



# Creative Forces®: NEA Military Healing Arts Network

Creative Forces®: NEA Military Healing Arts Network is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts in partnership with the U.S. Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs that seeks to improve the health, well-being, and quality of life for military and veteran populations exposed to trauma, as well as their families and caregivers.

**“I am so thankful that my psychologist and art therapist helped me use art (thread, stitches, and fabric) to process trauma and make an art quilt. When I use my hands I have to pay attention to what my hands are doing, that means that I don’t give my mind a chance to**

– MAJ Glema Gordon, U.S. Army (retired)

**“One session with my music therapist, I went the next day almost seizure free. That moment I knew the art was going to help me immensely.”**

– MSGT Michael Schneider  
U.S. Marine Corps (retired)

Creative Forces brings creative arts therapies to military personnel and veterans who are experiencing post-traumatic stress, mild traumatic brain injury, and related psychological illnesses. The program also offers community arts programming to improve the well-being and resilience of all military-connected people.

## The Need

Approximately 515,000 men and women of our armed forces were diagnosed with TBI between 2000 and 2024<sup>1</sup>, and 29% of veterans serving in the Operations Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Enduring Freedom (OEF)<sup>2</sup> have PTSD at some point in their lives. Both diagnoses may contribute to depression and to the estimated 17 suicides committed by veterans each day.

Creative Forces is managed in partnership with:



1 <https://www.health.mil/Reference-Center/Reports/2025/03/13/2000-2024-Q3-DOD-Worldwide-Numbers-for-TBI>

2 [https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/common/common\\_veterans.asp](https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/common/common_veterans.asp)

## Clinical Program

The Creative Forces Clinical Program embeds creative arts therapies in military healthcare settings across the country, including through telehealth. Creative arts therapies like art therapy, dance/movement therapy, and music therapy can promote rehabilitation and recovery for military-connected people, making a difference in their lives.

The Clinical Program influences the broader healthcare system by advancing research, practice, and policy to maximize impacts of creative arts therapies in integrative care.

Visit [arts.gov/CreativeForces](https://arts.gov/CreativeForces) to learn more about clinical research associated with Creative Forces.

Creative arts therapies utilized by Creative Forces:

<b>Art therapy</b>	<b>Music therapy</b>	<b>Dance/movement therapy</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Patients use visual art materials to express themselves. With the therapist, patients talk through the themes that emerge in their artwork.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Patients use music to identify, express, and process their experiences and emotions. Music therapists guide patients through activities that can help them achieve their goals.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Patients use dance and movement to promote healing. Dance/movement therapists help patients understand their mind-body connection.</li></ul>
Methods include:	Methods include:	Methods include:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Making a mask to process change and express themes about one's identity and sense of self</li><li>• Engaging in anxiety-reducing arts processes, like pour painting or mandala drawing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Playing instruments to support motor coordination, cognition, and relationships</li><li>• Singing to improve breath support and speech</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mirroring another person's movements to increase social engagement and support self-exploration</li><li>• Mind-body skills training to improve autonomic nervous system regulation and manage chronic pain</li></ul>

## Community Program

The Community Engagement Program expands the reach of Creative Forces to more military-connected people nationwide. It also provides continued, community-based opportunities for supporting health and well-being for people who have received or are currently participating in creative arts therapies through the Clinical Program.

Since 2017, Creative Forces has invested in community-based arts engagement activities that take place in healthcare, community, or virtual settings.

Engaging in the arts can help military-connected people, including their families and caregivers, enhance creative expression, build relationships, become more resilient, and adapt to civilian life.

## Community Engagement Grant Examples

Canton Museum of Art in Ohio, in collaboration with the PegasusFarm's Military and First Responders Center, is offering a series of free art classes led by an experienced teaching artist who is also a military spouse. This opportunity is called the Alpha Romeo Tango (ART) program and will culminate with a community exhibit featuring the work of Stark County veterans, active-duty service members, and members of the National Guard and Reserve.

Greentrike in Washington is bringing children and their parents/caregivers together at Joint Base Lewis-McChord for a play-based arts education program called Art Sparks. These curated and creative activities support the unique needs of military families through connection, community, and healing.

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## Impact

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### Benefits of creative arts therapies:

Creative arts therapies can help people achieve optimal physical and mental health, resilience, social integration, and quality of life. Creative arts therapies also address cognition, motor, speech/language functioning, and chronic pain.

These therapies help:

- Process emotions and traumatic experiences;
- Increase self-awareness and self-esteem;
- Reduce anxiety, avoidance, and depression; and
- Decrease social isolation.

### Benefits of community arts engagement

Research by Creative Forces is investigating how community arts engagement can help military-connected people:

- Increase social connection
- Enhance resilience
- Improve empathy through creative expression, and
- Support successful life transitions

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**Learn more**

For more information and resources, visit:

**[arts.gov/CreativeForces](https://arts.gov/CreativeForces)**

Follow @neacreativeforces on LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube.