Revista Română de Asistență Socială Militară
Romanian Journal of Military Social Work (RJMSW)
Revue roumaine d'assistance sociale militaire (RRASM)
ISSN: 3120-2179
Vol. 1, Nr. 4, octombrie - decembrie 2026
https://rrasm.ro/ redactie@rrasm.ro

The Recovery and Reintegration of Wounded Military Personnel through Sport and Volunteering: A Dialogue with the Invictus Romania Volunteers Association

Gabriel Ion
Invictus Romania Volunteer
https://www.invictusRomânia.ro/
E-mail: invictus.România.association@gmail.com

Oprina Constantin
University Lecturer, Legal Expert
West University of Timisoara
Faculty of Sociology and Social Work, Romania
ORCID: 0009-0002-0680-0837
E-mail: constantin.oprina@e-uvt.ro

Abstract

The present interview article highlights the experience and role of the Invictus Romania Volunteers Association in promoting the physical, psychological, and social recovery of wounded military personnel through adaptive sports, volunteering, and community involvement. The dialogue brings to the forefront the evolution of the Invictus Romania project, from the initiative to facilitate the participation of wounded Romanian military personnel in international Invictus Games competitions to the development of a united and close-knit community based on solidarity, camaraderie, and mutual support. The interview emphasizes the role of sport in rebuilding self-confidence, strengthening relationships between military personnel and their families, and building and developing the resilience needed in the recovery process following traumatic experiences associated with combat missions. At the same time, it highlights the importance of maintaining social and professional ties after injury, as well as the important role of volunteers and non-governmental organizations in supporting the post-mission recovery and reintegration process. The dialogue places emphasis on the development of various forms of cooperation between public institutions, specialists, and civil society. In this regard, particular attention is given to military social work and its role in the early identification of social needs, facilitating access to services, and, last but not least, supporting professional and family reintegration.

Revista Română de Asistență Socială Militară
Romanian Journal of Military Social Work (RJMSW)
Revue roumaine d'assistance sociale militaire (RRASM)
ISSN: 3120-2179
Vol. 1, Nr. 4, octombrie - decembrie 2026
https://rrasm.ro/ redactie@rrasm.ro

Finally, the main directions for the development of Invictus Romania are outlined, including the strengthening of international cooperation and the prospect of organizing large-scale events in Romania. The interview provides a practical perspective on the relationship between sport, recovery, social participation, and the quality of life of wounded military personnel and their families, highlighting the contribution of these efforts to improving psychosocial well-being, strengthening cohesion, and developing resilience.
Keywords: military social work, Invictus Romania, wounded military personnel, sports-based recovery, social reintegration, volunteering, veterans.

Introduction

The recovery of military personnel wounded while taking part in combat missions is a complex process that often goes beyond the strictly medical dimension. It involves psychosocial adjustment, rebuilding personal autonomy, maintaining family and professional relationships, and reintegration into the community.

Social reintegration and changes in family dynamics can influence the family, professional and social life of wounded military personnel, as well as the organisation of their daily activities and the way they perceive their own social role after returning from a mission.

In this context, adaptive sport can be considered a valuable means of recovery and of regaining confidence in one's own abilities. In this way, wounded military personnel can identify new reference points and personal directions, and rebuild their sense of belonging to a community by progressively achieving goals, taking part in training sessions and joining a team. It is important to emphasise that, although sporting experience can support a broader process of recovery and integration, it does not replace specialised medical, psychological or social interventions.

The Invictus Romania project developed around this perspective, centred on adaptive sport, with the aim of enabling wounded Romanian military personnel to participate in the Invictus Games and promoting sport as a tool for recovery and reintegration. The initiative brought together military and civilian volunteers, and its activities helped bring wounded

military personnel, their families and civil society closer together. Over time, the project moved beyond participation in sporting competitions to include community events, volunteering activities and initiatives dedicated to commemorating heroes and promoting respect for veterans.

From the perspective of military social work, the experience of Invictus Romania is relevant because of its focus on the individual, their concrete needs and the importance of continuity of support. Recovery does not end upon discharge from hospital, nor does it end after participation in a competition. It involves access to services, adapting the living environment, family support, opportunities for social participation and maintaining relationships of solidarity that help prevent isolation.

