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## Workshop gives caregiver self-care, resources

By Jeff Troth, MEDDAC PAO

The Fort Carson Warrior Transition Battalion held their quarterly Caregivers Workshop at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center February 10 for their staff and spouses of wounded, injured and ill Soldiers.

"We are all in need of healing and working on our own resilience," said Capt. (Chaplain) Mary O'Malley, the WTB chaplain. "So we have these workshops as a reminder for those that are in caregiving positions about how important it is for them to take care of themselves so that they can keep doing their important job of caring for our Soldiers."

The WTB mission is to take care of Soldiers who require at least six months of rehabilitative care and complex medical management. While assigned to the WTB these Soldiers are able to concentrate on medical appointments and transitioning to civilian life, or on returning to their original unit.

The workshops not only provide coping skills for self-care, but also give participants additional resources for assistance.

"I have been coming to the workshops for two years and each one is different," said Amy, the wife of a WTB Soldier who was medically retired in June 2015. "It is a great place to meet others who are going through a similar situation as me. And at every workshop I have learned of a new resource available for me and my family."

USO employees talked to the group about the Oxygen365 program that gives transitioning Soldiers the tools for strengthening relationships. O'Malley said that the WTB is all about transitioning and the Oxygen365 session talked about how getting out of the Army not only affects the Soldier, but those close to him or her. A transition or change in one segment of someone's life bleeds into other parts of their life, and can affect their relationships.

"We have the spouses and other family members here because they are part of the WTB family, and opportunities like this help us form deeper

connections to each other," said O'Malley. "It may be the Soldier who is our focus, our mission, but they are not living in a vacuum. So I think being able to offer something like this for family is fantastic, yes they are not a Soldier, but they are a part of the Soldier's whole journey."

"When my husband got to the unit we were told that once you are part of WTB, it is WTB for life," said Amy. "And even though my husband retired they didn't shut the door on me, they continue to keep me informed about different battalion events."

Amy's husband has been determined to be 100% disabled by Veteran's Affairs so she knows that besides being his wife her new role as caregiver will never stop. She also knows that besides taking care of him and their 3-year old daughter, she has to take time for herself and these workshops offer her the self-care she needs.

This workshop's self-care session focused on art therapy. The attendees were shown how to enhance relaxation and focus through Zentangle and water colors.

Zentangle is a form of meditation that uses a pen and paper to create abstract drawings using repetitive patterns. O'Malley said that Zentangling is great for decompressing and helps with anxiety since the person has to focus on the page and focus on making the shapes.

"Doing art helps you concentrate and to release what is in conflict with your body, your soul, your mind and your emotions," said Kim Nguyen, an instructor at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center's Bemis School of Art who held a water color session during the workshop. "Art is not just healing; it also gives the person hope. If you do something and it doesn't work you erase it and start over, you problem solve. You use your imagination to see possibilities and when you see possibilities you have hope."

"The self-care is terrific, even just painting," said Amy. "It is time for me to breathe and relax and know that I don't have to think about what is going on at home."

"The problem with caregiving is that it can completely consume their identity. Being a caregiver may be a huge part of who someone is, but they still have other parts to them too," said O'Malley. "And, the key is for them to find a balance and stay afloat, because if one thing becomes too heavy or

burdensome, then it is easy for it all to sink. Our workshops are one way to help find that balance.”



A caregiver works on water color painting during the Warrior Transition Battalion’s Caregiver Workshop. (Photo by Jeff Troth)



As part of the Warrior Transition Battalion’s Caregiver Workshop, the participants toured the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center. (Photo by Jeff Troth)