



# In FOCUS

## Newsletter

Issue 9  
May, 2015



**FMF Chairman  
Walt Suhre**

We kicked off 2015 on March 21<sup>st</sup> by welcoming FOCUS Class 15-03. Thirty-four warriors arrived, 32 Marines, one Greensider and one AUS. Average age was 32; the youngest 25, the oldest 48. Average number of years since separation from service was 3.8; the most recent, a month, the longest 10+ years. Seventy-nine percent had neither a job nor were attending school. I found most interesting that the fathers attending represented 46 children. Also, 15 were married, living at home with spouse and children. That presented us with the opportunity to *directly* affect **95** individual lives! And considering parents, siblings, co-workers, friends, neighbors, fellow students, etc. to *indirectly* affect countless others. What an opportunity – and what responsibility. We proudly rose to the challenge. Our participants were exemplary – fully involved, dedicated to improving themselves and anxious to prove their mettle in the civilian world.

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Putting on four FOCUS courses each year takes a huge amount of time --- and money. More than 120 pairs of footprints hit the campus each week of FOCUS. Inspirational speakers are paid fees greatly discounted from their normal



**FOCUS March 2015**

Another successful FOCUS Course is in the books. 34 Marines, Corpsmen, and Soldiers are now FOCUS Marines. This class seemed to bond quicker than ever. Once again, we had participants meet up with brothers they haven't seen in years. Just shows you how small the Marine Corps family is and the importance of the opportunity FOCUS provides to reconnect with others who had such a presence in our lives. Reestablishing those contacts leads to yet another source of support.

Our FOCUS Mentors started the week off on a positive note with John O'Leary providing his unbelievable inspiration to everyone in the room. During the first three days, participants looked at themselves to identify where they are and where they want to go. Then, it was time to come up with a plan. The Marines and Corpsmen worked diligently to establish individualized goals. Fishing was a hit, as usual, and we managed to have great weather. All participants took home their own fishing poles and some even learned how to tie flies. We're still anxiously awaiting the photos (evidence) to go with all of the fishing tales.

FOCUS is a work in progress and we can't improve without input from all involved. This class, like those in the past, provided invaluable feedback as to how to make the course even better for incoming Marines and Corpsmen. The number of Marines who are reaching out for help thanks to FOCUS grads is increasing rapidly. We can't thank you enough for keeping your eyes open for your brothers and taking care of each other. Well done, Devil Dogs, and Semper Fi.

## Walt's Welcome (cont.)

charges, our facilitators are paid and each Mentor receives a small stipend. All other time is donated – selflessly and fervently. I know of no other organization whose volunteers are more dedicated and generous with their time and talents – FMF Board Members, Team Leaders, FMF staff, instructors, interviewers, kitchen staff, EMS personnel, transporters and on and on.

And \$\$\$\$\$ -- The average cost of each of the four courses in 2014 was \$160,000. That works out to \$4836 per participant attending. No participant has ever paid a dime to attend – and never will. Our financial supporters number in the hundreds. Our event organizers and sponsors number in the dozens. Donated outside professional help is substantial. None of what we do could occur without all of these supporters. We thank them all and pray for their continuing participation. Special recognition is due Ted Kretschmar, Vice-President, Development and his Committee. Asking for money is never easy, but Ted attacks the mission with more grit than the Energizer Bunny. Thanks, Ted, from all of us, and keep up the great work.

Thanks for your time . . . . and network, network, network.

Semper Fi,  
Walt



## Survivor's Guilt after A Suicide

Almost every Marine, Sailor, and other service member who has come through FOCUS has been touched by the tragic events of a suicide of a brother/sister. It's a sad and tragic statistic that twenty-two of our veterans commit suicide every single day. This occurs because they reach a point of hopelessness in their lives trying to deal with the emotional wounds of war and their personal losses.