In this process, non-governmental organisations and volunteers can help complement the support provided by public institutions, without replacing their responsibilities or the interventions of specialists. By being close to beneficiaries and drawing on their ability to mobilise the community, they can facilitate access to activities and resources, encourage participation and help maintain an active connection between wounded military personnel and society.

Against this background, the Romanian Journal of Military Social Work conducted this interview with Gabriel Ion, an Invictus Romania volunteer. The purpose of the dialogue is to capture the organisation's experience in recovery through sport, the challenges faced by wounded military personnel and their families, the role of volunteering and the community, and prospects for developing cooperation between non-governmental organisations, public institutions and social work professionals.

From a methodological perspective, this material takes the form of a semi-structured interview, based on questions prepared by the journal's editorial team and the interviewee's responses. It does not constitute empirical research in the classical sense of the term, and the experiences and opinions presented reflect the interviewee's perspective and the Invictus activities described in the dialogue.

The publication of this interview forms part of the Romanian Journal of Military Social Work's (RJMSW) effort to document initiatives relevant to the military community and

Revista Română de Asistență Socială Militară
Romanian Journal of Military Social Work (RJMSW)
Revue roumaine d'assistance sociale militaire (RRASM)
ISSN: 3120-2179
Vol. 1, Nr. 4, octombrie - decembrie 2026
https://rrasm.ro/ redactie@rrasm.ro

facilitate the exchange of experience among practitioners, non-governmental organisations and academia. At the same time, the material seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the role that sport, volunteering and military social work can play in supporting wounded military personnel and their families.

Interview with Gabriel Ion, Invictus Romania Volunteer

1. How did the Invictus Romania project come into being, and what were its main objectives from the outset?

The idea for Invictus Romania grew out of a very simple but powerful wish: we wanted wounded Romanian military personnel to have the opportunity to participate in the Invictus Games, alongside wounded service members from the nations with which Romania had fought in international missions.

The initiative came from Patrick Luca, who began bringing together a few friends and volunteers, both military personnel and civilians. At the beginning, there were only a few of us, and we did not have a large organisation behind us. What we did have was an idea we believed in, and the Invictus T-shirt, which we started wearing at various sporting competitions. By attending these events, we tried to make the project known and, above all, to bring wounded military personnel into our group.

We gradually began involving them directly in sporting activities. One of the first important milestones was taking part in a triathlon organised in Constanța. Experiences like these showed us that sport could become a means for wounded military personnel to regain confidence, set new goals and feel once again that they were part of a team.

The initial objective was Romania's participation in the Invictus Games. Over time, however, we realised that the real purpose was much greater than taking part in an international competition. The Invictus Games can be an important destination in a wounded service member's journey, but recovery through sport is built day by day, at home, through training, events, camaraderie, and the involvement of family and community.

Revista Română de Asistență Socială Militară
Romanian Journal of Military Social Work (RJMSW)
Revue roumaine d'assistance sociale militaire (RRASM)
ISSN: 3120-2179
Vol. 1, Nr. 4, octombrie - decembrie 2026
https://rrasm.ro/ redactie@rrasm.ro

That is how Invictus Romania began: with a few people who believed that wounded Romanian military personnel deserved this opportunity too, and who started, step by step, to turn an idea into a community.

2. What role does sport play in the physical, psychological and social recovery of military personnel who have been wounded, disabled or affected by experiences in operational theatres?

Returning home after a mission does not mean that all military personnel return to the lives they had before. Some wounded service members returned to duty alongside their colleagues, while others went straight home because their injuries no longer allowed them to remain in active service.

The armed forces are an organisation in constant motion. Missions must be carried out, people must be trained, and standards must be maintained at a very high level. For a service member who has been used to being part of this mechanism, having responsibilities, leading or carrying out missions, and knowing that others rely on them, such a change can be very difficult to accept.

When you know what you were capable of doing and, as a result of an injury, find that you can no longer do some of the things you once took for granted, frustration inevitably sets in. Sometimes you no longer feel that you belong, tension increases and looking ahead becomes difficult. This is precisely where I believe sport can play an extraordinary role.

