

Collaborating at the Local Level to Serve Veterans and their Children

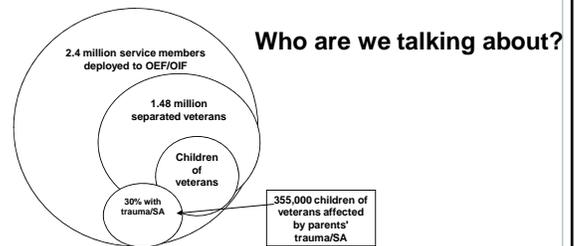
SID GARDNER
CHILDREN AND FAMILY FUTURES

Overview

- **Understanding the problem: invisible children and missing links to services**
- **The numbers: how many children and veterans?**
- **The need**
- **The networks: the potential for collaboration**
- **Obstacles to collaboration**
- **A checklist of collaborative tasks**

The Numbers

- **Over two million active duty service members were deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001**
- **An estimated 40% of them are now veterans separated from service, living in their communities**
- **Approximately 1/3 of those separated veterans are married, over half have children, averaging 2 children**
- **There is no current figure for the total number of children of separated veterans of recent conflicts or the children of veterans affected by family-impacting disorders such as PTSD and substance use disorders**
- **As a result, these are “invisible children,” who need services but have no status in the services system**



These estimated 355,000 children are largely invisible to the VA and local services systems until their problems become severe enough to come to the attention of local agencies and their schools

Eligibility and Access to Services

- Separated veterans have access to VA services
- Approximately 1/3 of them access VA health services; about ¼ of them in rural areas access non-VA mental health services; 45% of them receive health services from non-VA sources
- Children of veterans are not eligible for services unless their parent is seriously disabled or homeless
- As a result, *the VA cannot meet the needs of these families with its own resources*

The Need

- Approximately 30-35% of separated veterans exhibit symptoms of PTSD and/or substance abuse
- These are disorders known to affect the entire family, with an impact on children's cognitive learning, emotional stability, behavior, and the likelihood that these children will adopt risky behaviors
- These children need early identification and screening, substance abuse prevention services, and mental health services aimed at social and emotional stability

The Question: A Matter of Values, not Resources

- Should children of veterans who served their country be harmed or placed at risk by their parents' deployment and subsequent problems?
- If the answer is No—then developing services that respond to the needs of these children is one of the most important tasks of caring for veterans and their families

The Time Frame

- After past conflicts, the costs of veterans' services have extended for a 30-50-year time frame
- Research on the long-term effects of adverse consequences of childhood experiences shows 50-year effects of some childhood issues on health, mental health, and family stability
- This challenge will not recede as deployments are reduced—the impact on families and budgets is long-term

What are the key issues?

- **Numbers:** How many children of recent veterans are there?
- **Needs:** What services and supports do these children need, given their parents' needs and their own ineligibility for most VA services?
- **Networks:** How can we build lasting, effective networks at the local level that respond to the needs of these children?

Current Efforts to Respond to the Needs of Children of Veterans

- Section 304 grants for veteran's housing and supportive services
- Model programs that provide therapy
- Efforts by some Medical Centers and Veteran's Centers to provide family therapy
- School districts' efforts to identify and serve children of veterans
- Collaboratives formed by state and local agencies at city and county levels to develop networks of services for veterans and their families

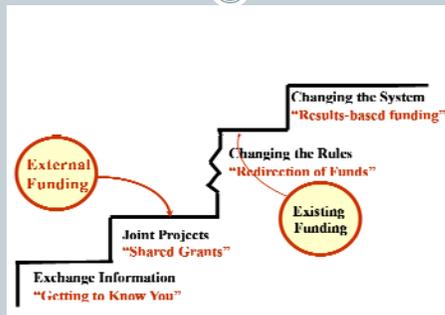
Barriers

- The invisibility of these children
- No "box on the form" of most agencies and schools
- Civilian agencies lack an understanding of military culture
- Failure to build on the strengths and resilience of military families

What Does A Local Collaborative Need to Succeed?

- Active involvement by all agencies that serve children, youth, and families
- A "box on the form" identifying veteran status in agency caseloads
- An accurate and updated inventory of local public and private services available to veterans and their families—for both "veterans' programs" and programs that *should* serve veterans and their families
- Estimates of the total number of veterans and families needing help:
 - "You can't coordinate what you can't count"

Four Levels of Collaboration



Two Ways of Seeing Collaboration

1. **Shared Outcomes**= resources + results in a genuine partnership of **accountability**
2. Partnerships rest on trust and trust grows out of **relationships** built over time
 - The soft skills: relationships, personalities, making it work with people; the blockers and the champions
 - The hard skills: data-driven, results-based accountability; integrated services driven by facts and values, played out over time—developmental approaches to collaboration
 - *Both sets of skills are needed*

What Challenges Do Collaboratives Need to Overcome?

- Missing players
- The tendency to talk about activities rather than clients—"what we did last month" vs who's getting helped and how do we measure progress for veterans and their families?
- "Projectitis:" defining progress as launching and funding projects rather than looking at the whole system that serves veterans
 - "Invading Normandy—and digging in on the beach"
- Pursuing grants vs "fair share funding"—are veterans and their families receiving priority in other agencies' caseloads?

A Checklist of Collaborative Tasks

- Is an inventory of services kept current?
- Are referrals to non-veterans' agencies tracked?
 - "we sent them over" Then what?
- Are local colleges and universities engaged in training, surveys of needs, or evaluations of impact?
- Are veterans' advocates and providers active in pending health decisions about who gets expanded coverage and what services will be included?
- Cuts: are programs for veterans and their children exempt from ongoing cutbacks?

Build on Strength

- Veteran and military families have great resilience, as well as significant challenges
- Respect for authority, a strong sense of mission, loyalty to the group and teamwork skills—all these build resilience in veterans and their families
- Building on these strengths, rather than focusing only on deficits, is just as important in providing services to veterans and their families as it is with any other clients

Future Challenges

- New reductions in force may increase the numbers of separated veterans with families
- Loss of a sense of urgency as conflicts wind down and troops return
- Failure to distinguish between active duty service members and separated veterans
- The need for training, service models, and staffing that is “culturally competent” and understands military culture

Resources

- Slide show available at www.cffutures.org
- Other resources available at
 - <http://www.samhsa.gov/MilitaryFamilies/tacenter/>
 - <http://www.zerotothree.org/about-us/funded-projects/military-families/>
 - <http://www.justiceforvets.org/>
 - <http://www.oefoif.va.gov/>
 - <http://iava.org/>