

## **Episode 223 - Dr. Clyde Angel, John Sullivan, and Dr. Vincent Starnino: At My Core, I'm Not the Same: Spiritual Injury and Military Trauma (part 2 of 2)**

[00:00:08] Welcome to inSocialWork. The podcast series of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work at [www.inSocialWork.org](http://www.inSocialWork.org). We're glad you could join us today. The purpose of inSocialWork is to engage practitioners and researchers in lifelong learning and promote research to practice and practice to research. We educate. We connect. We care. We're inSocialWork.

[00:00:37] Hi from Buffalo welcome back to all of our listeners who are academic year driven here at the School of Social Work. We're looking forward to meeting our newly admitted cohort and to reconnect with our current students. It's too bad there hasn't been anything going on in the world this summer for us to talk about with them but we'll give it our best try. I'm Peter Sobota in part two of a two part podcasts Our guests Dr. Clyde Angel, John Sullivan and Dr. Vincent Starnino continue their discussion related to spiritual injury and military trauma. They discuss the origins and process of creating their program. Observing that traditional evidence based practices did not easily address the existential issues they were hearing about from their clients. Our guests explain how they created the key components of their program. Our guests describe how they address anger and grief in their group and conclude with the feedback they received from the participants as well as the follow up they've done Clyde Angel Doctor of Ministry is chief chaplain services at the Richard L. Roudebush V.A. Medical Center. John Sullivan LCSW is retired and formerly an adjunct professor at University of Indiana Purdue University in Indianapolis and the University of Indianapolis. Vincent Starnino LCSW Ph.D. is associate professor at Indiana University's School of Social Work. Our guests were interviewed in April of 2017 by our own Dr. Tom Nochajski research professor here at the School of Social Work and a Marine Corps veteran.

[00:02:21] OK thanks Vincent that was very good. And it does lead me to the next question because again I can see now why the approach you working on was developed but I'll ask John to comment on that. And why did you think there was a need for this type of program and how did it come about.

[00:02:46] Actually I started work in Atlanta Georgia as a mental health chaplain that was probably back in 2006. One of the key roles that was working with veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder and at that time there was actually a group treatment that I was a part of and I would do a couple spare pieces. And then what spun off of that was aftercare group and from that I began to realize some of these deeper existential spiritual wounds. So move forward I came to Indianapolis in late 2008 2009 and John saw the comes in my office one day as the new chief chaplain. He says Hey do you have any interest in doing a spirituality group with veterans with PTSD. He produced it let me know that he was off the property and that was his primary work and that's well actually I've been doing some of this work. But it is it is really formalized. I said let's just kind of just start and do what we do. So we put a group together had to be honest we really didn't even have an outline. I told John I said you know I'm like this just off the cuff kind of went wherever it took us a group that week and so we started doing this and after one or two episodes or sessions to work with the time we were to an eight week sessions. I told John I said you know we need to develop some kind of a guy some sort of that we can hand to the veterans so they kind of follow along with us. And I said well why don't you start taking notes as we're doing this and let's see if there's a pattern. Well John did he get it through one group. We kind of love that. Let's see if I say the same thing twice. And so we did give the next group and interestingly enough we saw a very clear pattern of where we started with a veteran different topics we would reduce over the eight weeks. So we actually developed the search for meaning guy and that's what kind of move this forward. For about four or five years until we met Vincent began to form long says. Now why do we do that. Not only did I see that in Atlanta but in talking with John and as he eloquently ship there some where he came from as a visual therapist we were seeing that people would get stuck doing evidence based therapies or CBT or

prolonged exposure and they would get stuck. And I think what we see often is they get stuck around these existential Maltese spiritual things. And so that was kind of the impetus of the group can move forward. So John I'll add you add to that.