Bereavement for the loss of a loved one following suicide is unique to each individual, while at the same time, the process survivors tend to follow toward healing is surprisingly uniform. If you are dealing with a suicide, you will most likely feel shock, disbelief, protest, disorganization, and anger. You may also feel intense guilt and anxiety; a haunting feeling that you are to blame. Survivors often feel that they did not do enough to save the person who died: "If only I had said..." "If only I had done..." "Why didn't I see the signs?" These feelings are difficult to reconcile and often leave a person with persistent, troubling concerns that are referred to as "survivor's guilt."

Survivor's guilt is amplified if you are the one who discovered the suicide. You are left in the valley of "why" and "if only" and you may feel a profound sense of connectedness to the victim or to others surrounding you after a suicide. As the immediate shock begins to wane, you may feel a great deal of helplessness.

Everywhere you turn you are confronted with the deeply troubling question of why you were not able to prevent this tragedy from happening. Many people coping with survivor's guilt talk about re-examining their entire belief system and having difficulty trusting the world around them. Suicide death in our society is often a source of shame and embarrassment. You may have varying religious beliefs

## “Nurses Corner”

(Cont. from Page 2)

that are called to the forefront of this painful and foreboding frontier you find yourself looking upon. You may find that you feel overwhelmed with the question all survivors of suicide feel at one time or another – “Why couldn’t I stop it?”

### Everyone Grieves Differently

It is gratifying to know that you are not alone. Survivors should always be aware that each person affected by the loss may grieve a little differently and that one’s own personality and individuality enter into the grieving process. There are gaps or differences between individuals coping with loss. And there may be a canyon of unresolved issues between each affected person and the lost loved one. Everyone has different ways of coping with stress, anger and pain. Sometimes people report that while they are healing from a suicide they learned a great deal about one another and about each other’s beliefs and values. And often, a silver lining occurs when a suicide ultimately brings people closer together and causes them to reestablish bonds and family connections.

### Survivor’s Guilt Is Normal

Survivor’s guilt is a very normal response to the traumatic experience of suicide. The best way to help yourself heal is to acknowledge and accept your feelings and those of others that have affected by the loss. Talk about how you feel with other survivors and recognize that you do not have the answers to all the questions hurling around inside your head. **It’s very important to find ways to keep your loved one’s memory alive.** Make a memory book, plant a memorial garden (however small) or donate a tree – whatever you can do to *celebrate* the life of your brother/sister. If your feelings of guilt are so overwhelming that you find it impossible to take care of yourself and perform the necessary day-to-day activities, don’t be afraid to seek out a grief professional. They can help you mourn your loss and respond to your own needs as well.

And, most importantly, you may find that talking to other people who have been where you are will help you understand that the suicide was not your fault and while you may never be quite the same, you will be able to forgive yourself, to heal and move forward. Above all, remember that suicide is a personal choice, and no one’s fault.

### Identifying Suicide Potential

One small act can make a big difference in the life of a Veteran or Service member in crisis. Some of the warning signs of suicide potential are...

- Hopelessness, feeling as if there’s no way out
- Anxiety, agitation, sleeplessness, or mood swings
- Feeling as if there’s no reason to live
- Rage or anger
- Engaging in risky activities without thinking
- Increasing alcohol or drug abuse
- Withdrawing from family and friends

If you or your brethren exhibits any of the following signs, seek out immediate help ...

- Thinking about hurting or killing yourself
- Looking for ways to kill yourself
- Talking about death, dying or suicide
- Self-destructive behavior (drug abuse, weapons, etc.)

The Veterans Crisis Line is asking you to think about “The Power of One” and how a single act can encourage Veterans to access confidential support resources. Everyone can be the person who makes a difference in a Veteran’s life, and connecting with support doesn’t have to be hard. If you notice these warning signs in a Veteran, tell him or her about the Veterans Crisis Line, or make the call yourself. Call (800)273-8255 and Press 1, chat online at [www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](http://www.VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat), or text to 838255 for free, confidential support, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.



