



Summer 2024 Newsletter

UNITINGUS.ORG

Volume 5 | Issue 1 | Together We Rise: United Series

Leading Change

For decades, stigma and backlash against seeking care have led to the underutilization of Military and Veteran Mental Health services, mirroring what community healthcare has documented.

The Uniting US integrative model, born out of four years of collaboration with federal agencies to combat mental health stigma, is being honored by leading medical entities, governments, and communities.

Thanks to the dedicated Uniting US team, millions of people are experiencing unity through family-friendly art engagements led by veterans, the military, and their families

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Honors Bestowed on Uniting US

The Uniting US team gained notable recognition from the United Health Care Group as a significant contributor and leading innovator in providing healing and wellness programs to veterans, the military, and their families. As part of a special Kennedy Center dinner and ceremony, Uniting US was one of three national nonprofits recognized.

The Fenwick Foundation recently thanked Uniting US. "We express our deepest gratitude for the profound impact the Uniting US program has on serving the low/limited-income older adults, low-resource adults, veterans/active military, and their families, caregivers, and disabled populations in the Washington DC Metro region."

During a Uniting US Arts Festival, international VIPs from several foreign embassies participated in activities, including participating in the community mural. Following the event, Admiral Woods, Defense Attache of the British Embassy, and General Fadzil, Defense Attache of the Malaysia Embassy, sent handwritten letters of appreciation. General Fadzil shared his experience in the community mural painting:



Uniting US Professional Dutch Artist Jolanda Aucott with General Fadzil. Lower image Uniting US Hope and Remembrance Murals (2024).



“Thank you for teaching me that breaking through self-imposed barriers inspires others in the world to do the same.”

Uniting US Artist’s Receive Honors

Walter Reed National Military Medical Center honored ten influential women in US history, including Portrait Artist Alicia Christy, MD, Col (Ret). In the Spring of 2024, the Uniting US Celebrating Influential Women watercolor portraits exhibit welcomed patients, visitors, and staff, including many Uniting US participants and family members.





Storytelling Inspires Communities

Luis Rosa-Valentin, Army Sgt, critically injured in Iraq, shares his personal story with attendees at the Uniting US community art festival in Arlington, VA. During his extended recovery at Walter Reed, Luis found healing and wellness through therapeutic arts. The trauma associated with losing his legs, one arm, one eye, and his hearing motivated him to create artwork to share his perspective with others. A natural speaker, Luis, told everyone, "Broken does not mean useless; my broken body is a visible example of the horror of war, and the purpose of my life has never been greater." In addition to his speech, Luis' nude 'self' portrait represents resilience and beauty!

Special Thanks to the Board of Directors

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- President Lou Celli, Army Veteran
 - Vice President AnnMarie Halterman, AF Veteran
 - Treasurer Tiffany Wheeler, AF Family Member
 - Secretary Kimberly Johnson, Army Veteran
 - Alicia Christy, MD, Army Veteran
 - Robert Leese, Air Force Veteran
 - Maria Carrion, Marine Veteran
 - Clement Danish, Army Veteran
 - Annette Polan, Army Family Member

Next Issue: Faces of the Fallen initiative ramp up and our **Outstanding Collaborator Awardee Colleen P. Kelly, J.D.**

High Profile Public Exhibitions

Uniting US continues the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority partnership sponsored by Leidos! Reagan National Airport and Dulles International Airports have featured more than 300 Uniting US participants' artwork in four gallery locations.

Leidos, a company with phenomenal programs for Veterans and their family members, continues generously dedicating resources to support mental health through storytelling and the arts with Uniting US programming for veterans and their families.

Professional Mentor Artists Empowering Mission

Since 2020, the biggest Uniting US challenge has been to find resources to support the rapidly growing program demands. Inspired by the generosity of Professional Artist Annette Polan, Uniting US began working with like-minded professional artists to expand capacity and improve therapeutic arts offerings, making programming accessible for all people.

Professional Stone Carver John Sonnier, joined the Uniting US mentor artist team. He collaborated with Michael Wheeler, and AnnMarie Halterman to create "In the Balance," a 2024 feature piece.

Upcoming artmaking activities: Army Veteran Diana de Avila is leading a group collaboration with severely disabled veterans. Pins Leese is leading a community artwork with Community Fork Lift.

Special thanks to our Mentors! Annette Polan (Portrait Artist and Advisor), Sushobha Jenner (Large Scale Mural Artist, Steve Alpert (Painter and Instructor), Jolanda Aucott (World Wide Art Project), Luke Frazier (The American Pops Orchestra), John Sonnier (Classically Trained Stone Artist), Diana de Avila Veteran Savant Digital Artist), Annie Chen (Digital Artist), and Alicia Christy, MD (Watercolor Artist).

Thank you Uniting US participants, supporters, and volunteers! Together We Rise: United!



Photo References: Top to Bottom (left to right)

- Uniting US Participant Discussion
 - Christina Polosky and Lisa Carrington Firmin Book Collaboration: Latina Warrior
 - DCA Airport Demo, Alicia Christy, 28K people
- Row 2:**
- Community Murals Painting
 - British Ambassador Residence Private Tour
- Row 3:**
- DCA Airport Demo, Annie Chen, 31K people
 - Gallery Underground Uniting US Opening
 - British Embassy Recognition of Uniting US
- Row 4:**
- Uniting US National Gallery at DCA
 - Army Veteran Sgt Luis Rosa-Valentin, Community Mural Painting
- Front Cover: Uniting US Thought Leader Panel Discussion: Rising to Find Wellness and Community Together**