

Veteran's Sea Kayak Resiliency Training - Spring 2024 & Fall 2024

Coastal Warriors Impact Report

Spring 2024: 8 Men, 10 Women = 18 Warriors

Fall 2024: 10 Men, 8 Women = 18 Warriors

Age Range: 26 years old → 77 years old

Staff: Captain Chris Crolley & Madison Cantrell

Specialists: Dr. Liz Santa Ana, Jean Brooks, and Jonathan Kessler

Spring 2024 Cohort - Branches of Service: 8 Army, 6 Navy, 3 Air Force, 1 Coast Guard

Fall 2024 Cohort - Branches of Service: 9 Army, 6 Navy, 2 Air Force, 1 Coast Guard

Pre-Assessment Responses

Motivations and Goals in joining the Program

- Enrolling in this program gives me the opportunity to meet new people and get out of the house. I also like the family time the program promotes.
- To build relationships with people I can relate too and spend more time outdoors doing physical activity.
- To continue this healthy life for my son
- Learn better coping skills, learn a new skill, have another means of enjoying nature, dedicated and committed time to be outside and working on healing
- To better my coping skills while also helping others. How to always find the positive even when it seems impossible.
- More knowledge about kayaking. How to be more disciplined.

Post-Assessment Responses

Biggest Take Away

- The nature of what it takes to become proficient in a kayak takes you through a progression of technical skills. Sharing that with the program leaders and the cohort is the real magic. You show up not knowing anyone, or how life has treated them and you learn to work together to understand the nuances of kayaking and each other. Like a lot of things - the more you learn, the more you understand how much you still have to learn. You go into the program thinking it's just paddling a kayak. In reality, it's all the safety training, logistics, stretching, coursework and conversations, interpersonal relationships, team building, and dirty work that facilitates the

paddling that are invaluable. I thought the program might be fun - I learned that I needed this program more than I ever imagined.

- I'm never alone, I always have a fellow veteran to lean on. And I'm there for them
- To help someone else you must first save yourself. That goes for kayak rescue but also life in general; a very interesting way the coaches brought that up in the resilience training and reinforced it through subsequent sessions.
- Biggest takeaway is I'm not alone and my feelings matter
- That the program has a new identity for every cohort. We are still a young and growing program.
- This round, the biggest take away would be focusing more on the present and being in the moment with gratitude vs focusing on past or possible future events. This is by far one of the best programs I have ever had the pleasure to be a part of.

Noticeable changes in oneself, friendships, and family dynamics since beginning this program

- Yes. I committed to the program expecting to get through it, graduate, and move on to whatever came next. After a few weeks of contributing to the gratitude list I really felt that just thinking about what I was grateful for had a positive effect on me. I started letting my family and friends know how it had opened me up a bit. I let them know when they "made the list" because I was grateful for something they did or just having them in my life. They commented that they thought the program was good for me. Just the fact that I'm having conversations about gratitude with my friends and family would have been hard to imagine before the program introduced me to the concept. I have a long way to go, but I am at least aware of that and heading in a good direction.
- I have more patience, a little hope again, can feel excited about new things instead of just the anxiety, I have some purpose again (in context of now being a mentor in the group at least)
- Yes - and they are all positive changes. I am more open and sharing in my conversations. I express my gratitude much more freely. I notice little positive things and I am able to be positive most of the time. I feel more centered and less bothered by inconsequential nuisances. I think I'm just happier and that rubs off on the people around me. I can tell that my family is happy for me.
- Yes, I have found myself enjoying the moment more. The relationships in my life are getting better.
- Feeling that I belong

- I feel much more relaxed in everyday activities

Favorite Part of the Program

- The time on the water is amazing - but I love the whole thing. Show up knowing nothing (thinking you know something, but finding out you don't); meeting people you know nothing about; the pool training initiation; the tiny technical details like a trucker's hitch and tying the kayaks down for transport; stretching; selecting equipment and knowing how to adjust the gear; talking during the ride and the playlist; trips of increasing difficulty; getting paired up with different people so you get to know them; learning through the coursework and discussions; following along with other folks' gratitude - all so good. Every week I try to let a little of Captain Chris' and Madison's mad skills and human touch rub off on me. By the end of the cohort - just seeing the group in the parking lot before we start working to load the trailers makes me happy.
- Seeing improvement in others.
- Seeing my fellow veterans. Watching others overcome adversity in the pool and on the water.
- I enjoyed the challenge and learning that took place in the pool sessions. I think those 2 days were the most intense, but they laid the foundation that gave me the confidence to enjoy the less physically demanding excursions. I'm not saying the pool work was fun - but it was essential and provided an early infusion of accomplishment.
- Kayaking, new paddling destinations, conservation awareness and learning local flora/fauna. The biggest take away was the actual resiliency component and mentors.
- Getting to know everyone as individuals and being challenged to push myself with the support of others
- This program was the best thing I've done for myself in at least 15 years.

Least Favorite Part of the Program

- The drive home
- Saying see you later after 12 weeks of creating new relationships
- Getting in and out of the pool when it's really cold out, but the pool water itself is warm

Any additional comments?

- This is the best thing I've done for myself in years.

- Chris, Madison, and all others involved are phenomenal, selfless people. They're inspiring, kind, and compassionate. Thank you guys for all the hard work you put into this.
- CW is life saving.