NAVY-MARINE CORPS  
RELIEF SOCIETY

## FOCUS Lessons Learned “The Marine in Your Pocket”

By  
Tom Ilges

Tom Ilges delivers a hard-hitting but very timely perspective on anger management at each of our FOCUS sessions. The “Marine in your pocket” talk is something that we all need to take with us daily.

We all need to understand that once we leave Focus is when the true challenges will present themselves and that is when it is paramount that we remember those lessons and rise above our issues.

After decades of living with anger issues I have come to some conclusions:

1. Anger is a formidable enemy (work of a lifetime ).
2. Anger deceives (you think you have resolved a situation).
3. You need to have constant insight of what anger really is. ie; anxiety, impatience, frustration, misunderstanding, perceived injustices all intersecting in your being causing a moment of destruction.
4. Alcohol or drugs will not arrest anger, but will actually perpetuate it by trapping us in an ever spinning cycle of anger, then remorse, then guilt then anger then seeking relief with false remedies.

The truth is, you will not be punished for your anger; you will be punished by your anger, and all those close to you will feel its wrath and destructive nature. Anger is truly a short madness, and often one doesn't remember what they were so angry about. Anger is not a valid reaction, but an action that perpetuates more reaction.

You are warriors and anger and rage are your enemy standing in the way of your life being happier and more complete. Take this enemy on with every fiber of your being because you must own this battlefield or go down in defeat. Disrespect anger, diminish it to irrelevance in your heart and soul. Bury it with understanding and love of those you cherish and your own self worth.



A moment of anger can destroy a lifetime of work, whereas a moment of love can break barriers that took a lifetime to build. Learn to hesitate the instant the enemy of anger tries to take everything away from you. That moment will give you worth, strength, understanding and a victory that will be life changing. It will take willpower but it is worth it. Stop defeating yourself.

You have been through the chaos and have seen the worst that war has to offer so you deserve to have some peace in your soul with happy days ahead. But anger is not the road you should be taking to a brighter future, it is the road to a bitter end.

In your young lives you have already been three of the best things you can be... by birthright or naturalization an American citizen; by choice a patriot; and by courage a United States Marine, Navy Corpsman or warrior from our other services. Stay proud, stay resolute, live with Honor, Courage and Commitment for those who gave all and will no longer get a chance at a sweet life in the greatest experiment of freedom in the world, The United States of America. The very nation you defended with your life. DO NOT let anyone diminish your worth, to you, your loved ones, to your nation, or to your Focus Marines family. This nation needs you, now more than ever.

Keep the Marine in Your Pocket and when you see another human being in distress or there is a threat to you or your loved ones your Marine will be out in an instant. Then, and only then, is it honorable to let the Marine out.

## Warriors for Warriors

FOCUS Marines and Corpsmen were given a unique opportunity to experience Central America thanks to the Marine Corps League of Costa Rica's "Warriors for Warriors" Program. MSgt Rob Locy, DISC with the Wounded Warrior Regiment, coordinated local efforts and support organizations to ensure a unique environment and countless once-in-a-lifetime activities.

Eight participants were met at San Jose airport and taken to the home of SgtMaj Ron Couture (Ret) and then on to the Hotel Pelicano in Esterillos



Este. Hotel Pelicano and its staff went above and beyond to make sure everyone felt welcomed. By the end of the week, it was home. Other major contributors include Oceans Unlimited, Runaway Grill, iFish Quepos, Pez Vela Marina, and the US Embassy.

The "Warriors for Warriors" program is the perfect complement to FOCUS. Participants find that same sense of brotherhood with their fellow Marines and Corpsmen. Additionally, they are consistently afforded opportunities to leave their comfort zone. While the activities are markedly different, the result is the same – members of the group reflect on where they are, where they want to be, and how they're going to get there.



A special "Thank You" goes out to the Marine Corps League of Costa Rica, the community of retired Marines in Costa Rica and MSgt Locy for their tireless efforts. It was the first of many life-changing weeks. As they say in Costa Rica, Pura Vida!



