



CHRIS GORDON

Chris Gordon joined the U.S. Army in 1997. Having grown up in Brooklyn and Queens, the events of 9/11 hit close to home with his entire family still living in New York. When the war began, Chris was assigned to an armored vehicle unit as an infantry supply sergeant.

On March 13, 2005, his unit was on patrol in Tal-Afar, Iraq, when their vehicle struck an improvised explosive device (IED) that launched Chris and another soldier out of the back hatch. When he woke up in the hospital, he realized he had lost his right leg and had a permanent titanium rod in his left leg.

The rehab was intense, and Chris had to learn to walk all over again. From the beginning of his recovery, Chris says Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) supported him like a family member, starting at his hospital bedside with a backpack filled with comfort items.

Since then, he has been involved in many life-changing WWP programs, such as Adaptive Sports and Project Odyssey®, and says, “WWP has been an integral part of my life. They have provided me with countless unforgettable experiences, so I can keep moving in a positive direction, both mentally and physically.”

“If it wasn’t for the support of individuals like you, I would have never become the positive, happy, family-focused man I am today.”



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MICHAEL CARRASQUILLO

As a New York City native, Michael Carrasquillo felt a calling to defend his country and hometown after watching the planes hit the World Trade Center towers on 9/11. He joined the Army after graduating high school and deployed to Iraq in 2003. While on a mission, he was shot five times and spent the next two years in hospitals, relearning how to walk and use his hands again.

Due to the severity of his injuries, all of his medical care was geared toward his physical healing, and he was never tested for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It was more than a year after Michael was medically retired that he and his wife began to realize something was very wrong.

Michael was on a dark downward spiral until he connected with Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP). Michael attended several WWP connection events where he slowly ventured out of isolation and later connected to a peer mentor, who helped him realize – and eventually overcome – his mental health challenges. He also worked with the Warriors to Work® program to craft a resume and land a job he loves.

Not only has Michael found a civilian career through WWP, he has also found a renewed purpose, helping other veterans in their transitions. Michael now serves as a peer mentor – bringing fellow warriors together to find the same connection that helped him begin to heal. “WWP gave me the opportunity to help myself. I couldn’t be happier physically, emotionally, with work, and with my family.”

“I wouldn’t be where I am today if it wasn’t for WWP and the people who support it.”



JASON EHRHART

The events of 9/11 made Jason Ehrhart so angry that he enlisted in the U.S. Army right after high school. A few months after being sent to Iraq, life for Jason and his family took a devastating turn when his Humvee was blown up by anti-tank mines. Both of his legs were broken, he had third-degree burns covering 60% of his body, and he slipped into a coma that lasted for three months. When he came out of the coma, one of his legs had been amputated and he couldn't swallow or speak.

Jason's wounds and traumatic brain injury (TBI) meant that he could do virtually nothing for himself, and his parents, Pam and Mike Estes, were about to embark on a long, hard journey as full-time caregivers to their adult son. Only a year after sending their son to war, Pam says, "We were having to consider whether we should put him in a nursing home."

The Estes family credits Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) caregiver retreats with helping them begin their own recoveries and the WWP Independence Program with helping Jason live more self-sufficiently. Jason continues to make progress and shows improvements after every WWP event he attends. He says, "I know I'm never going to be the same person. And I don't want to be the same person. I'm still moving forward."

Pam and Mike know that they will not always be around to take care of their son but are comforted by the fact that WWP will always support them. Pam says, "We will be living with the effects of war for the rest of our lives. Wounded Warrior Project's message was that 'we will always be there. It doesn't matter how far from the war you are.'"

"Wounded Warrior Project gave me my life back."





LISA CRUTCH

Sergeant Lisa Crutch was very comfortable in her role as a leader of the 736th Transportation Company in the U.S. Army. “My military training, my national pride, and my concern for my fellow soldiers made me a leader. I was comfortable in my own skin,” she says. “However, the transition from being Sgt. Crutch to being just Lisa wasn’t so easy.”

When Lisa returned home from Iraq to her husband and children, she looked completely normal, but she was far from okay. Not only was she suffering from the invisible wounds of war, specifically post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and a traumatic brain injury (TBI) that caused her to forget joyous family memories, but she was battling with her transition as a female veteran from Sgt. Crutch to Lisa.

Lisa was introduced to Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) in 2009 and says, “They helped my family understand what I was experiencing and gave me the tools I needed so I could find my former self, or a better version of it.”

Lisa feels empowered to share her story and experiences by volunteering as a WWP peer mentor and national campaign team member. “I can help my fellow warriors acknowledge, confront, and overcome what’s going on inside of them,” Lisa says. “I’m still a work in progress. So let’s be imperfect together. Let’s help one another. You can never go wrong when you help people.”

“Because of you, I’m no longer isolated.”



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MIKE LARSON

While on patrol in Iraq, Mike Larson completely lost the use of his right leg and the feeling in his right hand after an improvised explosive device (IED) blew up in the middle of his platoon. But that wasn't the worst news he received after the explosion — they also lost 10 men in his unit.

In addition to his visible injuries, he also suffered from traumatic brain injury (TBI), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and survivor's guilt, and the resulting memory loss, anger, and depression were affecting his life and family.

In 2012, Mike started attending Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) connection events and realized that other veterans were going through the same challenges as him. Mike has since been involved in multiple life-changing programs, such as Project Odyssey®, where he was able to identify emotions and symptoms associated with PTSD, as well as help warriors who were at the very beginning of their recovery.

He says, “Because of WWP, I saw what other warriors were going through — and trying to help them has helped me too.”

“Thanks to you, I know someone has my back anytime I need it.”

YOMARI CRUZ

In September 2010, Yomari Cruz deployed to Afghanistan with her Army unit filled with pride and purpose. But not 10 minutes after getting off the aircraft, the base was attacked and those good feelings were replaced with intense fear. While Yomari loved her job, the constant attacks, the loss of her military brothers, and other traumatic experiences took her to a dark place. Things only got worse after a soldier she trusted was caught videotaping her in the shower on base, and betrayal, fear, and paranoia overwhelmed her.

Suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) when she medically retired in 2013, Yomari struggled to transition to civilian life. She had serious anger issues, feared public places, couldn't handle everyday conversations with people, and most of her relationships with friends and family disintegrated.

Everything changed when a fellow veteran took her to a Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) event. For the first time in more than three years, Yomari felt at ease. She saw other warriors behave like she did, and she realized there were other people who understood what she had gone through — and cared.

Since then, she has participated in many WWP events, including Soldier Ride® and Project Odyssey®, which Yomari credits as one of the best experiences she has ever had. “You feel like you have a support system and you become like a close family,” says Yomari. Yomari knows how important connecting to other veterans is to recovery and has found a new purpose — helping other warriors. She volunteers with WWP as a warrior leader, organizing local events and helping her fellow veterans connect with one another.

“I don't think I would be where I'm at today if it wasn't for your support.”



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