COMMUNITY

Knowledge Point Network Obtains Skid-Steer, Secures Grant Funding for Child Suicide Prevention

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MONTGOMERY, TX -- Knowledge Point Network, U.S.A., a local charity dedicated to the suicide prevention of Combat Veterans with PTSD and their children, recently unveiled a new piece of equipment to assistance them in the maintenance of the area trails used in their program. KPN Founder, Ed Ponikvar, unveiled the organization's new Dozer Dog, at a recent breakfast gathering of the Lone Star Honor Flight Veterans Group this past Wednesday. The skid-steer loader is designed to empower Veterans in engaging in trail maintenance used by participants in the program to build value in their lives and help them heal from self-harm tendencies.

The initiative, also aimed at preserving Montgomery County’s natural beauty with the improvement of trails in and around Montgomery, for the use of PTSD Veterans and their kids, in off-road vehicles such as electric motorcycles, and track chairs. The original experiment started back in

2006 by Pennsylvania campground owner Brenda Fitch and her Veteran husband, in an effort to acquire properties for installing trails for Veteran and family use.

Knowledge Point Network, which started in 2007, concentrates on the use of electric motorcycles and track chairs to allow for participants to talk and heal while on the trails themselves. They offer necessary and challenging work to Veterans with the use of a skid-steer to clean up the trails for program participants to enjoy the use of electric motorcycles and track chairs. Some gas powered vehicles are used, but it’s mostly an electric venture.

“Building on the success of the initial program, KPN is proud to launch our groundbreaking initiative aimed at preserving Our Nation’s natural beauty while fostering a spirit of community and sustainability,” said Ponikvar. “The Dozer Dogz program represents a unique evolution in ecosystem management, turning the act of consumption into a powerful force for positive change.”

KPN really thinks out their program of healing the Veterans and their families. The trails offer a chance to commune with nature, and the farther the participants go into the forest, the closer they are to God and his healing ways. No one goes alone on the trails because the idea is to be chatting and letting your feelings be known. And that goes especially for the children of the Veterans, who are constantly bombarded with cell phone and video game usage which detracts from the relationships with their parents.

Ponikvar loves to give his Veterans a mission purpose, and trail maintenance with the use of the Dozer Dog, is not a walk in the park, and it takes time and a certain amount of skill to make the trails as safe as possible for his program's participants. Essentially KPN is rebuilding a sense of pride of workmanship in a Disabled Veteran with the skid-steer use. And it makes a difference in the lives of someone who may have lost the use of his legs, or received traumatic brain injury. Despite their condition they can still navigate a skid-steer along a trail making it better for all who trek it.

In January this year KPN secured a grant to tackle suicides of the children of Combat Veterans. The grant from the American Legion Child Welfare Foundation (CWF), is designed to combat the alarming statistics surrounding child suicide, especially in families where a parent has served in a combat zone. The children of those Veterans are three times more likely to die by suicide when a parent has taken his or her own life. So the idea with Ed and his team is save the parent, save the child, and that's KPN’s goal.

Saving lives is a serious endeavor with KPN, since according to the CDC, suicide is the second leading cause of of death among children ages 10-14; so keeping the children busy in the outdoors rather than chained to in-home technology makes a real difference. The Mayo Clinic has noted that increased physical activity for children helps improve their mental and emotional health. Couple that with recreational ecosystem management learning, with kids brushing up their

knowledge of the forest and trails, then performing maintenance with their family members, and you have a shared sense of accomplishment, building self-worth amongst each other.

Another takeaway from the project is the dissemination of survival skills to the children through utilization of an online platform (KPN approved good technology) that measures ongoing achievements. In addition, there are quarterly requirements for physical activity, stewardship of natural spaces (like pick-up trash, or planting trees), and building a toolbox of survival skills, such as with navigation skills and orienteering.

“KPN’s approach is centered around a unique, family orientated tracking service that emphasizes self-growth and self-healing, as well as gaining tools to overcome life’s challenges,” said Ponikvar, upon receiving the grant. “The project focuses on children learning skills about the outdoors, and effectively makes them leaders should a situation arise when that expertise is called for.”

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