You need something that can help you break out of this state, something that gives you a goal to focus on and that you know you can achieve through hard work. Sport does exactly that: it gives you a new point of reference. Today, it may mean covering one kilometre; tomorrow, finishing a race; and later, taking part in a competition. Every step shows you that you are still capable.

Sport can restore the feeling that you are useful, that you are part of a team again and that you have something to offer. Sometimes it takes you even further: not merely proving that you are still capable, but discovering that you can become very good at something new.

Revista Română de Asistență Socială Militară
Romanian Journal of Military Social Work (RJMSW)
Revue roumaine d'assistance sociale militaire (RRASM)
ISSN: 3120-2179
Vol. 1, Nr. 4, octombrie - decembrie 2026
https://rrasm.ro/ redactie@rrasm.ro

That is why, in Invictus, the medal is not necessarily the most important victory. The journey towards it matters more. It is the moment when a wounded service member starts setting goals again, working towards them and, above all, looking to the future with the confidence that they can reach the place they have set out to reach.

3. How are the military personnel who represent Romania at the Invictus Games selected and prepared, and what impact does this experience have on their lives?

There are a few very clear rules for participation in the Invictus Games, and our starting principle is that sporting performance must not be the only criterion. Invictus is not designed only for the fastest or strongest, or for those with the greatest chances of winning a medal. We want wounded military personnel to have the opportunity to reach the Games, regardless of the level of performance at which they start.

What we do ask for, however, is commitment and consistency. Each service member must choose a sport they are able to practise and train regularly. Their journey matters greatly to us: attending training sessions, getting involved, working hard, making progress and understanding that participation in the Invictus Games is the outcome of a process of recovery and preparation.

In fact, preparation for the Invictus Games begins long before the team is selected. Through the sporting activities we organise in Romania, we try to give all wounded military personnel the opportunity to participate, regardless of performance. There is no qualifying standard that you have to meet to join us. First and foremost, you need to identify a sport that you can practise regularly and that gives you the motivation to keep going.

Some will make it to the Invictus Games; others may never want to do so. What matters is that sport remains part of their lives. The Games can be an extraordinary goal, but they are only one stage. The real achievement comes when, after the competition, the service member continues training, takes part in sporting activities, encourages others and, in turn, becomes an example for those who are just beginning this journey.

The impact of participating in the Invictus Games cannot easily be reduced to rankings and results. Wearing the Romanian flag again, being part of a team and standing alongside

Revista Română de Asistență Socială Militară
Romanian Journal of Military Social Work (RJMSW)
Revue roumaine d'assistance sociale militaire (RRASM)
ISSN: 3120-2179
Vol. 1, Nr. 4, octombrie - decembrie 2026
https://rrasm.ro/ redactie@rrasm.ro

wounded military personnel from countries with which you once served on missions creates a special feeling. For many, the real victory is precisely this return: having a goal and a team again, and the confidence that their journey did not end with their injury.

4. Based on the organisation's experience, what are the most common challenges faced by wounded military personnel and their families after returning from missions?

The challenges are numerous and, above all, vary greatly from one service member to another. I do not believe there is a single model of recovery, because every injury is different, every person is different, and each returns to a particular family, professional and social environment.

The first challenges are, of course, those related to adapting to a new health condition. For military personnel with very serious injuries, this sometimes means dealing with things that most of us take for granted. Some have to learn to walk again. Others have to learn to get around without sight. In some cases, they have to relearn how to eat independently, put on their shoes, get dressed or attend to their bodily needs without assistance. In such cases, recovery first means regaining a certain degree of autonomy.

Then come the professional challenges. Some service members can return to their units, sometimes in a different role, while for others their injuries make it impossible to continue their military careers. Adapting to this change can be difficult, especially for someone who has built much of their identity around their profession, their colleagues and the missions they carried out.

There is also a family and personal dimension that perhaps receives less attention. A serious injury changes not only the service member's life, but also the lives of those close to them. Relationships are put to the test. I have known wounded service members who were left by their partners after returning home, but also service members who later found new love and managed to rebuild their lives. The family can be an extraordinary source of support, but we must understand that it, too, goes through a process of adjustment.

