Executive Summary

Founded in 2007, Heroes on the Water (HOW) is a 501(c)3 non-profit that provides recreational wellness experiences. Our primary modality is kayak fishing which has proven cognitive and emotional benefits. These programs incorporate structured activities in a pressure-free environment creating opportunities for community building and personal healing. Our participants receive much needed camaraderie and support.

HOW HAS TWO PRIMARY PROGRAMS:

- HOW Volunteer Programs are placed across the United States and provide wellness services to veterans, first responders, and their families.
- HOW Therapeutic Programs provide the healing benefits of kayak fishing to improve the recovery of our military in treatment.

To better understand the impact of our kayak fishing programs, HOW embarked upon a peer-reviewed, validated study of our Therapeutic Programs dubbed Operational Early Impact. We used a tested tool developed by the program’s Research Coordinator, Shelby Jackson, PhD. The initial results are positive, and we will continue the research in 2023 by implementing the study in our volunteer programs.

About Operation Early Impact

The primary objective of the study was to explore the impact of HOW therapeutic kayak fishing programs on service members regarding stress-management, relationships, and self-efficacy.

BACKGROUND

Process-Development

Below is a visual outline of the process used to create the 2022 version of Operation Early Impact Survey and next steps.

Review questions from existing tested assessments

Review articles and blog posts for anecdotal evidence

ID common themes & desired questions

Narrow down questions to 10-15

Test for validity and reliability

Distribute survey during fishing season

Collecting data during fishing season

Analyze data throughout and post-fishing season

Review Operation Impact Survey for possible revisions

The study will be published in full later in 2023.
## Major Findings

### RESPONSE SUMMARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Stress Management</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Self-Efficacy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taught me coping skills I can use outside of HOW</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helps improve my mood</td>
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<td>Helps decrease my anxiety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provided opportunity to relax</td>
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<td>Helped strengthen relationships with family and friends</td>
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<td>Confidence to build relationships outside of HOW</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opportunities to build new relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helps me be more mindful</td>
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<td>Recognize personal strengths</td>
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<td>Increased self confidence</td>
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82% 84% 86% 88% 90% 92% 94% 96% 98% 100%

## NEXT STEPS

- Focus group implemented early November
- Continue analysis of data
- Submit for publication
- Prepare for next fishing season
- Expand to volunteer chapters