



# MORAL INJURY

# & THE JOURNEY UNBOUND



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **American Warrior Association Launches National Awareness Campaign for Moral Injury, Debuts *The Journey Unbound* Documentary Series**

**FORT WORTH, Texas** — The American Warrior Association (AWA) announced a national communications initiative to increase awareness of moral injury, culminating in the premiere of the five-part documentary series *The Journey Unbound* in alignment with Texas Moral Injury Awareness Day on May 14, 2026.

This effort addresses the invisible wounds carried by military service members, veterans, first responders, and their families. Through storytelling, advocacy, and proactive programming, the AWA aims to shift the national conversation around mental and emotional resilience for those who serve. Deploying a multitude of resources and efforts including its R3 program, which focuses on the country's first responders, the AWA is a leading voice on moral injury awareness and resilience.

*Moral injury* is often misunderstood and frequently overlooked; it affects individuals who have experienced or witnessed events that deeply conflict with their moral beliefs. Unlike traditional clinical diagnoses, moral injury requires a holistic, community-centered approach rooted in faith, purpose, and connection.

On May 14, 2025, both the Texas House and Senate officially proclaimed May 14 as Moral Injury Awareness Day, marking a significant step forward in recognizing the challenges faced by veterans, first responders, and frontline professionals. The 2026 campaign builds on this momentum, positioning Texas as a leader in a growing national movement.

At the center of this initiative is *The Journey Unbound*, a five-part documentary series hosted by former Navy SEAL Josh Jakob, Director of Men's Programs for the AWA. The series follows Josh on a cross-country journey, sharing real stories from service members and first responders while exploring the role of faith and community in healing moral injury.

Through intimate conversations and firsthand accounts, the series reveals the emotional and spiritual challenges faced by those who serve and the transformative impact of community, purpose, and faith-based restoration.

The American Warrior Association has long supported veterans through Warrior's Refuge, an immersive outdoor retreat that fosters camaraderie, reflection, and spiritual renewal. Building on that foundation, R3 extends this mission to first responders through a proactive, structured approach to wellness.

Developed by the AWA, R3 (Respond. Restore. Resolve.) is a department-embedded wellness and resilience framework designed to proactively address moral injury before it becomes a crisis. By integrating directly into daily operations, R3 provides first responders with access to trusted, peer-led, non-clinical resources using dedicated training time, removing barriers and prioritizing confidentiality. The program empowers first responders to take ownership of their mental and emotional health without stigma, judgment, or administrative barriers.

Together, the AWA and its R3 program are emerging as leading voices on moral injury, offering scalable solutions, national programming, and a unified message of healing.



## **Media Opportunities and National Expansion**

As part of this campaign, AWA leadership, program participants, and documentary contributors will be available for:

- Broadcast and podcast interviews
- Speaking engagements and panel discussions
- Legislative briefings and advocacy efforts
- Expert commentary on moral injury and resilience

The initiative also supports ongoing national expansion efforts, with R3 positioned as a scalable model for first responder wellness programs across the country.

## **About the American Warrior Association (AWA)**

The American Warrior Association (AWA) is a Fort Worth-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to restoring military service members, veterans, first responders, and their families. Through its flagship program, Warrior's Refuge, and its department-embedded R3: Respond. Restore. Resolve. framework, the AWA delivers confidential, peer-led, and proactive solutions focused on addressing moral injury. By removing barriers to care and prioritizing trust, the AWA helps warriors process moral injury, reclaim their purpose, and return to their lives with renewed moral resilience. Supported by a unique funding model in which all administrative costs are covered, 100% of public donations go directly to program delivery and warrior care.

## ***The Journey Unbound***

*The Journey Unbound* is a documentary series that shines light on the lives of America's military service members and first responders, revealing the vital role faith plays in their mental and emotional well-being.



The American Warrior Association (AWA) is a faith-driven, research-based nonprofit dedicated to healing moral injury among service members, veterans, first responders, and their families. We provide faith-based healing, practical support, and comprehensive wellness programs to foster lasting resilience and spiritual strength.

