

THE WCR LEARNING COMMUNITY

This project is made possible through funding from the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia.



Participants in the Veterans Transition Program re-enact experiences from their military service.
Photo by Martin Dee, UBC Public Affairs.

UBC program helps ex-soldiers

Adapted from *WE Vancouver*

Level 3

(The videos in the links are highly recommended.)

A program at the University of British Columbia (UBC) is helping soldiers return to **civilian** life. These soldiers are called veterans. Other programs help veterans heal soldier's bodies. But the Veterans Transition Program (VTP) helps heal their hearts and minds as well. People attend in a group and work together. Dr. Marvin Westwood and Dr. David Kuhl developed VTP in 1999.

A much-needed program

About 30% of soldiers suffer **trauma** from being in **active combat**.

There are many signs that show a soldier has trauma.

Some have nightmares or cannot sleep.

They have flashbacks.

This means they relive the experience many times.

Some cannot focus well.

One man was sleeping under his bed.

Some begin to abuse alcohol or drugs.

These drugs help them forget.

Without help, veterans are twice as likely to commit suicide.

About trauma

Soldiers often see things most people cannot think about.

Sometimes they face their own near-death.

Other times they are unable to save someone's life.

Or they can't help a child in a refugee camp.

When the soldiers return home, many of them cannot forget.

They think maybe they could have done this.

Or maybe they could have done that.

The thoughts return again and again.

Life becomes very difficult.

Dr. Westwood calls this a "soul injury".

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The men and women in the VTP work with doctors and each other to get information and skills. These skills help these people get their lives back.



Veterans Transition Program at UBC helps veterans deal with trauma.
Photo by Martin Dee, UBC Public Affairs

Success of the program

About 275 veterans have been in UBC's program. Researchers find that members of the VTP have fewer signs of trauma later. And they have more self-confidence. Many now have new careers. Other members say their relationships with their children and partners have improved.

Future of VTP

There are plans to take the VTP to first responders in the police, fire department, and other emergency services in B.C. People working in these areas also see things during their work that the rest of us do not. Often these workers also suffer trauma.

A graduate of the program

Tim Laidler was a member of the program in 2010. Now he helps others through VTP. He is executive director of the new Veterans Transition Network. The Royal Canadian Legion, Veterans Affairs Canada and other organizations donated \$1.4 million to help veterans. Thanks to this funding, this non-profit network can also offer its treatment program across Canada. Laidler hopes to reach 2,000 vets over the next five to ten years.

Vocabulary:

- **civilian:** a person not in the military or police force
- **trauma:** emotional shock which follows a disturbing experience
- **active combat:** being directly involved in fighting during war

Links:

Veterans Transition Program at UBC video:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVfcGquM014>

The Veterans Transition Program was featured in the documentary A War in the Mind. Watch an excerpt at:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyGAggA0_t0&feature=youtu.be

The Veterans Transition Network:
vtncanada.org