## Marine Corps League Support

As our FOCUS Class graduates return to their homes, they are encouraged to seek out and join the veteran service organization they would be most interested in. Most large cities offer several choices, such as The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, AM Vets, DAV, and the Marine Corps League local Detachments as well as others. All of these organizations have missions to assist veterans. Most of these organizations have monthly meetings in which a veteran can expand his or her network. The Veteran will enjoy the friendship of others who have also proudly served our country.

FOCUS Marines Foundation is closely aligned with the Marine Corps League (MCL). Many of our Board members, Team Leaders, and support personnel are members of St. Louis Metro MCL Detachments. The Marine Corps League is best known for its annual program "Toys for Tots". There are approximately 1200 MCL Detachments across the United States and around the world.

The mission statement of the Marine Corps League reads as follows:

*"Members of the Marine Corps League join together in camaraderie and fellowship for the purpose of preserving the traditions and promoting the interests of the United States Marine Corps, banding together those who are now serving in the United States Marine Corps and those who have been honorably discharged from that service that they may effectively promote the ideals of American freedom and democracy, voluntarily aiding and rendering assistance to all Marines, FMF Corpsmen, and FMF Navy Chaplains and former Marines, FMF Corpsmen, and FMF Navy Chaplains and to their widows and orphans; and to perpetuate the history of the United States Marine Corps and by fitting acts to observe the anniversaries of historical occasions of particular interest to Marines."*

Attending each FOCUS class, you will find Wendell Webb, MCL National Jr. Vice Commandant, talking to the men and women participating in the class.



Wendell shares his experiences and educates those in attendance about the Marine Corps League. He serves as a valuable resource to the participants, helping them in whatever way he can. He is a strong supporter of the FOCUS Marines Foundation.

Throughout the year, FMF receives monetary donations from various MCLs throughout the United States. The MCLs generously support our program through their own fundraising efforts, making it possible for us to continue to provide the FOCUS program to future Marines and FMF Corpsmen.

The Marine Corps League is truly there to aid and provide assistance where they live. It came to our attention that a FOCUS graduate in another state needed assistance. One of our board members contacted the MCL commandant in the graduates' area. The commandant immediately sent a call to all Marines, reached out and provided assistance to the graduate. The commandant continues to stay in touch with the graduate.

We feel honored to be able to work with this amazing organization. The Marine Corps League truly lives up to their mission statement. Their generosity is making a difference in so many lives.



Thanks to our MCL's and all Veteran Service Organizations for all you do to assist our veterans.

## FMF Fundraising

We are grateful to the organizations who work tirelessly to raise funds for the FOCUS program. We could not do it without their support. To date, three events have been held raising over \$25,000 for FOCUS Marines Foundation. Those events included a poker tournament, veteran's barbeque, and a chili cook off & home brew competition. Nine additional fundraisers are scheduled for the year with five taking place in May.

The Eureka/Pacific, MO Elks Lodge hit another home run with their Veterans Group Barbeque and silent auction. This event raised \$15,000 for FMF. The Elks Lodge parking lot could not be missed because there were vintage military vehicles and a large American Flag strung between two fire trucks. The event was extremely well attended.



Steve Jeffries and Lisa Cushing of Eureka Elks Club present Tom Ilges, Ted Kretschmar, and Merlin Clayton of FMF with Veterans BBQ fundraising check.

A big hit was "Joey", Jerome "Smitty" Smith's (FOCUS, Sept. 2012) service dog. Joey wowed the crowd by soliciting donations by approaching individuals with a tin cup in his mouth and that look on his face that only a retriever has. If a dollar bill happened to miss the cup, Joey would put the cup down, retrieve the bill and place it in the cup to the applause of everyone. Also attending the event was Joshua Ploetz, (FOCUS, May 2012). Joshua and Smitty, mingled with the crowd throughout the day making new friends answering questions about FMF, and sharing their life experiences.