[00:05:27] OK. Yes that's the history of our progress and. Patience if you will listen to them will give you clues of what's really going on particularly after they trust you. So when I was hearing statements like my core is not the same. And. When I would say to them Do you feel like damaged goods. And they would say yes. Talking about a very deep level again of shame and guilt and anger all the emotions. Magnified. So they would say. You know. What you told me last session what you've been telling me. And they were talking about as we went through the manual are evidence based therapy. It really helped. When I think about this particular thing differently. I feel differently. And then they would add. But I still there's something wrong. With your alerted me to the fact. Number one. We had a lot of unfinished business. And number two we needed a different approach. To getting to that level. I think one of the. Really good things about. Our. Model. Is that and we talk about this more later that it is led by a. Mental health practitioner. And a chaplain who has interest in doing counseling so that we can get to things from these two different perspectives. And sometimes I would be working with somebody and I would just. Say look. There's a. That group that you really need to go to you can continue to see me or not. That's your choice. We can finish up the manual later on. But at this point in my opinion you need this intervention. And then sometimes I get people who had gone to the class first and then started working with me. And it was really interesting to see the impact of this class on their understanding their gaining meaning and purpose.

[00:07:23] Based on what you just said. John I have a question because it sounds like that if we were to see points to us doing the search for meaning course first and then going into this DCRT or prolonged exposure seems like it might be a better way to approach this than potentially doing CBT first and then the search for meaning. Do you think that's a way to go about this or do you think that it really doesn't matter.

[00:07:52] This is Clyde. Let me go ahead and get on that topic. So this is what we found out because we were originally drawing mainly from the trauma recovery program and that particular time we would do the what he had taken. And so it was offered as something they could do Deery or whatever but what ended up happening is I have had over the years we've had people who did it first. We've had people in the middle just like John said and we've had other people who probably wouldn't even realize or identify that injury. But after they completed CBT or prolonged exposure it was like there's still something there. You know this has been helpful it's helped reduce my symptomology far as PTSD symptoms but there's still something there. I still don't feel right. And so I don't think that there is a exact formula. I've seen people go through it on the front in the back and I've seen people repeat it. So I don't think there's a particular formula.

[00:08:52] Okay that's helpful. I just was curious because it sounded like there may be a sequel kind of aspect to this but it makes sense that there may not be depending on the individual. I like that process.

[00:09:04] Yeah but that can be a problem some time as you work your way through manuals. There's not always a sequence. It's not always linear. And one of the things I like about our approach is. Just what the chaplain just said that it comes about. It's recommended it's referred to as the point that. We deem it. Necessary.

[00:09:26] Yup that's dealing with the client needs and that's that's again a social work concept here. One of the other things then you've talked about the program in general but what I'd like to do is have you. Clyde and John you guys tell me what are the key components of the program.

[00:09:45] Tom before I do that I do want to go back to just one little piece here aren't they. John mentioned earlier that we do this with a chaplain in a mental health provider and that's what I want to say is this for me is driven by the chaplain. But it's important to have a mental health provider there and let me share with you where I I for. So I walk in my office as a pastoral counselor and it's not in my scope to diagnose PTSD and I could say I think you may have some symptoms of PTSD they probably wouldn't buy that. But if they went to a psychologist and they said yeah you have PTSD. OK. Well vice versa I think when it comes to these existential and spiritual wounds especially of someone who holds a deep religious understanding or a pretty much spiritual view Judeo Christian view of creation they are going to see the chaplain as an authority. And I think many times the mental health folks can address some of these pieces like forgiveness and grief and some of these pieces. But if it gets down to that compromises leave I think they look to the chaplain or a clergy person has that authority. And I think that's the reason it's important that we have both mental health and the chaplain together. And that also has a chaplain. If they start getting over into some of the mental health pieces I've got the experts that the subject matter experts that there right with me.

[00:11:05] That makes perfect sense. OK. So again I really think so far you guys have been providing a lot of good information on the program but now again if you could give me some information about the key components our listeners would have some idea about what is actually in the program.

