

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Minneapolis VA Health Care System

One Veterans Drive
Minneapolis, MN 55417
www.va.gov/minneapolis-health-care

January 10, 2025

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to express my strong support for North Star Valor's Photography in Ely program. As a board-certified, registered Art Therapist at the Minneapolis VA Health Care System, I have directly witnessed the profound impact this program has had on our Veterans managing PTSD and MST.

The Photography in Ely workshop exemplifies best practices in arts-based community programming through its combination of professional instruction, peer support, and nature immersion. The program's seven-day immersive format provides our Veterans with both the time and space needed to develop new skills while building meaningful connections with fellow veterans.

Over the last year, North Star Valor has demonstrated exceptional ability to work with our wounded Veteran population. Their understanding of military culture, combined with trauma-informed practices, creates an environment where veterans feel safe to explore creative expression. The organization's founder, Alec Johnson, has shown remarkable dedication through his seven years of volunteer service, establishing trust and credibility within our Veteran community.

Particularly noteworthy is the program's comprehensive approach to participant support. By providing all necessary equipment, transportation, and accommodation, North Star Valor removes barriers that often prevent Veterans from accessing therapeutic programs. Their inclusion of Veteran mentors and emphasis on ongoing engagement through follow-up programs further strengthens the long-term impact of this initiative.

Based on feedback from Veterans I referred who have completed the program and our continued collaboration with North Star Valor, I enthusiastically endorse their work. A goal within our Recreation and Creative Arts Therapy department is to provide our inpatient and outpatient Veterans positive opportunities for creative engagement with trusted partnerships and within Veteran-welcoming community settings which is exactly what North Star Valor provides. Their Photography in Ely program represents a valuable complement to our VA mental health services, offering veterans an innovative pathway for healing through creative expression.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Allison DeCamillis", followed by a long horizontal line.

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