**2,900+**

**HEROES SERVED**

Across our programs, we've supported service members, veterans, first responders, and their families.

**93%**

**GREATER RESILIENCE**

A majority of participants experience improved emotional strength and reduced moral injury symptoms.

**35**

**PARTNERSHIPS**

Through the Virtus Project, we collaborate with government, clinical, non-profit, research, and community organizations.

**132**

**PEER SUPPORT CIRCLES**

We've facilitated support and accountability small-groups, offering faith-based guidance and collective healing.

CORE VALUES

**PRINCIPLES THAT EMPOWER WARRIORS**

**FAITH**

We root our work in faith-based principles, trusting God's guidance to bring healing and hope.

**COMPASSION**

We stand with those who serve, understanding their struggles and championing their well-being.

**RESILIENCE**

We nurture spiritual strength, moral courage, and the ability to rise above adversity.

**SERVICE**

We inspire continued leadership and community engagement, reflecting the heart of those who serve.

PROGRAMS

**FAITH FUELED & IMPACT DRIVEN**

**THE VIRTUS PROJECT**

Merges faith and science to combat moral injury.

**HEALING & RESILIENCE**

Transformative support through faith-based retreats and practical wellness resources.

**ADVOCACY & AWARENESS**

Amplify personal stories and mobilize communities nationwide.

**LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

Cultivate resilient, morally driven leaders through scholarships, mentorship, and service-based training.

**RENEWING STRENGTH WITH FAITH AND RESEARCH**



R3 is a department-embedded wellness and resilience framework to proactively address moral injury before it becomes a crisis. The R3 Program is a peer-driven, evidence-based initiative created with first responders, for first responders to help departments proactively address trauma, build resiliency, and restore purpose.

#### R3 PROGRAM

### KEY OBJECTIVES

#### ADDRESSING MORAL INJURY

By proactively confronting moral injury, R3 aims to prevent long-term psychological consequences, reducing critical incidents within departments.

#### ELIMINATING STIGMAS

R3 fosters an environment where mental health discussions are normalized, encouraging first responders to seek help without fear of judgment.

#### NON-CLINICAL PREVENTATIVE CARE

The program emphasizes non-clinical resources, allowing first responders to access support without the stigma associated with traditional mental health treatments.

**REVOLUTIONIZE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT** for first responders through a proactive, moral injury centered approach that breaks stigma and fosters a culture of care

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#### FIRST RESPONDER

### WELLNESS TRAINING

**1**

#### ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Easily accessible approved non-clinical resources for proactive and preventative care.

**2**

#### EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGNS

Awareness campaigns and internal department trainings to educate both departments and the broader community about moral injury and available support mechanisms.

**3**

#### PEER SUPPORT GROUPS

Establish peer support systems within departments, fostering early intervention, camaraderie and shared understanding among first responders.

**FIRST RESPONDERS ARE FACING A CRISIS AND IT'S NOT JUST PHYSICAL**

FACTS

# MORAL INJURY

The damage to one's conscience, moral compass, or soul when those individuals experience or witness events that deeply conflict with their moral beliefs, values, or ethical codes of conduct.

**MORAL INJURY REQUIRES A HOLISTIC, COMMUNITY-CENTERED  
APPROACH ROOTED IN FAITH, PURPOSE, AND CONNECTION**

**22**

**Estimated Veteran  
Suicides a Day**

**46%**

**Post 9/11 Veterans Suffer  
from Moral Injury**

**37%**

**Fire & EMS Professionals  
have Contemplated Suicide**

**2020**

**Highest Active-duty  
Suicide in a Decade**

4 STEPS

**TO BATTLE MORAL INJURY**

**1**

**Fill Your Mind  
with Truth**

Replace distorted beliefs with what is true about who you are, what you've done, and what is still possible.

**2**

**Release Destructive  
Thoughts**

Identify and let go of shame, guilt, and lies that keep you stuck and disconnected.

**3**

**Remember Who  
You Are**

Reconnect with your identity, your values, and the purpose that still remains.

**4**

**Don't Carry  
it Alone**

Healing happens in community through shared stories, and knowing you're not alone.



