

Helping the Wounded

Becky Klepper Uses her Own Experience to Help Other Military Families

By Kim Fernandez



When Marine Sgt. Karl Klepper was wounded in Iraq on September 27, 2005, he and wife Becky were inundated with information and medical support from the military. After awhile, the steady stream of “stuff” felt overwhelming, especially as Becky began caring for her husband at their Camp Lejeune home, along with four children.

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She had plenty of information on where to go and who to call when Karl needed something, but no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't find any information on what to do with her feelings about her husband's injury. There was no one specifically supporting her.

"I was a stay-at-home wife and mom," she says. "All of a sudden, I was taking care of my husband. I was used to doing dinner, but I'd never done a dressing change before. And here I was, helping him in and out of the shower, helping him in and out of clothing. To watch your loved one go through something like that is heartbreaking."

"There wasn't really anybody I could talk to who knew what I was going through after Karl was injured," she says.

"If there's a wounded soldier I'm aware of, I get them a pair of trousers or pants or shirts or something to help them"

"It's not like somebody who's had a car accident or whose spouse has been ill or whose parents have been ill. It's different when it's your spouse versus your child or your parent. I wanted a place where I could go and talk to other spouses of injured soldiers."

Not one to sit around and mope, she teamed up with two other base wives whose husbands also had been injured. Together, they founded the Wounded Warrior Spouses' Support Group, which offers information and emotional support for those whose husbands or wives have been hurt overseas.

"We meet once a month to gather information and build on each other's experiences and strengths," Klepper says. "We get to get things off our chests and meet with others who understand what we've gone through."

The group started after Klepper met with fellow spouses Shannon Maxwell and Alison Sturla, each of whom had been searching for someone to share their experiences. Klepper met the other women when she approached base leaders and asked if such a support group existed. "They'd been doing something but it wasn't formal," she says. "We kind of got together and put our three heads together, and this is what we came up with."

The group has met three times so far and already boasts a strong handful of regular members. Each meeting starts with a talk from an expert in the field—someone who provides solid information on what to do when a spouse is injured to receive military support, or who offers psychological advice on what to do with feelings after an injury.

After that, injured soldier spouses are then free to share their feelings and frustrations privately.

"It's a safe haven if you want to let your guts out or if you want to just sit there and listen," Klepper says.

Thanks to some local press coverage and the complete support of Camp Lejeune officials, the Wounded Warrior Spouses' Support Group is in the beginning stages of becoming a model program for other military bases, and Klepper and her partner organizers have already spoken to spouses as far away as the west coast.

An active-duty military wife for three years, Klepper is no stranger to volunteering on base. She's been a longtime

member of Soldiers Angels, which helps match up wounded soldiers with "angels" who provide care packages, letters, and support. And she's the base liaison with Sew Much Comfort, a group of volunteers who make adaptive clothing for military personnel who, until now, have been relegated to hospital gowns and blankets.



"It gives these guys a sense of

normalcy to have clothing that doesn't look like it was cut up," she says, remembering her husband's limited wardrobe of cut-up sweats after his 2005 injury.

"I feel like I can't do enough to help these families out," she says of her countless hours of volunteering with the three groups. "It's not like we didn't receive help. We definitely did. And it's because we received help that I want to help others. After an injury, you get inundated with so much information, so many business cards. Those things can get lost and information can get misunderstood."

She's hopeful that the Wounded Warriors Spouses' Support Group will become another national effort to assist military families.

"My personal goal is for every base with a deploying unit to have something set up like this before there's a massive amount of injuries," she says. "I want them to have something in place that's run by spouses of wounded service members."