The environment among colleagues is equally important. For someone accustomed to being part of a team, seeing former colleagues continue their missions and careers while their

Revista Română de Asistență Socială Militară
Romanian Journal of Military Social Work (RJMSW)
Revue roumaine d'assistance sociale militaire (RRASM)
ISSN: 3120-2179
Vol. 1, Nr. 4, octombrie - decembrie 2026
https://rrasm.ro/ redactie@rrasm.ro

own possibilities have changed can be difficult. That is why it is so important that the connection with this community does not disappear.

In our experience, perhaps the most important lesson is that no two cases are identical. Every service member has their own journey and their own needs. For one person, the priority may be to walk again; for another, to find a new job; for someone else, to rebuild family life or regain self-confidence. That is precisely why support must start with the individual and their actual needs, not with a standard solution applied to everyone.

5. How does Invictus Romania work with the Ministry of National Defence, public institutions, academia and non-governmental organisations to support veterans?

The recovery and support of a wounded service member cannot be the responsibility of a single institution or organisation. Needs vary too widely and, sometimes, situations arise that require a very rapid response. That is why it is essential for the Ministry of National Defence, public institutions, non-governmental organisations, academia, specialists and the community to work together continuously and, above all, to complement one another.

Let me give a very simple example. If a wheel breaks on the wheelchair of a wounded service member, we cannot tell them to stay at home for a month until the paperwork required to purchase a replacement has been approved. Nor can we simply say: "We cannot help you because we have no money." For that person, the wheel is not an accessory. It means being able to leave the house, get around and carry on with life.

We must also understand what lies behind a situation like this. We may be talking about someone who has gone through months or years of treatment and rehabilitation, who has made an enormous effort to regain their autonomy and accept a life different from the one they had before being wounded. If, when a relatively simple problem arises, we leave them to face it alone once again, we risk increasing their frustration and the feeling that all the effort they have made up to that point has been pointless.

For a service member who has already experienced war, injury and a difficult recovery process, having to face these obstacles repeatedly can become extremely burdensome. This is

Revista Română de Asistență Socială Militară
Romanian Journal of Military Social Work (RJMSW)
Revue roumaine d'assistance sociale militaire (RRASM)
ISSN: 3120-2179
Vol. 1, Nr. 4, octombrie - decembrie 2026
https://rrasm.ro/ redactie@rrasm.ro

precisely why support must be continuous. It is not enough to intervene at the time of injury and then consider our mission completed.

This is where I see the value of cooperation. Sometimes the military institution can provide the solution; at other times, a non-governmental organisation can act more quickly; and in other situations, doctors, psychologists, social workers, academics, local authorities, companies or simply people willing to help are needed. What matters is that we do not work separately and do not force the wounded service member to search alone, every time, for the right door to knock on.

Ultimately, all these structures must pursue the same goal: the wounded service member should feel that their life continues to have meaning and value, that they are not abandoned when difficulties arise, and that disability does not exclude them from the community they served. I believe this is one of our most important responsibilities towards them.

6. What role do volunteers and the community play in supporting Invictus Romania's activities and promoting respect for Romania's veterans?

Invictus Romania was born through volunteering. At the beginning, there were military personnel and civilians who believed in this idea and tried to persuade others that sport does not put wounded service members at risk; rather, when adapted to each person's abilities, it can become an extraordinary support for their physical and psychological recovery. Volunteers were also the ones who began promoting the idea that wounded Romanian military personnel should be involved in sporting activities and remain present in the community.

The volunteer's role, however, does not end when the wounded service member arrives at training. I like to make a simple comparison: doing sport in a stadium with empty stands is completely different from having people around you cheering you on. When you hear "Come on, you can do it!", "Just a little more!", "Go Invictus!", "Well done, you did it!" from every direction, the energy is entirely different.

