



Returning Veterans Meeting: Executive Summary

Convened by the *Psychotherapy & Spirituality Institute*
and *Intersections International*

November 23, 2008

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Context of the Meeting: The Psychotherapy and Spirituality Institute (PSI) and Intersections International have come together to design healing services for veterans and their families in the New York City area. Our particular strength and focus is on addressing the mental and spiritual wounds of war. PSI and Intersections are both working to develop a scalable pilot program that will be available to veterans and their families over an extended period of time. A meeting was convened on October 16th and 17th, 2008 in New York City with the objectives of networking, listening to the experience of veterans, their families, and care providers, identifying characteristics and best practices of effective programs and receiving recommendations for program development.

Participants: Invited participants were veterans of four wars, family members, VA and military chaplains, therapists, faith community leaders, writers, advocates, direct service providers, leaders in post-conflict transformation, musicians, and educators.

Process: There was an unexpected power and experience of healing that arose from the meeting process. Beyond concrete identification of needs and potential programs, the process created space for storytelling, support and creativity. Presentations were made by Joe Wheeler of Iraq Veterans Against the War, Wendy McClinton from Black Veterans for Social Justice and Father Michael Lapsley, founder of the Institute for the Healing of Memories in South Africa.

Identification of Best Practices: Participants identified the components of both effective and ineffective programs. Best practices were identified as being multidisciplinary, strength-based, accessible, interconnected with other programs, attentive to spirituality, educational, and community/peer based. Incorporation of the arts, ritual and spiritual practices were noted as fundamental to healing.

Recommendations: The recommendations made by the group fell into six general and interrelated categories: Psycho-Spiritual Healing Support, Storytelling, Education, Advocacy, Networking and recommended Methodologies for program development

Conclusion: As evidenced by participant evaluations, the gathering met and exceeded the objectives established by PSI and Intersections International. The recommendations are expansive and provide goals, methodologies and best practices for program development. The sponsoring organizations are in the process of evaluating which recommendations can most appropriately be implemented given our skills and organizational capacities.

This report was convened by the *Psychotherapy & Spirituality Institute* and *Intersections International*.

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