

Sailor Serves as an Anchor for a Wounded Warrior

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By Patty Babb, Navy Installations Command, Navy Wounded Warrior – Safe Harbor

For nearly a year, Navy Culinary Specialist 1st Class Jamie Wyckoff has provided crucial support as a sponsor of a wounded warrior who is medically separating from the Navy and navigating a transition to civilian life.

Retired Navy Information Technology Specialist 2nd Class Pualani Ralph, who hails from Glen Burnie, Md., was enrolled in Navy Wounded Warrior (NWW) – Safe Harbor in 2013 after she was sexually assaulted and subsequently diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). NWW provided a number of support services to her and her family, including involving her in the Anchor Program and connecting her to Wyckoff.

“The Anchor Program helps NWW carry out its promise to provide a lifetime of care to seriously wounded, ill, and injured Sailors and Coast Guardsmen, as well as support for their families,” said Navy Capt. Brent Breining, director of NWW. “It provides them with a Navy sponsor during a challenging chapter of their lives – the conclusion of their military careers.”

Ralph says that Wyckoff, as her Anchor Program sponsor, has been a lifeline during her transition from the Navy.

“She has provided amazing support,” Ralph said. “If I have needed anything, she gets it right away She makes me feel like I am still part of the military family, which my husband and I both miss a lot.”

After she was assaulted in 2013, Ralph was plagued with a variety of PTSD symptoms. She also has chronic back pain and frequently experiences migraines after a full day’s work at her civilian job. Ralph is a mother of two – including a child with special needs – and juggling daily responsibilities can be difficult.

“I have really bad dreams, and I have little anger outbreaks,” said Ralph. “I’m definitely not as cool and collected as I used to be. My kids suffer the most.”

“Our relationship gives her an outlet,” said Wyckoff. “Because I’m here solely for her, not for anybody else. She can talk about how she’s feeling openly, and I think that helps a lot.”

Wyckoff, who lives within an hour’s drive of Ralph, was recommended as an Anchor Program sponsor by her supervisor, a Navy senior chief. Wyckoff and Ralph try to get together at least once a month – to catch a movie, get pedicures or attend a Navy function – and they call and send text messages to one another regularly. Wyckoff lends an ear when Ralph vents frustrations and worries, and she connects Ralph to support services as needed.

“Our relationship has opened up my eyes, that’s for sure,” said Wyckoff. “I realize now that for some people, just waking up and starting your day can be a process. It’s mind over matter, and sometimes that’s super hard.”

As an enrollee of NWW, Ralph and her family have received the gold-standard of non-medical care. The program – which supports those who are seriously wounded, ill and injured – has assisted more than 3,200 service members since its inception.

“I wasn’t injured in combat, and, at first, I thought I didn’t deserve to be in the program, that I didn’t deserve the great treatment I was getting,” said Ralph. “[My NWW Recovery Care Coordinator] told me that I do deserve it, that I did my job, I did what was asked of me when I was told to do something. She said that I do deserve to be in the program.”

Ralph, who hopes to spread the word about the NWW program, spoke at the U.S. Department of Veteran’s Affairs Office of Human Resources Management Town Hall meeting on Dec. 2 in Washington, D.C. about her experiences as a wounded warrior transitioning out of military service.

Wyckoff says that serving as an Anchor Program sponsor is a very rewarding experience, and that she has found a lifelong friend in Ralph. She encourages other Sailors to get involved.

“You never know who you’ll meet, and how that person might impact your life,” said Wyckoff. “They are the shining stars out there who have been through so much, and yet they still press on.”

To learn more about NWW or the Anchor Program, visit <http://safeharbor.navylive.dodlive.mil/> or call 855-NAVY WWP/855-6128-9997. For the latest news about the program and its wounded warrior enrollees, follow it on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com.navysafeharbor/>

The Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) Program provides support and advocacy services to active duty and adult dependent victims. You can receive confidential support and connect with your installation’s SAPR resources by calling the Department of Defense Safe Helpline at 877-995-5247 or by visiting <http://www.safehelpline.org/>.