Perhaps, at first, a service member using a wheelchair could barely push it five metres, but after months of work they manage to cover ten kilometres. At that moment, the people around them do not see only those ten kilometres. They see the whole journey it took to get

Revista Română de Asistență Socială Militară
Romanian Journal of Military Social Work (RJMSW)
Revue roumaine d'assistance sociale militaire (RRASM)
ISSN: 3120-2179
Vol. 1, Nr. 4, octombrie - decembrie 2026
https://rrasm.ro/ redactie@rrasm.ro

there. And when someone says, "See? You did it! You are Invictus!", that encouragement can mean an enormous amount. This is the spirit we are trying to build.

Wounded military personnel live in every part of the country. That is why we need people who can be close to them, see them, encourage them and invite them to take part. There are also times when wounded service members cannot attend certain activities. That does not mean the Invictus spirit should disappear until the next event they attend. Volunteers are the ones who keep it alive, carry it forward in their communities and help others understand what it stands for.

Volunteers also have a very practical role in organising activities and securing the support that is needed. They help organise events, promote them and raise the funds required, including for the purchase of equipment needed by wounded military personnel.

In Romania, Invictus moved beyond the stage of simply supporting the recovery of wounded military personnel through sport a long time ago. Today, support is provided on several levels, and the project has become not only a sporting, volunteering and educational initiative, but also a way of keeping the memory of our heroes alive and fostering respect for veterans and for the values they served.

The many events we organise throughout the country serve precisely this purpose: bringing people together around these values. Whether we are talking about a sporting competition, a run organised within a community or an event dedicated to commemorating our heroes, the same idea remains at the centre: a wounded service member should not be alone, and the community can play a real role in their journey forward.

For me, this is one of the most beautiful definitions of Invictus: wounded military personnel, serving military personnel, veterans, families, volunteers and members of the community moving together in the same direction.

7. From your perspective, to what extent can military social work contribute to the recovery, professional reintegration and improved quality of life of wounded veterans?

Revista Română de Asistență Socială Militară
Romanian Journal of Military Social Work (RJMSW)
Revue roumaine d'assistance sociale militaire (RRASM)
ISSN: 3120-2179
Vol. 1, Nr. 4, octombrie - decembrie 2026
https://rrasm.ro/ redactie@rrasm.ro

I believe that sometimes we attach too little importance to things that may seem simple at first glance: a conversation with a psychologist, someone sincerely asking "How are you?", or someone noticing in time that a person is no longer managing on their own.

We are used, especially in the military environment, to being strong, finding solutions and moving forward. That is precisely why it can be difficult to acknowledge that there are times when we need help. After a serious injury, there may be periods when a person simply no longer has the energy needed to get back on their feet alone. Then someone is needed to give them a little push—not to do everything for them, but simply to help until they manage to get moving again.

This is where I believe military social work can play an essential role. A wounded service member needs more than the resolution of a medical problem. They may need support with professional reintegration, adapting their home, accessing entitlements or services, resolving a family issue, or reaching the right specialist. Sometimes, they simply need someone to listen and notice that things are not going well.

These are things that matter enormously precisely when a person feels they have no energy left. If support is missing at that point, problems can accumulate and deeply affect recovery, family relationships, professional reintegration and quality of life.

For this reason, I believe social work should not be merely reactive, intervening only once a problem has already become serious. There should be an ongoing connection with wounded military personnel and their families so that moments when support is needed can be identified in good time.

Ultimately, sometimes the difference is not made by a spectacular intervention. It is made by the person who is there at the right moment, who sees that you have fallen behind, turns back for you and helps you set off again.

8. Are there projects, programmes or examples of good practice developed by Invictus Romania that you consider models which could also be adopted by other organisations or institutions?

Revista Română de Asistență Socială Militară
Romanian Journal of Military Social Work (RJMSW)
Revue roumaine d'assistance sociale militaire (RRASM)
ISSN: 3120-2179
Vol. 1, Nr. 4, octombrie - decembrie 2026
https://rrasm.ro/ redactie@rrasm.ro

We have drawn heavily on international experience, because there are countries where the recovery of wounded military personnel through sport already has a strong tradition, and many of these practices have been tested and validated over time. The very concept of the Invictus Games was inspired by the Warrior Games, a competition in which wounded American service members use adaptive sport as part of their recovery process.

We have tried to learn from these experiences and adopt what could work in Romania as well. At the same time, over the years we have come up with ideas of our own, and some of them are now appreciated within the international Invictus community.

