



September 9, 2018
201 West Washington Avenue
P.O. Box 7843, Madison, WI

To Whom it May Concern,

It is my pleasure to write a letter of support for Wisconsin Hero Outdoors. I am a social scientist at the Medical College of Wisconsin studying alternative therapeutic approaches for Veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder. I have had the pleasure of taking part in Wisconsin Hero Outdoors sponsored events after hearing such positive feedback from Veterans who participate in my research activities.

For most of the Veterans I work with, traditional biomedical approaches are failing them. These Veterans tell me about the therapeutic benefits of spending time in nature, taking part in recreational activities with other veterans, as well as the desire to “get away”, “unplug” and “turn down the mental noise” of their previous military lives. The Wisconsin Hero Outdoors Fund fulfills these needs through connecting Veterans and their families (who are often left out of therapeutic programming) to outdoor activities in Wisconsin’s beautiful and serene outdoors.

My experience researching and working specifically with combat veterans shows that the skills that make a good soldier are the very skills that create stress in the civilian world (e.g., hyper-vigilance, distrust, and emotional detachment). This makes engaging on a social level and finding purpose in life very difficult. In a profound way, Wisconsin Hero Outdoors attends to these needs. This organization supports much needed socializing for veterans in a safe place where they feel comfortable talking about their challenges and receive support from others who have travelled the same path. According to the Vets I work with, *being outdoors* allows a calmness that lets them open up. Additionally, two veterans I work with have expressed their newfound purpose in helping organize fundraisers and activities with other veteran service organizations.

I fully endorse this organization for a number of reasons. First, for the benefits stated above that I consistently hear from my research participants. Second, VA providers in particular have a difficult time prescribing and supporting outdoors therapies because of the lack of evidence. What would assist service providers is an understanding of what defines this population of Veterans that experience therapeutic benefits. Wisconsin Hero Outdoors is on the forefront of this research agenda through supporting organizations that could collaborate with researchers such as myself.

Most importantly, the added mission to build capacity and provide service members new-found purpose through the development of non-profit organizations cannot be underestimated. We need community-based alternatives to augment, or in some cases replace current therapies that do not work for everyone. I fully endorse the Wisconsin Hero Outdoors Fund and urge you to support this much needed agenda in therapeutic alternatives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katinka Hooyer".

Katinka Hooyer, PhD
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