[00:11:24] OK let me start there. When we talked earlier week one we actually got into some we defined religion as spirituality. We defined the concept of the shared soul the person some places the eye into to where we go. And then I began talking about the spiritual journey as a process of spiritual reformation or making meaning out of it within the traumatic events. And so with the concept that we have this spiritual formation it gets shattered then we have the ability to put it back together so that creates some sense of hope and then we talk about what I call the significant or signature spiritual wound of PTSD and that's trust individually. In my office or in a group when I say to a veteran who is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder which by the way is a disorder of recovery it's a disorder of recovery the ability to bounce back. I say Who do you trust. And almost nine nine point nine percent of the time the person will say no. And not even myself on a bad day. So that's that shattered trust that we're beginning to help them restore so we kind of do that again. This is all part of helping them identify and begin to see the path to the other piece on week one that we talk about and I say to them the goal is what I want you to do is learn contentment and define contentment is the absence of inner conflict because. This is really what's going on with the spiritual peace of the PTSD the is there that compromise of one's self one's belief one's perspective of the world. And so what we're hoping to do is give you tools that you can address that and resolve those conflicts. So you come to the sense of a life that's pretty much the first week. John would you want to add anything to that.

[00:13:23] Yes. Picking up where you made comments about trust what counselors and therapists and I'm sure Chaplains need the most from people they're working with is often the most difficult thing for them to get. And that is trust. But in the classes and in the program we asked them to investigate. Take a look at their beliefs or their beliefs. Not just religious beliefs or existential all beliefs and ask the question can you rely. Can you fall back on them. If not then we're going to help you work on developing a new belief system. It's going to be your construction is going to be your belief system but we're going to facilitate that one that you can rely on and fall back on in the future. So from a spiritual foundation. And usually nobody says it better than patients. One man said that the trauma wasn't earthquake and his flashbacks were the waves that come after aftershocks. I thought that was really spoke to and I keep saying this over and over the depth that we're trying to reach so other components that you want to speak to sure component that we begin

to move toward is then.

[00:14:38] OK. You're talking about rebuilding a spiritual formation how do we do that. And we have two or three components that are part of that sick week and developing what is I start out talking about the concept here is beginning to take responsibility for one's own thoughts feelings actions and to stop blaming. And it really falls off around any kind of recovery language. The first step to recovery is that I've got to own whatever it is whether it's alcoholism or drug use or whatever addiction I may be having I have to be first going to home that and how it's affected my life and what I add to that is the first spiritual peace is I've got to own this and stop blaming others. And that's kind of a natural part of humanity when things go wrong. You know we blame God like someone else. So this is first getting to reach recenter itself. Take responsibility for the recovery. The second part we talk about is control what can we really control in life. I can them myself and I offer this. The truth is the only thing that we absolutely can control is the water which we exist. Everything else is managed we could manage our lives. We could we can manage our relationships manage our money we can manage our work we can manage our recreation we can manage multiple things but really the sense of control that's important because with post-traumatic stress it is that loss of control that is shattering to the individual. And so often with folks with post-traumatic stress you see them being very controlling or very avoiding avoidance is the lifeblood of PTSD. And so to begin to help them understand what is it that I can control. Well I can control my choices. I control how I react in this mold. In this piece and another element we talk about is this is just learning to be still learning to sit with that anxiety. Be still and know that spirituality isn't about doing after when people I say Tell me about your spirituality. They'll get over to the religious ideal you say well I'm not very religious or you know I have prayed as much as I used to go to church or synagogue or I don't do those things as much as I used to. And I'll pause and I'll say you know this is about us. It's not spiritual. Do we need spiritual peace. And so I'm wanting them to just learn to relax and begin to sit with this and then the fourth piece there that we look at it is to help create a personal martyr something that will help them in the future when they begin to get this anxiety around their spirituality that they have something that works for them spiritually much like we use them for helping people ground emotionally and mentally from the psychological side this is kind of a way to to ground oneself from the spiritual side. And then we start talking about beliefs. What do I believe and what has been the basis of my beliefs and that pretty well runs that second session.

[00:17:42] OK. I have a couple of pieces out in going through your program. There are two things that I think our listeners would like to hear you address. Clyde and John and that has to do with the anger aspect because again as a disabled combat veteran I know where that comes from and I understand and I have that anger my friends that came from Vietnam all of that. And the second thing is that especially for the Vietnam veterans who are now aging the issue of grief. Do you guys want to speak a little bit about how your program looks at those two elements.