I believe one of the distinctive features of the model we have developed in Romania is that we have opened the project up widely to civil society. We did not want Invictus to remain a programme known and experienced only by wounded military personnel or within the military system. We have tried to create events in which military personnel, veterans, their families and civilian volunteers take part together.

Moreover, we have built some of these events around important moments in our national identity and memory. On Heroes' Day, we organise the Invictus Heroes Half Marathon; around National Flag Day, we climb together some of Romania's highest peaks. Through the Veterans' Relay, over a period of almost a month, volunteers and wounded military personnel travel across the country running and cycling, carrying the tricolour flag and reaching Carei for Romanian Armed Forces Day, while the Invictus Royal Duathlon is dedicated to Veterans Day in Theatres of Operations.

In this way, sport becomes a means of bringing people together, talking about veterans, keeping the memory of our heroes alive and passing on values such as respect, volunteering, camaraderie and responsibility towards the community to younger generations.

Perhaps, however, one of the most important practices we have tried to develop is genuine volunteering. We want these activities to be built and carried forward by people who get involved because they believe in them, without expecting a personal reward. Volunteers are not simply people who help us organise an event. They are the ones who carry the Invictus spirit forward in their communities.

Revista Română de Asistență Socială Militară
Romanian Journal of Military Social Work (RJMSW)
Revue roumaine d'assistance sociale militaire (RRASM)
ISSN: 3120-2179
Vol. 1, Nr. 4, octombrie - decembrie 2026
https://rrasm.ro/ redactie@rrasm.ro

If I were to describe a model that others could adopt, it would be this: we should build projects not only for beneficiaries, but together with them and with the community. We should learn from the positive experiences of others, adapt them to our own realities and, when we find a solution that works, share it with others.

After all, we too have received a great deal from the international Invictus community. It is only natural that, after almost ten years of experience, we should also be able to offer ideas and good practices that can help others.

9. What are the main objectives and development directions for Invictus Romania in the coming years, and what initiatives are you preparing for the veterans' community?

In the coming years, above all, we want to consolidate what we have built so far and give as many wounded military personnel as possible the opportunity to discover sport and the Invictus community. At the same time, I believe that after almost ten years of experience, we can begin to look further ahead.

One important direction is for Romania to become a regional hub for activities dedicated to the recovery of wounded military personnel through sport. We want to be able to organise training camps, recovery-through-sport activities and increasingly significant international events here, inviting wounded military personnel and representatives of the Invictus community from other countries.

We still have much to learn from our international partners, but I believe we also have much to offer. I would like those who come to Romania to discover not only how we have developed our recovery-through-sport programme, but also to experience a little of the Romanian people's winning spirit and the hospitality that characterises us. I would like them to leave with the feeling that they have been welcomed into a community and that they will want to return.

We also have a bigger dream: we want Romania to be able to host the Invictus Games one day. We know very well what organising an event of this scale involves, and that is precisely

Revista Română de Asistență Socială Militară
Romanian Journal of Military Social Work (RJMSW)
Revue roumaine d'assistance sociale militaire (RRASM)
ISSN: 3120-2179
Vol. 1, Nr. 4, octombrie - decembrie 2026
https://rrasm.ro/ redactie@rrasm.ro

why we do not want to skip any stages. We are starting with small steps, organising international activities, gaining experience, building infrastructure and partnerships, and growing steadily.

It is important to us that this development should not take Invictus away from its main mission. No matter how large the events we organise become, the wounded service member, their recovery and their family must remain at their centre. An international event is valuable if it leaves something behind: more training opportunities, a stronger community, better infrastructure and more people who understand what recovery through sport means.

Perhaps one day we will see the Invictus Games flag raised in Romania. Until then, however, we will continue doing what we have done from the very beginning: building step by step, bringing people together and trying to make each year find us a little better prepared than the previous one.

10. What message would you like to convey to serving military personnel, veterans, their families, social work professionals and the readers of the Romanian Journal of Military Social Work?

