

WI National Guard: Wisconsin Air Guard unit participates in Brothers at War workshop

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MILWAUKEE — The 128th Air Refueling Wing rallied its Airmen to participate in a groundbreaking Brothers at War workshop, facilitated by the Gary Sinise Foundation, Dec. 3 at the Oak Creek Community Center.

“Mental health is crucial to our overall ability to complete our mission,” said Col. Adria P. Zuccaro, 128th Air Refueling Wing base commander. “Workshops like Brothers at War help by bringing us together where we can openly discuss our unique experiences, positive and negative, in a supportive environment. Talking is the first step of processing events hopefully resulting in an ability to reflect and grow.”

The event, scheduled over drill weekend, aimed to address the unique challenges faced by military personnel and their families. The workshop offered a space for reflection on both the positive and negative impacts of military service.

Brothers at War, an initiative created by director and producer Jake Rademacher through the Gary Sinise Foundation, provides an exclusive opportunity for the 128th Air Refueling Wing members to delve into the effects of service and deployments on mental health and family life. The free, interactive event emphasizes the importance of supporting Airmen in managing the stressors that arise from their dual roles as military professionals and civilians.

“This event is powerful because service members see their story inside Brothers At War, and they see their family’s story inside Brothers At War,” Rademacher said. “The significance and the importance of it is that it allows them to start to open up

and talk about their experiences. The journals are to give them a private place to explore that and the discussion is to try to have a conversation and dialogue about what they have experienced in their service, their military life, and to explore some of the trauma, some of the difficulty, and how they have navigated that difficulty.”

With a decade-long track record, the Brothers at War Workshop has garnered praise, benefiting over 33,000 service members and their families. An impressive 94 percent of past attendees recommend the event to others, underscoring its effectiveness in addressing the challenges inherent in military service.

“So many of our service members come from families of service,” Rademacher said. “If we can do right by the people that are serving now and the people that served in the past, we are going to create a better dynamic for their children, and those are the service members of the future.”

Workshop facilitators were attuned to the unique experiences of the 128th Air Refueling Wing members, particularly their involvement in Operations Allies Refuge and Allies Welcome. This awareness allowed them to personalize the workshop, ensuring that it resonates with those who have served in these critical operations. All members, especially those with experience in these operations, were strongly encouraged to participate.

Notably, spouses and significant others were encouraged to attend alongside the Airmen, fostering a holistic approach to mental health and family support within the military community.

“There is no one way to ensure mental health — it’s a continuous process which requires effort, self reflection, and a willingness to share with others,” Zuccaro said. “I encourage Airmen of all specialties to inventory their mental health practices, and I challenge them to add to their practices.”