



The C.A.S.T. for Kids (Catch a Special Thrill) Foundation is pleased to announce the successful launch of the **Take a Warrior Fishing** program. These once a year, community-based events are designed to support disabled/impaired armed service members and their families, specifically targeting persons assigned to Warrior Transition Commands, by creating an adaptive community-based outdoor, recreation experience through the sport of fishing. The objectives of the program are to increase family interaction, encourage outdoor recreation, and support positive community activities for individuals most affected by military related injuries. Additionally, **Take a Warrior Fishing** encourages utilizing fishing as a therapeutic element that positively contributes to a soldier's transition back to either active military duty or the civilian sector.

Each event begins with volunteers arriving at 7:30am to prepare the festivities; each event will have the capacity to accommodate up to 80 families and brings in numerous community partners. Participating individuals and families arrive at 8:00am and are provided fishing equipment and safety gear needed to enjoy a morning on the water. They are then paired with experienced fishermen and head out onto the lake for about 3 hours of fishing and boating. The fishing concludes at 12:00pm and participants return to join volunteers, families, and friends for a barbeque lunch hosted by the local service clubs and a free raffle. Representatives from many local outdoors groups are also on-site to share information about participation in their organizations.

These events are made possible through the collaboration of numerous community groups, local businesses and countless volunteers.

Background

The C.A.S.T. for Kids Foundation was formed in 1991 by a small group of dedicated fisherman and volunteers, and was granted 501(c)(3) status in 1994. Originally designed to open the door to fishing for disabled children and their families, the foundation has broadened its scope to include urban children populations (through our Fishing Kids program), and in 2011, the foundation's Board of Directors and management decided to expand their scope once again and provide program services to support transitioning service members and their families. In partnership with the Warrior Transition Battalion at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington State, the "**Take a Warrior Fishing**" program was established and the inaugural event was held at American Lake on July 23, 2011.

In June of 2012, C.A.S.T. signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the following government agencies: the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI)'s Office of Youth Partnerships and Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Indian Education, Bureau of Reclamation, National Park Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; the U.S. Department of Agriculture's U.S. Forest Service; the U.S. Department of Defense's U.S. Army's Corps of Engineers; and the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The purpose, as outlined in the MOU, is to establish a general framework for cooperation among the agencies and C.A.S.T. for increased opportunities for individuals served by C.A.S.T. to use and enjoy outdoor recreation on federal lands and waters.

The "Take a Warrior Fishing" program encourages fishing as a therapeutic activity that contributes to a wounded soldier's return to military service or civilian life. These services, provided by C.A.S.T., will assist the agencies in meeting their goals of providing accessible programs and facilities, and opportunities for healthy outdoor recreation to the public. This MOU establishes a framework for the agencies and C.A.S.T. to work cooperatively with disability advocacy organizations, tribal governments, local governmental agencies, community organizations, and fishing and boating organizations to develop and implement mutually beneficial programs, projects, and activities in an outdoor recreational setting that serve children and military service members with disabilities and/or disadvantages.

In 2012 we held six TWF events throughout the country. As of early 2013 we already have 12 events planned. Our goal is to have 20-25 **Take a Warrior Fishing** format events up and running nationwide over the next 3 years.

Why We Do It?

Numerous studies have shown that traumatic events not only affect the psychological structures of the self, but also the attachment and meaning that link individuals and community. The capacity to enjoy life and to maintain self esteem is vital to the well being of an individual, particularly when recovery or transition is involved. Based on core knowledge of human behavior and physiology, the goal of recreation is to enable the creative development of an individual's potential for self-sufficiency and enrichment. As the availability and importance of leisure increases in today's lifestyle, so does its potential for waste and boredom. Wounded warriors often have an abundance of down time to deal with and while inactivity is neither good nor bad, it's person's use of it makes that determination. Finally, it is a simple fact that a recreational program such as fishing, designed around the patient's needs and interests, reduces the need for medication and shortens the hospital stay.

By providing structured and unstructured therapy driven services such as fishing, Therapeutic Recreation can:

- Restore disconnects and Promote family interaction
- Strengthened interpersonal skills enabling persons to rebuild connections with the civilian world
- Development and/or enhancement of leisure awareness and skills
- Empowering Veterans to advocate for positive self growth and change
- Enrichment and creation of a meaningful quality of life

Take a Warrior Fishing is a budding program for the foundation. We feel confident in our ability to make it successful given our 20 years of experience hosting fishing programs for underserved populations and wide range of contacts within the fishing industry nationwide. We also feel that the timing is right to expand our services given the increasing population of returning wounded warriors. This program is a response to a need that has been expressed to us frequently in the past and currently plays a role in the reintegration of returning and existing wounded services members. We feel honored to be able to offer a program such as this that has the potential to give back to those that have sacrificed so much for our country.

Jim Owens
Executive Director, C.A.S.T. Foundation