[00:18:22] I let the chaplain lead off as he's been doing and then yes I have some comments.

[00:18:27] OK so I approach anger from a little bit different aspects of what we talked about as I said there's anger management but there's anger resolution anger management is important because the management keeps us out of jail. Right. There is actually a spiritual component for that. You know be angry and don't do something stupid is the way that's an interpretation of scripture. So we have to learn to manage our anger to keep us from making other poor choices. But as I began doing this work and thought about it I thought you know I don't want them just to walk around managing their anger or risk their lives because I think anger spiritually keeps us separate both from our self from others from the universe from our higher powers. So I begin to investigate and talk about doing. Not just anger management but let's do anger resolution. And I developed this just very simple five step process in the first two steps are actually anger management. The first thing is to separate yourself from the situation. The peace is is you pause you take a deep breath you take a

moment to relax because what happens and with veterans with PTSD whether they are to talk about this in their treatment their anger can go from zero to 10 in a flash. And so there is a physiological response that goes with that. So that just taking a pause relax takes the breaths and the breathing. The other part of that is what gets separated and I think this is with karma in general is our feelings and our thoughts get disconnected. And when I am healthy I'm only healthy when I am both thinking and feeling and if I get too much into my feelings I'm not healthy and get too much into my head I'm not healthy. And so it's calming down is a moment for us to kind of come back and get both the health and the emotions beginning to work together. The third step then becomes the core piece here and we actually help them do homework around this. And I will say you know when we get angry there is why am I angry. But also what am I feeling. And often what I'll do in a group is I will say that I got an incident where maybe he will share with the group right now something that's angered you in just the last little bit. I almost guarantee your PTSD group will have someone raise your head oh yeah you all the way here. And so they will share the answer. That's OK. That's why you were angry. I'll use this as somebody cut you off on the way here. The driver cut you off. And so I say OK why did you feel now almost immediately they'll say well I was irritated or pissed off or upset or as well that's another anger word you're still using words describing what I'm looking for is a deeper feeling. What did you think. What what did you feel when someone cut you off the car cut you off with a lie or or whatever and they'll start looking for that. Sometimes a group jump in. Helpful. But let's say they identified disrespect. If it's a Vietnam veteran I guarantee you they're going to identify disrespect because that's where the major wounds of Vietnam veterans. My next question to them if they say yeah it feels disrespectful when people come and my question to them is go back and tell me the first time in your life that you felt disrespected and they'll pause for a moment. And it's really interesting. Almost immediately they'll go back to as early as 4 or 5 and 6 years old. In fact one day John John you can share that you faded into that little bit.

[00:22:04] One day I did and that was when I was about to enter the first grade the first grade teachers thought it was would be a positive experience to try to connect with me and she said I was in the hall and she said Would you like to see a monkey. We are at that age. Who wouldn't want to see a monkey so I said Yeah. She took me into the room and pointed to. A full length mirror. In which was my image. Now her intention and all was probably really great. But I have to say. That really hurt. And to this day if I talk about it for a period of time or think about it I can dream up that hurts you know.

[00:22:45] And so so what I do think is once they identify that moment then I'll eat them forward and I say OK. So thank you. And a significant time not a not a minor situation but was there another significant moment in your life you felt disrespected. And I keep doing that. I move them all away to where they are currently and they all say to the group here's kind of the theory behind this is we experience these woundings and I call them spiritual woundings emotional woundings we experience these wounds through life and often we never really attend to them. And so what happens is around that feeling of disrespect is anger and it doesn't get resolved. And then another wound comes and we get more anger around that feeling and more anger and that feeling worrying around that feeling. So that what happens is someone cut someone off in a lie and they're ready to go fight. And what you have is what I say a 10000 volt response to a 10 vote situation. And I say if you say that almost everyone. Yeah. Has that happen to you. Oh yeah you know that happens to me. And I said OK so here's what we need to do now this week. I want you to go there today sometime or just sit down and reflect. Have I been angry today. Why was I angry. And what was I feeling. And over the week what we're hoping they'll do is probably come up with three or four feelings tend to get hooked over and over again betrayal disrespect abandonment some major key wounds. And so then what you do is you take each one of those key feelings where you realize there's been some significant wounding around and you identify those moments when it happened and those become the moments that we'll get back to later in making peace you'd have to find the places in their life where they need to make the peace. Now the next step. So that's the first step. That's the