# THE TEAM



**ANNA HEIL**

Executive Director



**JOSH JAKUB**

Director of Men's  
Programming



**NEIL NOAKES**

Cheif of Strategic  
Advancement



**WILL SPENCER**

Founding Director

Behind this national awareness initiative is a team of leaders, storytellers, and veterans committed to addressing moral injury at its core. Executive Director Anna Heil leads the strategic vision and national expansion of both the American Warrior Association and the R3 Program, equipping veterans and first responders with proactive tools for healing and resilience. Former Navy SEAL and AWA Director of Men's Programs Josh Jakub leads the charge in The Journey Unbound, traveling across the country to uncover powerful, firsthand stories of struggle, restoration, and purpose. Founding Director Will Spencer, a retired Navy SEAL Master Chief, provides the movement's foundational leadership and philosophy, shaping its faith-based approach and long-term impact. Together, this team combines lived experience, professional expertise, and dedication to create a platform for healing, connection, and national change.

To learn more about each member of the team, click the images above!

**Anna Heil**

Executive Director

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Anna Heil proudly serves as the Executive Director of the American Warrior Association and leads the R3 Program team with a steadfast commitment to fostering impactful and sustainable change within the military, veteran, and first responder community. As a trained level-one Biblical Counselor, QPR Suicide Prevention and Awareness instructor, and a graduate of the Shay Moral Injury Institute's Moral Injury Care certificate program, Anna brings a unique blend of expertise and compassion to her work.

In her role, Anna partners closely with departments to advocate for their wellness goals, ensuring they have the necessary support to succeed. She also develops and delivers moral injury resilience training programs tailored to the unique needs of first responders, equipping them with tools to navigate the challenges of their high-stress roles.

A passionate innovator with over a decade of nonprofit leadership experience, Anna excels at cultivating strategic relationships with individuals and organizations, continually expanding support and raising program visibility. Her excellent communication skills and creative spirit are essential in building lasting relationships and achieving the mission of the AWA and R3 program.



**Josh Jakub**  
Director of Men's Programs

#### **Military Qualifications**

- SEAL Team 2
- NSW Sniper Instructor

I was born in Bowling Green, KY and later moved to Mitchell, IN at the age of 10. After high school I went to college where I studied architecture. But found that wasn't something I really enjoyed. I wanted to join the military. My grandfather was in the AirForce, so I thought I would follow in his footsteps, but the recruiter misled me and I ended up joining the Navy. I didn't know what a SEAL was, but the recruiter insisted.

I joined the Navy in 2011 and signed a SEAL contract when I went into bootcamp. I joined and finished in BUD/s class 292. Out of 250+ candidates seven of us originals finished with class 292. Three months of language school followed where I learned Pashto. I then joined SEAL Team 2 in early 2013 and deployed to Afghanistan in late 2013.

After that deployment I stayed at ST2 and did two more deployments before becoming a NSW Sniper Instructor at the Advanced Training Command. I spent my last two years in the Navy instructing before separating completely in May 2020.

Upon getting out of the military I assumed I was ready for the transition but was mistaken, not only was it hard to transition but it was also during the covid pandemic. So, I moved to Nashville where I had no friends yet and nothing was open to make new friends. I enrolled at Belmont University to finish my bachelor's degree in 2020 and finished in late 2021. During this time, I was focusing on songwriting and trying to pave a path in the country music industry. Once things started to open again, I was able to experience Nashville, play out at some local venues and make some friends.

During this early time in Nashville, I hadn't found my true purpose. I was searching for community. But the community I had just left was like no other I would ever find again. I began networking around Nashville and bars which turned into constant partying and drinking. This led me to stumble financially. I almost moved home to my parents' house but decided I wasn't going to give up; I needed to figure out my life. At a golf tournament in Nashville someone told me about AWA. To this day, I don't remember who it was, but I filled out an application and went on an AWA trip 3 weeks later. I had never been on anything like this. I didn't know what to expect but I showed up and instantly was back with like-minded men and was able to find myself again without all the noise. I found what I had been looking for. I needed to go back and find who I was a kid growing up in Indiana. I found "Indiana Josh". And that was a direct reflection of me being strong in my faith once again.