I believe we have made it this far because, from the very beginning, we have thought first and foremost about the people around us. We have tried to help even when perhaps we did not have everything we needed ourselves. We have not always waited for perfect conditions, because they come very rarely. We have tried to do what could be done at that moment, with the people and resources available to us.

At a certain point, we stopped looking back and complaining about the difficulties. We simply started building. A little every day, each of us doing as much as we could. No obligations, no targets to meet, and no constantly asking what we would get in return. Simply together and moving in one direction.

I believe this is also one of the lessons we have learned from wounded military personnel. Sometimes life forces you to start again with things you once took for granted. Perhaps yesterday you were running, and today you are learning to walk again. Perhaps

Revista Română de Asistență Socială Militară
Romanian Journal of Military Social Work (RJMSW)
Revue roumaine d'assistance sociale militaire (RRASM)
ISSN: 3120-2179
Vol. 1, Nr. 4, octombrie - decembrie 2026
https://rrasm.ro/ redactie@rrasm.ro

yesterday you were on a mission alongside your comrades, and today you have to build a different path for yourself. What matters is finding the strength to take the next step.

That is why my message to military personnel, veterans, their families, the professionals who support them and everyone who stands with us is that we should never underestimate how much what we do for the person next to us can matter. Sometimes practical support is needed; at other times, just a word of encouragement: "Come on, you can do it! Just a little more!" It may seem like a small gesture to us, but for someone going through a difficult time, it may be exactly the encouragement they need to carry on.

Invictus has taught us to encourage one another and remind each other that we are strong. But above all, it has taught us to give the expression "never give up" its true meaning. Not giving up does not mean never falling, nor does it mean being able to do everything on your own. It means finding the strength to carry on and, when the person next to you no longer has that strength, being there and helping them take the next step.

Perhaps that, in the end, is the spirit of Invictus: never giving up on ourselves, but above all, never giving up on one another.

Conclusions

The dialogue with the Invictus Romania Volunteers Association reminds us that, beyond the uniform, the visible or invisible wounds, and the experiences endured in theaters of operations, there are human beings who need support, understanding, and trust to regain their balance and their place in society.

The Invictus experience demonstrates that sport can signify much more than just performance or competition. For wounded service members, it can serve as a vital step toward recovery, the restoration of self-confidence, and the forging of a new path forward. In this process, the support provided by volunteers, the bonds between comrades-in-arms, and the involvement of families hold a value that cannot be measured solely in terms of athletic achievements or medals.

Furthermore, reintegration does not conclude when a competition ends. It requires time, patience, access to appropriate services, and a community willing to stand by those who have

Revista Română de Asistență Socială Militară
Romanian Journal of Military Social Work (RJMSW)
Revue roumaine d'assistance sociale militaire (RRASM)
ISSN: 3120-2179
Vol. 1, Nr. 4, octombrie - decembrie 2026
https://rrasm.ro/ redactie@rrasm.ro

endured difficult experiences. The families of wounded service members also require attention and support, as recovery is often an endeavor shared by the entire family.

From the perspective of military social support, the Invictus Romania experience underscores the importance of collaboration among public institutions, non-governmental organizations, specialists, and volunteers. While each may contribute in a different way, the objective must remain the same: ensuring that wounded service members and their families are not left to face the challenges of recovery and reintegration alone. For the *Revista Română de Asistență Socială Militară* (RRASM), this dialogue also serves as an invitation to reflect on how society supports its service members after they have undergone life-altering experiences. Gratitude for their sacrifice should not be limited to ceremonies and public statements; rather, it should manifest through concrete support, genuine opportunities, and a commitment to stand by them for the long term.

Ultimately, perhaps one of the most important lessons from the Invictus experience is that recovery is not just about learning to live with the changes that have occurred, but also about discovering that one can move forward. And when there are people who believe in you, support you, and stand by your side, that journey can become easier. Because, beyond the competitions and the medals, the true value of Invictus lies in the people—in the solidarity among them and in the strength to never give up.

The authors and editorial team of the Romanian Journal of Military Social Work express their gratitude to Mr Gabriel Ion, Invictus Romania Volunteer, for his willingness to take part in this interview and for the information and reflections he shared, which contribute to a better understanding of the role of non-governmental organisations in the development of military social work in Romania.