

YRP is first police forces to team with Wounded Warriors to combat PTSD



By Brock Weir

Elaine Mann is still looking for her own "happily ever after."

That's the end goal for everyone, she says, but for people in her situation it can often be a tall hope.

Elaine and her husband Glenn, like so many other couples, have gone through their ups and downs through decades of married life, but their ups and downs have been unique, the result of Glenn's post-traumatic stress disorder.

A veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces, having served from 1969 through 1999, Mr. Mann didn't realise he had PTSD until 2004. Elaine, however, knew something was amiss and pressed her husband to seek help. It took a bit of coercion, but now they are working on their "happily ever after" through Wounded Warriors Canada.

Members of the York Regional Police living with PTSD will now have their own chance at that "happily ever after," being the first police service in the country to partner with Wounded Warriors. This partnership will support ill or injured first responders and their families through Equine Assisted Therapy at Wind Reach Farm in Ashburn, ON.

"York Regional Police remains committed to assisting and supporting all members through the struggles and challenges they may be facing," said YRP Chief Eric Jolliffe. "This is one of the many programs and options now being offered to our members to help them through difficult times and to provide ongoing support for them and their families during recoveries."

According to Scott Maxwell, Executive Director of Wounded Warriors Canada, the organization was founded to support ill and injured servicemen and women, and their families, but has since been expanded to address the needs of first responders, which was a gap that quickly made itself evident.

It was a gradual expansion, however, and the YRP is now blazing a trail with them.

"We learned and heard how at-the-front-line they are with respect to dealing with mental health and operational stress injuries," says Mr. Maxwell of the YRP. "I think everyone understands no one body has a 100 per cent solution. There is going to be a need for partnership and the need to work together. When you put the resources the YRP has together with the resources we have with Wounded Warriors Canada, nothing but good things are going to come from that. I think when you get the partners and stakeholders to realise no one group has the 100 per cent solution you're going to get outcomes like you have today where we're now going to have members of the YRP who are going to benefit from an outstanding and potentially life-changing therapy program."

For the longest time treatment simply looked at the injured and ill population. There was little to no recognition of the impact PTSD was having on the home front and providing the supports to address that. That too was a gap Wounded Warriors Canada found to address, emphasizing couples-based therapy.

Glenn and Elaine can attest to just how important that need is.

"I had to be pushed," says Glenn on getting into the Wounded Warriors program. "With my PTSD you want to disassociate yourself with everyone and everything. You'll avoid crowds like the plague, you don't like going out for outings with your spouse, but at camp I have learnt it was a communication thing between myself and Elaine. I feared I was always right and she was always wrong. I like to have my ducks in a row and every time one duck is out of the row I pounced on her. Sometimes the words that come out are not as nice as they should be and they effected Elaine and our children."

Mike Mann, a veteran of the Bosnia and Afghanistan missions, found himself in a similar position. His wife, Laura, recognized there

was a problem at home, and she says she had to 'coerce' her husband into taking part in the program.

'I knew it was an issue for 10-plus years, but I just thought it was all some sort of crap and I didn't want anything to do with it,' he explains, noting now it is a different story. 'As soon as we got there we started talking with other veterans. You can go for 10 years without talking to anybody. If you have a group of veterans you can talk about anything. [With the spouses there] it forces the communication.'

At phase one, Glenn says his eyes were opened to the benefits. In the second phase of the program, he found himself in the same group as Mike and both men were 'given a toolbox you can use' to get through the struggle.

'It puts you on the same page and gives people the tools they need to work,' says Laura.

Adds Elaine: 'This was one of the first opportunities we had together, away from all the triggers and, in the process, it gets vets to think about their spouses and partners and we don't normally get that. My goal is to live happily ever after, as so many of us want to do. We all live in hope. I want some return on my investment. I decided I would stay several years ago because there are times when the spouses have to think about, 'Do I really want to do this? Is there hope?'

'There is hope. I am hoping to realise the happily ever after, or at least comfortably ever after.'