Many FMF events are planned for May. We hope you are able to attend one of these events. Each promises to be a great time supporting the FOCUS Marines Foundation. You will find additional information regarding events for all of 2015 under the "Upcoming Events" button on any page of our website, [www.focusmarines.org](http://www.focusmarines.org). If you are interested in volunteering to work at a fundraising event or want to be involved in FMF fundraising, please complete the volunteer form on the FMF website and submit.

## Focus Marines Foundation May 2015 Events

**Summer Kick Off Party** – May 14<sup>th</sup> - There will be an evening of dancing, good food and drink at the "Q" in Old Towne St. Charles. Visit our website to purchase your tickets online.

**FMF Trivia Night** – May 15<sup>th</sup> - Very pleased to announce this event is sold out with 300 FMF supporters having purchased a ticket to this event.

**Eureka Red White & Blue 5K** – May 23<sup>rd</sup> - The Eureka Pacific Elks Lodge will sponsor a 5K run/walk. To sign up visit [www.redwhiteblue5k.itsyourrace.com](http://www.redwhiteblue5k.itsyourrace.com).

**Chandler Hill 5K/10K Run** – May 25<sup>th</sup> - Enter the 5K/10K event at Chandler Hill Winery and enjoy an afternoon sitting on the veranda at Chandler Hill drinking the best of Missouri's wines.

**Sailing for Veterans** – May 30<sup>th</sup> & 31<sup>st</sup> - Enjoy the day watching sailboat races on Lake Carlyle and making new friends.

## FMF 2015 Upcoming Events

May 30 <sup>th</sup> -Jun 6 <sup>th</sup>	<b>FOCUS</b>	Summer FOCUS Session	Augusta, MO
Jun 26 <sup>th</sup>	Fundraiser	A D Lift Truck Barbeque	5434 Natural Bridge, St. Louis
Sep 12 <sup>th</sup> -19 <sup>th</sup>	<b>FOCUS</b>	Fall FOCUS Session	Augusta, MO
Oct 5 <sup>th</sup>	Fundraiser	Gateway Warrior Golf Tournament	St. Albans Golf Club
Nov 7 <sup>th</sup> -14 <sup>th</sup>	<b>FOCUS</b>	Winter FOCUS Session	Augusta, MO

For detailed information on any of the FMF upcoming events, please contact our FMF VP of Development, Ted Kretschmar, at... [help@mmffocus.org](mailto:help@mmffocus.org)

Or visit our website at .... [www.focusmarines.org](http://www.focusmarines.org) and click on "Upcoming Events" button on any page.



## FMF – Big Bang for Your \$\$\$\$\$

The Board of Directors of FMF takes very seriously its duty to be good stewards of the funds that the organization receives from its loyal supporters. With only a few exceptions, all of FMF’s board members, officers, team leaders, kitchen staff and other support personnel are unpaid volunteers who contributed over 15,000 man hours in 2014 to fulfill FMF’s mission. In addition, all facilities for the training and housing of FOCUS participants are provided at no charge to the organization. As a result, operational and administrative costs are kept to an absolute minimum so that your contribution goes to the execution of our week-long workshops and mentoring program.

Industry Best Practices Comparisons						
	USO	Help Hospitalized Veterans	AMVETS	Paralyzed Veterans of America	Wounded Warrior Project	FOCUS Marines Foundation
<b>Expenses Devoted to Programs</b>	61%	43%	73%	33%	54%	<b>82%</b>
<b>Fundraising &amp; Administration</b>	39%	57%	27%	67%	46%	<b>18% *</b>
<b>Fundraising Efficiency **</b>	25%	37%	16%	64%	26%	<b>14.0%</b>

\* Fundraising = 11%; Administration = 7%

\*\* Fundraising costs as a percent of cash donations. The lower, the better.

The chart above lists several Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs) relative to their overall efficiency in providing direct support to veterans. FOCUS Marines Foundation ranks very favorably in all measured categories. This information is provided by Charity Navigator ([www.charitynavigator.org](http://www.charitynavigator.org)) and Charity Watch ([www.charitywatch.org](http://www.charitywatch.org)).