

**08/19/2021**

To the agency, committee, or individual,

It is my privilege to write this letter of support for Edward (Ed) Ponikvar and the Knowledge Point Network (KPN). I have known Ed and his team for a few years. He has a passion and heart for helping Veterans and their families. I meet Ed at a community meeting where he was advocating for Veterans and their families to have access to public lands 365 days a year. He invited me out to look at the National Forrest and shared his vision with me. I immediately saw the value he added to the work I am already doing with Combat Veterans.

He and KPN are not like other organization that focus on just events and one-time interactions. They are about lifestyle changes. This stuck with me. I saw the value in what they had to offer. For me, a triple amputee, Purple Heart Combat Veteran from the war in Iraq, he offered me the ability, expertise and support to take my children out into nature both public and private and have meaningful positive shared experiences. Ed is coaching 3 of my sons on what it means to utilize public lands and be good stewards of it. This is a bonding opportunity for us to use nature to heal from the trauma of war and PTSD. My boys love the community that he has provided us. They have other children that they can relate too and are learning skills that Combat has made me unable to teach them. They are learning life lessons that will help them build character and resolve. In turn I can heal and bond with them over a shared passion. This is lifestyle of healing and helping allows us find purpose and connection in my community.

I call Ed a fixer he doesn't see problems only solutions. The challenges of reaching our rural and remote Veterans are big, but Ed has managed to build community with those that are unserved/underserved by other support systems. In my 15 plus years of working with Combat Veterans both at the VA and in the national non-profit area I have not yet come across an organization like KPN. They provide multiple touch points for the Veteran and their family members. This provides more opportunity for connection and purpose which leads to healing.

KPN is passionate about stewardship of the lands they use. This goes beyond just picking up your trash. KPN version of stewardship is about a person's relationship to the land and who you are on the inside. Steve Nelle describes it this way, "stewardship is a deeply held inner conviction that compels and inspires people to be responsible caretakers of the land entrusted to them. The motivation for this stewardship is based on three essential things: present benefits to the landowner; benefits to future generations; and the benefits that accrue to society outside the boundary of the land both public and private. Genuine stewardship has a strong element of benevolence." These core values that KPN instills in their communities are the values we need in America now more than ever.

I cannot stress this enough KPN is unlike anything I have ever experienced. They are a community builder that provide a place of hope and healing for Combat Veterans and their families. They do this by utilizing nature and teaching stewardship as describe above to provide a place of belonging and purpose beyond the uniform. They enable, equip, train and support men and women like me to engage with our families in meaningfully ways. This helps us build stronger family connections and overcome our combat trauma.

SINCERELY,

**CH JAY FONDREN (SSG)**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ch Jay Fondren', written in a cursive style.

US ARMY RETIRED