

From Survival to Strength: Stories of Resilience as Veterans Heal, Find Hope through Veterans Yoga Project

Former service members to reflect on how group changed their lives during nonprofit's 15th anniversary celebration

ALAMEDA, CA, UNITED STATES, May 27, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- "Honestly, I think I would have already taken my life."

That was the first thing Ceasar Barajas, 50, said when asked where his mental health would be without yoga. The former Navy hospital corpsman started the practice while in college. And [Veterans Yoga Project \(VYP\)](#) has only helped him deepen his connection to the meditation, breath and movement practices that helped him come to

terms with abuse he suffered (in and out of the military) and work through anger, anxiety and depression. His isn't the only story of continued healing found in the nonprofit organization — which offers free daily classes to Veterans and their family members in everything from meditation to chair yoga, to power yoga, to Yoga Nidra (a practice often used by Veterans suffering from conditions like PTSD to help calm the mind enough to sleep).

On June 26, Barajas and two other Veterans will tell their stories during a two-day 15th anniversary Veterans Yoga Project celebration in the nation's capital. [The Skyline Social reception](#) will be held on the rooftop of the Beveridge and Diamond building. Barajas will also teach yoga on June 27, during a [mass community yoga practice](#) on The Global War on Terrorism Memorial Site on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. The second-day event is free and open to anyone who wants to join.

At a time when Veterans are committing suicide at an average rate of 17.5 per day 1 and still report challenges in accessing the services they need, VYP is helping to fill a critical gap in services and care for many. And the Department of Veterans Affairs recognizes the value of VYP. They've partnered with the nonprofit group to offer yoga services to as many Veterans as



Veterans practicing yoga on the deck of the Battleship New Jersey

“

I will sum up what a doctor told me last December ... for one of those in-home checkups by the Medicare folk: ‘Keep doing the yoga.’”

I live pain free and am mobile because of this yoga program.”

Bill Pratt

possible.

The Veterans Yoga Project also partners with Blue Star Families—an organization that supports military family members—conducting sessions that address stressors faced by caretakers such as compassion fatigue and burnout.

In 2025, attendees had more than 42,000 sessions with VYP, up 27% from the previous year. From those self-reporting results, 74% indicated a decrease or neutral change in pain and 86% saw a decrease or neutral change in stress. 2

More Veteran stories

Winston Cortez Ward, 40, served in the Army for eight years. Just before deployment to Iraq he injured his back curtailing his participation in Operation Iraqi Freedom — a fact that haunted him and caused tremendous guilt. Now, the Veteran teaches yoga, has started a nonprofit to help others discover how to be mobile, and uses breathing and other yoga techniques as medicine. The holistic approach helps him manage pain.

“Yoga is one of the primary things to help with body function.”

“You know, I really have a better outlook on things, to not reflect so much on the past, and what happened, and just to really be in the moment.”

Ward will also speak during the June 26 reception and teach during the community yoga event.

Bill Pratt, 83, served in the Air Force for three years during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and is now more mobile than Veterans 20 years his junior.

“I believe that true wellness at any age is a balance of mind, body and spirit and if one goes off, the rest will be unbalanced. Yoga improves all three.”

“Over the couple years I have been a participant in these yoga classes, I have experienced lower blood pressure, lower A1C issues. No, my diet has not changed. My cholesterol has dropped significantly.”

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For 15 years, VYP has made an impact by serving the military community from active duty to Veterans, reservists and their families.

For more information about the anniversary celebration or community yoga event please contact vyp15@veteransyogaproject.org.

To reach the June 26 speakers, please contact vypmarketing@veteransyogaproject.org.

1 [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2025/2025 Annual Report Part 2 508.pdf](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2025/2025%20Annual%20Report%20Part%20508.pdf)

2 Veterans Yoga Project, Subjective Pain and Distress Scores Analysis, 2025.

Karen Schneider

Veterans Yoga Project

+1 631-229-7460

karen.schneider@veteransyogaproject.org

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