clarification piece that's beginning to understand you know where am I getting hooked was they could really identify that it really began working on say the wounds around this was the trail of added etc. Then in the moments if they feel disrespected they hopefully can learn to pause and say Wow I just felt disrespected. First of all this is about all my past will be. This is the moment and you can give an appropriate response because there's things in life that require a response of anger. There's things that need to elicit anger issue. But getting a a healthy approach. John let you follow up.

[00:25:21] I really think that both are important. As the chaplain said the management and also the resolution of anger. Were working at people's core. And if an individual. Sees himself getting angry all the time or others telling you you know you're just angry all the time they start thinking that's their core. At my core I'm just an angry person. And they may not like angry people themselves. So now they don't like themselves. By telling them to. Get deeper. See what's underneath that they'll find what might be their core has more to do with fear and hurt than it does anger. And as he said dealing with the here and now what just happened and what should be my response be to that. When the person does that even if it's for a second it means that their first action was in not out. They went in to try to figure out what the heck is going on as opposed to just lashing out to quote that I've always found helpful when working with people who had anger problems one of them says anger addicts the body to adrenaline and the soul to bitterness. And before I do the next quote I think the second quote illustrates that in our approach we deal with all systems of thought. It's not just one faith based it's not. It's across the board. And one particular belief system set of anger anger is like a hunting dog that does not oppose the hunter who trained it. So what we're talking about is learning how to do something to end with anger instead of always doing something to end with you.

[00:27:05] OK. Thank you for that. It was very very helpful and interesting. I hope our listeners will also find it interesting. I'm going to move past the grief one I want to make sure we talk about anything in terms of the folks who have taken this. How are they responding to your course and what happens to the participants once they complete your program. If you guys could address that it would be great.

[00:27:38] So Tom let me actually you know I hate that we're moving past the grief of forgiveness. Because they are such big pieces. Let me give you an example. You say what happens what happens to people. Let me tell you the story real quick of a grief story so I have this veteran who had gone through the program but he was still struggling with things begin to come back to see me individually was like it just happens. And he is often I hear people say to me more often in session I've never Chaplain I've never told anyone this before. These are Vietnam veterans were 40 45 years down the road. They've held this secret so that's where all the shame and guilt come from and they begin to tell this story. Well this veteran told his story it had to do with a fatality over and so forth. The count up because that's what his nightmares were. And he kind of thought that was core. Well actually as we began to talk he had some early will deal with the death of his father at a young age. So as we got through working as I often use a letter grief letter and so I said you know I think it'll be helpful that you wrote two letters right. One to the young man and his family. And in a letter to your dad when he came back in he said you know Chaplin interestingly enough he said it was the letter to my dad make a difference. So that was his core wounding. And what happened in combat was an additional wound on top of course. But here you say what happens go out another month or so. He came back here and he said I really do. Well he says not very seldom have the nightmare anymore even if I do it all I do see the face for a moment. So there was an improvement there. They began to talk about a couple is that this just happened that week and he says you know what. I've been caught a little off guard because he says so-and-so happened and I found myself crying. And then you describe in those situations the same thing happened less. That's wonderful. Why did it happen. He was literally couldn't share or open up or allow himself to fiddle those finer emotions as he resolved his anger and his grief and so forth. He was now beginning to respond in a very human natural way

that we all do when there's losses or moments of joy or whatever. So those deeper feelings once resolved those more heavy feelings painful failing to resolve then they can begin to experience that. So that's what I see coming out of groups.

[00:30:07] That's great. Do you guys have anything else you'd like to say.

