, water, weapons, or other resources. They'd fast and reflect to prepare their minds,

until their Wyakin revealed itself in a vision. A protector and comforter, a Wyakin bestowed powers to prepare and assist the

adolescent through challenges, and guide them for the rest of their lives.

MOVING FORWARD

to fulfill a vision

Boise's Wyakin Warrior Foundation provides mentorship and support to severely wounded and injured veterans

By DONNA BUSH AND DALIA GRIFFITH
Photography By DICK SELBY

The Wyakin Warrior program has helped me better control the stress in my life, and the education to make it possible for me to achieve a better grade point average after failing out of school on my own. The Wyakin Warrior program has been very influential in my future success of graduating and transitioning into the work force and becoming, what Jeff Bacon and I talked about, an ambassador into the community for future veterans.

MISCHA BRADY



Wyakin has cleared obstacles from my path to graduation, and has provided the tools for my continued success thereafter.

AARON WOODS

Like the spiritual guardian of Native American lore, the Wyakin Warrior Foundation comforts, guides, provides support, and fulfills visions, for life. For more info or to find out how you can help, check out www.wyakin.org.

The program has given me the tools to become a better positive member of the community in which I am so thankful to be a part of.

MATTHEW WATSON,
Army specialist retired



Being in the Wyakin Warrior Foundation has giving me a good direction and motivation for school. If it weren't for Wyakin I would have dropped out after my first year. I was so frustrated and fed up, but once I got into the program I got the help I needed and the motivation to keep going.

TOMMY MONTGOMERY

Like the Wyakin, an organization in Boise prepares, assists, and guides wounded young veterans. The Wyakin Warrior Foundation (WWF) is a non-profit that provides multifaceted mentoring, professional development, financial support, community service, and networking opportunities – with the ultimate goal of completing an education and securing a meaningful job - to those severely injured in the line of duty. Its model is unique, having been labeled “best in class” by the USO, a key partner and supporter. Many returning soldiers feel isolated and have difficulty transitioning into mainstream society when their service

“It’s about showing these guys and gals that they can still tap into that service ethos.”

ends. Formed in 2011, the WWF helps severely wounded, injured or ill post-9/11 veterans who are interested in making an impact in business, government, or their communities, but lack the education or training to do so. It’s a win-win situation, suited to the Treasure Valley with its sense of patriotism and veteran support. Perhaps it’s no coincidence that the idea for WWF came to co-founder Jeff Bacon while hiking with his wife, Rebecca. A retired naval officer and cartoonist, Jeff had visited military hospitals to cheer wounded veterans. But drawing “goofy pictures” and saying “thanks for your service” didn’t seem like enough. Inspired by these soldiers, Jeff was struck by how many of

them vowed to move forward, and wondered what else he could do to help. On Mores Mountain, Jeff and Rebecca pondered a solution. “She asked what I thought they needed, and I said that these guys have counselors and chaplains, a huge support network while they’re in military hospitals,” he explains. “But what happens when they are medically retired and end up in Caldwell? And you’re missing a limb or two, and you’ve got burns on the face? And you’re 25 years old? A lot of your identity is wrapped up in your appearance and age. They might wonder, ‘Am I attractive? Do I scare people?’ And people in Caldwell, or any town in the country, admire what they’ve done in service to their country, but don’t know what to say.” As they hiked, unknowingly on their own quest, the couple discussed young veterans with limited resources. “We talked about what you would need if you were 18 years old and missing a

couple limbs, and had a high school diploma. Your training no longer applies. You have to start over, and you have some big physical challenges to overcome. We started building the program on that hike.” Rebecca is the foundation’s board secretary and corporate secretary. Senator Marv Hagedorn, another retired Navy man and Jeff’s friend, quickly joined the cause. Jeff recalls, “I got about two sentences in, and Marv says, ‘I’m in.’ We knew there was a need so we started moving forward. And it blossomed.” After a generous contribution from the J. A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation, the Wyakin Warrior Foundation became a life-changing partner for many. Their motto is “Battle Tested. Business Ready.” But WWF benefits extend beyond the workplace. The group emphasizes leadership and character, and encourages participants to become business and community leaders. Many proceed to

mentor others. Those who complete the program have a lifelong support network. Trained soldiers, sailors, and airmen are accustomed to hard work, making them valuable to any business. WWF helps them gain the necessary skills to land the job and move forward. The mentoring structure is similar to that of military ranks, with professional, community, and peer mentors ready to assist. Only one percent of the public has served in uniform. That can cause returning veterans to feel alienated or misunderstood. Executive director Todd Monroe says, “It’s about showing these guys and gals that they can still tap into that service ethos. They can be leaders, role models. Our community is built around that. We want the other 99 percent to understand and help embrace veteran strengths over their struggles. These young veterans bring an awful lot to the table for

your organization or your business. Not because of what they’ve been through, but because of the training they’ve had, and because of their character, mission focus, attention to detail, and motivation.” Jeff adds, “We saw this inner strength in soldiers and sailors and such. And we try to concentrate on that, rather than their challenges. We know that you’ve got challenges to overcome, and we’ll help you. But what we’re really interested in is what’s in your chest, and what’s in your head. And that is what has been so gratifying. (We’ve seen) some unbelievable challenges. And yet they get back on their feet and start moving forward again. And when you start seeing them begin to have their own individual successes, it’s as if they’re a member of your family. It’s that same pride. That’s the reward.” ■