I volunteered on an AWA trip 6 months after my initial trip and loved helping others find their way. I was offered a position at AWA as a Men's coordinator Feb 2023. I spent all year traveling on trip after trip leading men and found that this was my purpose in life now. To lift up others who think there is no way to move forward. Since that first trip I have been on 20+ trips meeting and leading men from all over the country. I then moved up to the Director of Men's programs and was able to build a team of faith-driven men who lead warriors refuge trips from all over the country with all backgrounds in military and law enforcement.

I was able to share my story at our annual Hoedown for Heroes in Sept of 2024 to 750+ people the impact that they had in donating to AWA. The path I was going down and how I was healed, cared for, and saved.

When I'm not on AWA trips I reside in Tennessee where I bought a small farm to give me that same peace, I find on the warrior's refuge trips.

A passion that I have is riding my motorcycle. Taking trips to other states and being on the road where you are with your own thoughts only focusing on what is in front of you. Taking myself out of society and traveling on roads few people travel on brings me peace and allows me to fill my cup.

May 2026 I will have a new docuseries that showcases my passion for riding with the stories from around the country of military service members and first responders in how they refill their cup and find hope and peace. "The Journey Unbound" will be based off my story of resilience and the search for purpose while hearing from other like-minded people in how they have found their purpose hopefully building a community where others find hope and inspiration to better themselves.

I want to show that after you've hung up your gear for the last time, it's time to put on your next uniform. The new uniform that takes care of others in different ways, one that focuses on loving one other and yourself.

Purpose after service is not black and white, it's not commanded like in our former service. This new purpose takes shape and becomes clear once we realize that we do not make our own plans. God has a purpose for all of us; we just need to listen.



**Neil Noakes**  
Chief of Strategic  
Advancement

Chief Neil Noakes serves as the Chief of Strategic Advancement for the American Warrior Association, bringing more than 25 years of frontline and leadership experience with the Fort Worth Police Department. The son of a firefighter, Noakes has a deeply personal understanding of the pressures first responders face and has dedicated his career to advancing their well-being. As Chief, he led the development of multiple wellness initiatives, including the department's Wellness Unit and the implementation of the Checkpoint system to proactively monitor and support officer health. He also played a pivotal role in launching the R3 program in partnership with both the Fort Worth Police and Fire Departments, which was an innovative effort to address moral injury within public safety.

Noakes holds a Master's degree in Criminal Justice and Criminology from Texas Christian University, a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice Administration from Tarleton State University, and an Associate's degree from Weatherford College. He is a cofounder and instructor of TCU's Leadership, Executive and Administrative Development (LEAD) Program and a graduate of the prestigious Southern Police Institute's 137th Administrative Officers Course. Through his leadership and advocacy, Noakes continues to shape the national conversation around moral injury and the long-term wellness of those who serve.



**Will Spencer**  
Founding Director

#### **Military Qualifications**

- NSW Scout Sniper
- Jumpmaster
- Master Parachutist
- NSW Dive Supervisor
- Sniper Instructor
- Master Training Specialist

#### **Academic Achievements**

- Doctor of Strategic Intelligence (Magna Cum Laude) from American Military University
- Bachelor of Management Communications from Southern Christian University
- Joint Special Operations Senior Enlisted Academy

#### **Personal Awards**

- Bronze Star Medal with “V” for Valor
- Defense Meritorious Service Medal

Will Spencer is the Founding Director of the American Warrior Association. Will is a retired Navy SEAL Master Chief who conducted 14 overseas deployments, including 8 combat deployments to Iraq, Afghanistan and Southeast Asia while assigned to multiple SEAL Teams and Special Operations Commands during his long naval career from 1991 to 2017. He is a proponent of peace through strength and argues against endless wars and foreign entanglements. Will has a passion for helping others and mentoring the next generation. He will tell you that his life’s highest accomplishment is “Bringing everyone home!”