[00:30:11] I was going to add something in terms of what happens after they leave our program. We're talking about a recovery program so that 10 sessions 10 classes we believe are very good beginning. But the recovery journey goes on. So we encourage them to keep following up on that. It's interesting also that the classic 12 step program the 12 steps. Having had I'm paraphrasing having had a spiritual experience we now reach out to others who had no qualms about identifying the level of treatment and what their program was all about. It was spirituality. And if I could just share one quick thing that a patient said because patients always say it better than anybody. Following what we considered to be some successful treatment and a good prognosis. From my perspective. This patient said I can see the light through the door of intimacy that door that gets you out of the room with no doors which is PTSD. So when we're talking about being able to see the light that has spiritual implications we're talking about guidance. We talk about a lightness of the heart where things are not so heavy that you carry around when we're talking about through the door. Intimacy. Can be an indication that maybe that person is ready to reach out again and we're going to be willing to have people reach towards them and when they talk about a room with no doors this really talks about deep depression that you can't get out of a hole that you can't get out of. So I just found his statement to incorporate our whole program which deals with emotions and spiritual issues.

[00:31:58] OK. You know I have a question for you guys. Are you thinking of potentially extending this for folks to come back and say I need a booster shot or something to that effect. You know what I'm talking about. It's like like a relapse type issue.

[00:32:18] So let me stick to what we've experienced so far so one thing we do have aftercare group. Currently the aftercare group that I'm leading makes every two weeks. And so veterans can come back who've been through the program they can join this group. And typically what we do then is we deal more on current issues like I like them bring the issue of what I do is describing the issue of these tools that I have taught them and they learn off all them up and show them how they apply again at the moment. So just you constantly teach. You know it's that old thing you don't know what you don't know now you know you don't know. I'm learning and now I'm proficient. We're teaching these tools if you will in this 10 week session. But by no way do they walk out of these proficient. And so we have these aftercare groups. The other is is always make sure to like that or you know if you're still struggling you have stuff that you want to talk about your own coming to see me individually. Typically when I have someone who's done the group that then comes to see me at here's a question Jack another quote of the statement. I've never told anyone else this. So they've got a secret. And in the darkness that secret becomes the monster. And so they would be able to finally voice this brings it to the light and that's where I really began to see the healing for some folks who were stuck around something that really compromised their moral and spiritual belief system. The third aspect is we actually people repeat. I had a young lady who either three or four times went through the group and each time she got to a deep wound into a deeper level. So we leave it fairly open for people to continue the process.

[00:34:01] Yeah that's interesting and that follows generally what happens in addiction treatment as well. So I think that's a nice approach in allowing folks to retake it. Because as you say they may pick up something each time they do it. And that certainly can be helpful.

[00:34:20] You know some of them go back and then mention one other thing too if I may. You

know anger is a core piece of this. And I think anger is very much a spiritual issue because anger keeps I have anger. It keeps me out of my contentment. So we lose the contempt piece early and we're the anger. I always make the statement I would make the statement anger and contentment can exist in the same group just like light and darkness that can exist together. And John would often go over flipped the light off and on just kind of give a physical understanding. But that's true. But it brings us back to Argo. So I have to resolve this anger. I resolve this anger by going back to looking at this movie and working through my grief and working to a place letting go of forgiveness so that I can reach the goal of contentment that I may still get angry and maybe crawl out of my contentment for the moment but I now have the tools to get back to that place.

