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## On Multiple Fronts

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**V**eterans and first responders suffer from disproportionately high rates of mental illness and suicide in comparison to the general population. A former U.S. Navy Seal, Alexander Othmer, is focusing on providing a range of positive, life-changing programs to veterans and first responders through a New York state not-for-profit organization, Guardian Revival, to help combat this crisis.

Othmer co-founded Guardian Revival in 2019 after pursuing his master's degree in psychology with a concentration in leadership from Penn State University. He developed Guardian Revival's offerings based on both research and personal experience of the impact of animals, nature, wellness and music on mental health and suicide prevention.

According to Othmer, who serves as Guardian Revival's executive director, "14% of Americans who die by suicide every day are veterans — but veterans make up just 7%

of the population. Veterans aged 18-34 are three times more likely to die by suicide than their non-veteran counterparts. An estimated 60% of first responder suicides go unreported, and approximately 50% of first responders experience suicidal ideation.

"Stigmas related to mental health treatment among guardians make it even more difficult to address this problem, largely stemming from a culture that values self-reliance and 'toughing it out' and marginalizes those experiencing distress or asking for help," he explains. "Guardian Revival approaches the topic of mental health with non-clinical language and programs positioned to avoid these stigmas and barriers."

The organization's mental health programs include Guardian Encore, a music program that provides guardians with opportunities to learn, write, play, record, and share music — individually, together, and with the broader community; Another Summit

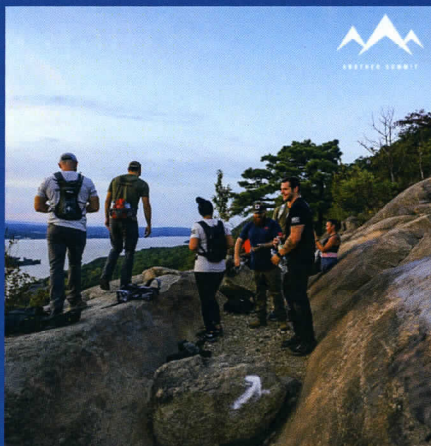
is an outdoor adventure program that organizes and leads structured outdoor activities such as hiking, backpacking, and paddling adventures for guardians, their families, and community members. Boots & Paws, a canine program, provides service and companion dogs along with a care package that includes food, veterinary coverage, professional training, and pet insurance for up to a year. Finally, G-Connect provides experiences, resources and peer support, by guardians, for guardians, with a mix of in-person and virtual events.

"Each program is supported by therapeutic models and research, and they represent compelling areas of interest to participants: outdoors, canine aid and companionship, music, and peer support," Othmer points out. "In just three years, we've achieved great things and served thousands of guardians across the country through our programs, both in-person and virtually. Through both in-person and online offerings, our programs

## In Their Own Words

Testimonials from participants in Guardian Revival programs:

- Another Summit ([guardianrevival.org/programs/another-summit/](https://guardianrevival.org/programs/another-summit/))
  - “It’s more than just exercise, it’s like taking off your blinders and being able to really see the world and appreciate it for what it is.”
  - “The outings are rewarding; I find myself feeling less stressed and more confident in many areas of my life.”
- Boots & Paws ([guardianrevival.org/programs/boots-paws/](https://guardianrevival.org/programs/boots-paws/))
  - “Your team is changing lives for the better. You changed my life. Getting her made me a happier person, hands down. I have more accountability, I wake up earlier, I train more frequently, and I feel like I have more purpose in my day to day.”
- Encore ([open.spotify.com/artist/2Pk3u0tNYq07B0QRSTFaL](https://open.spotify.com/artist/2Pk3u0tNYq07B0QRSTFaL))
  - “Guardian Jams are the best part of my week. My mind gets to check out for a bit, and I get to just focus on the music with others like me who are passionate about the same thing.”
  - “Jams is a space where I can focus on



music, through discussion, listening and playing music. It is a time of temporary pause on the day to day chaos that life presents.”

- G-Connect ([guardianrevival.org/programs/g-connect/](https://guardianrevival.org/programs/g-connect/))
  - “Her adage, ‘There’s no way to do this wrong,’ was the first time that anyone has actually said this about anything I’ve done, so while it doesn’t sound revolutionary, it really is a big ‘take away’ for a quick hour of my time.”
  - “I love that it was virtual. I felt at home with other veterans on the call.”
  - “It was a very accepting environment and honestly, I didn’t know how much I needed those mobility exercises.”



For more information, check out: [guardianrevival.org/](https://guardianrevival.org/); sign up for the email list: [eepurl.com/h8acif](https://eepurl.com/h8acif); or follow along at [www.instagram.com/guardianrevival/](https://www.instagram.com/guardianrevival/) or [www.youtube.com/@guardianrevivalinc](https://www.youtube.com/@guardianrevivalinc).

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—Alexander Othmer,  
Executive Director of Guardian Revival

have directly impacted guardians in more than 20 states across the country. We hope to serve 20,000 more guardians over the next two years.”

Specifically, the Another Summit program has 295 members and has had 277 outings for a total of 1,210 participant days. Boots & Paws has awarded companion dogs to 53 guardians, has eight service dogs in training, and a total of 1,600 canine therapeutic interactions. The Guardian Encore program has had 107 music sessions, with 55 tracks

recorded and 330 participant days. G-Connect has 200 members and held 45 peer events for a total of 486 participant days.

The Guardian Revival team is a mix of staff and volunteers, who come from both civilian and guardian backgrounds. “We’re proud that our organization is made up of a diverse population to ensure we represent and are accessible to everyone,” Othmer remarks. “We get the word out through our email lists and on social media.”

Guardian Revival programs are designed to help veterans and first responders have a decreased sense of loneliness, an increased sense of purpose and belonging, and a growth in their social networks.

“Our programs offer a complimentary approach to healthcare, so that our guardians can pursue an empowered, integrative approach to improving their lives,” Othmer notes. “Guardian Revival programs are founded on 10 key principles, which target specific critical challenges — social isolation, theoretical and impractical approaches, and inaccessible and inequitable resources.

“We focus on offering options that are both appealing and accessible to this population,” he adds. “Through their participation, guardians build beneficial routines and skills, relationships and connections with others, and ownership and accountability.”