Master Chief Special Warfare Operator (SEAL) William T. Spencer is a native of California and a 1991 graduate of Royal High School in Simi Valley. In June 1991, two weeks after graduating high school, he enlisted in the Navy and attended boot camp at Naval Recruit Training Command, Great Lakes, IL. Upon completion of recruit training and Hull Technician “A” School, Master Chief Spencer entered the UDT/SEAL training pipeline and successfully completed Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL Training Class 182 in July 1992. Will is one of the youngest Navy SEALs ever to complete the arduous SEAL training and was only 19 years old when he was assigned to SEAL Team ONE in Coronado, CA.

#### **Military Service & Leadership Overview**

- Served across elite Naval Special Warfare commands, including SEAL Team ONE, SEAL Team FIVE, Special Reconnaissance Team ONE, and SEAL Team SEVEN
- Held senior leadership roles such as Alpha Platoon Chief, Troop Senior Enlisted Leader, and Operations Master Chief
- Completed 14 overseas operational deployments in multiple high-impact leadership positions
- Served as Senior Enlisted Leader for the National Mission Assault Force, executing continuous direct action missions in Iraq
- Played a critical role in supporting the safe retrograde of final U.S. forces from Iraq into Kuwait
- Led HUMINT operations in Ramadi, Iraq (2007) as Operational Control Commander
- Served with Special Operations Command Central (SOCCENT) as Senior Enlisted Leader and Navy Component Command Master Chief
- Led CENTCOM Team for the Foreign Fighter Task Force (JSOC), helping



- 2x Joint Service Commendation Medal with "V for Valor"
- 3x Navy & Marine Corps Commendation Medal
- Army Commendation Medal
- Joint Service Achievement Medal
- 3x Combat Action Ribbon
- 4x Good Conduct Medal
- Expert Rifle & Pistol Medal

initiate Operation Inherent Resolve

- Most valued roles include SEAL Pointman and Platoon Chief, leading from the front and ensuring team safety across multiple combat operations
- Continued service post-retirement as a contractor within the Sensitive Activities Division (J3X), U.S. Special Operations Command (MacDill AFB)

After founding the American Warrior Association, Will wrote the book "Post Op Reflections" to heal the moral injuries of those who serve our nation at home and abroad. His efforts prevented suicides, healed marriages, and saved many families. Two years later, Will created the Urban Explorers Program to mentor, educate, and support at-risk and underserved kids who do not have one or both parents at home. Will recently wrote the book, "The Warrior Way, Advice of a Navy SEAL Father to His Children" with a forward by Dr. Ben Carson to strengthen and encourage children who are struggling in modern-day society. This book is now the foundational book for the Urban Explorers Program and is given out at Nike Football Sport Camps.

Will's Academic achievements include a Graduate Degree (Magna Cum Laude) in Strategic Intelligence from American Military University, A Bachelor's Degree (Cum Laude) in Management Communications from Southern Christian University and completion of the Joint Special Operations Senior Enlisted Academy.

Will's military qualifications include Naval Special Warfare Scout Sniper, Military Free Fall Jumpmaster, Static-Line Jumpmaster, Naval Special Warfare Dive Supervisor, Sniper Instructor, NSW Breacher, Military Master Parachutist, Open and Closed-Circuit Diver, Achilles Dagger, Emerald Nomad, Advent Laden, Small Arms Instructor, Range Officer-In-Charge, Master Training Specialist, and Helicopter Rope Suspension Trainer.

His personal awards include the Bronze Star Medal with "V" for Valor, the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, two Joint Service Commendation Medals with "V" for Valor, three Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medals, the Army Commendation Medal, the Joint Service Achievement Medal, three Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medals, the Army Achievement Medal, three combat action ribbons, four Good Conduct Medals, Expert Rifle and Pistol Medals and various unit and campaign awards.

# CONTACT

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American Warrior Association

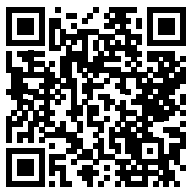
**R3 Program**

[r3program.org](http://r3program.org)



@r3\_program

## THE JOURNEY UNBOUND



The Journey Unbound is a documentary series that shines light on the lives of America's military service members and first responders, revealing the vital role faith plays in their mental and emotional well-being.