[00:35:18] Tom this is Vincent one of the things we didn't get to is feedback that we have from those who completed the program. I think Clyde and John gave some feedback just from working with folks but we do have some research based feedback. As I said before we conducted qualitative study and did interviews for the group and then after the group so I have some feedback of I'll just summarize some key points. We received a lot of feedback after the group but I'll say a few things of what folks that were in our study told us after the group. So one thing that came out is that after the 10 session group participants were at various stages of change. So some came out of the group and they were at a contemplation stage. So another words from taking the group they were at a place where they gained insight into some spiritual wounds that they were experiencing and the impact that it was having on their life. An example would be personal gain insight that you're dealing with anger issues or having difficulty forgiving. But these folks weren't at the point where they were able to make any significant change. But at least they were gaining some insight. Some other folks were at the experimentation phase so they had gained insight into some of their spiritual wounds and they were in the process of working toward or planning changing some of these negative thoughts feelings and behaviors associated with the trauma and so an example would be someone who recognized that they had a negative self identity and they started planning on how they would change that planning for ways to reconnect with their deeper self or redefining who they are. So in addition to those two stages a lot of folks that took the group were. Actively engaged in change and shifting some things around spiritual wounding. So I'll just give you a few brief examples. Whereas before the group several veterans were immersed in guilt and shame associated with trauma particularly with killing that took place in combat. And then after the group many of these folks experienced some kind of shift and we tried to look into the mechanisms how did this shift occur. And so a couple of the main mechanisms that we were able to identify include reframing and normalizing. So in other words through going through the group they were able to reframe their trauma and go from complete self blame to being open to the idea that they were in the context of war and they did what they had to do. And as far as normalizing the idea of sharing what they experience and how they were feeling and the guilt and shame they were caring sharing that with peers and finding out that many of their peers felt the same way. That also brought some relief. Another thing came out is related to forgiveness. So many of the veterans had made it a shift in this area. And forgiveness goes to forgiveness of self forgiveness of other people and also feeling that they're forgiven by their higher source. And it's part of how that happened was also related to being in a group and sharing what had occurred with others. And when they realize that their peers were not looking upon them with judgmental lens that helped them to be open to the idea that their higher source forgives them if other people could forgive them then it would only make sense that God would forgive them also. And then through that they started being more forgiving of yourself and other people. So those are some of the things we saw in the qualitative findings when we interviewed folks post group mentioned briefly that we've also been collecting some pilot data and we've been doing this for the purpose of Program Improvement Program Evaluation. And so we've been administering some measures including the PTSD checklists PCL 5 and the spiritual injury scale and also the brief religious coping skill. And I'll share very briefly what we found we did pare sample t test for each of these measures. And there was a significant decrease in PTSD symptoms from baseline before they did the group to Scroop. Also with the spiritual injuries scale again there



was a significant decrease in spiritual injury scores and the spiritual injury scale that's really important because it measures a lot of the things that search or meaning group is targeting including guilt anger grief lack of meaning feeling despair and hopeless feeling that a life for God has been unfair or religious doubt disbelief that kind of thing. So veterans were able to improve in those areas. And then with the grief religious coping scale there's two sub scales positive religious coping and negative religious coping veterans did not show improvement in positive religious coping. They showed some improvement but it wasn't significant but there was a significant decrease in negative religious coping from baseline to post group. So what this kind of shows it's early indicators that the group is targeting many of the things that we are hoping that that it targets. And with that being said we are in the process of applying for further grants to do a full scale intervention study on the search for meaning intervention.

[00:41:08] Tom can I say to you also I may and there may be something out there in this my lack of ignorance if there is but our search has found that there really is an evidence based treatment that specifically addresses this spiritual existential moral duty. A lot to be learned. You know we're in that research discovery stage. And so that's where I feel very hopeful also because of the early indicators are that this really could be developed hopefully be evidence based treatment that will share more widely.

[00:41:39] Yeah I would agree with you. I don't know of anything specific to post-traumatic stress disorder. I mean they do have some with respect to addictions but not with post-traumatic stress disorder. So I think this is this is really promising. I mean the results are encouraging. I hope you do get the grant. And again I really enjoyed this talk. Thank you very much.

[00:42:05] Thank you Tom. Thank you Tom.

[00:42:11] Thanks for listening to Dr. Clyde Angel. John Sullivan and Dr. Vincent Starnino discuss spiritual injury and military trauma in social work.

[00:42:32] Hi I'm Nancy Smyth Professor and Dean of the University of Buffalo School of Social Work. Thanks for listening to our podcast. We look forward to your continued support of the series. For more information about who we are as a school our history or online and on the ground degree and continuing education programs we invite you to visit our website at [www.SocialWork.buffalo.edu](http://www.SocialWork.buffalo.edu). And while you're there check out our technology and social work research center you'll find that under the Community Resources menu.