



The Army National Guard's Path to Greater Resilience

The Army National Guard recognizes that each Soldier and family is part of a support structure and a network that helps them cope—even thrive—in the face of life's challenges. The success of our Soldiers and families in remaining resilient has much to do with the individual efforts of the states, territories and communities.

MG Raymond W. Carpenter, Acting Director of the Army National Guard
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Introduction

As the United States approaches its tenth year of war, the Army National Guard is more integral to the United States Army than ever. In response to the toll that multiple deployments and two long and ongoing wars have taken on the National Guard, Army leaders are continuously seeking methods and establishing programs to further support Soldiers and their families. With this in mind, several states have developed comprehensive social support and mental health initiatives. These programs emerged out of a need to deepen Soldier resilience and were prioritized by Army National Guard senior leadership.* States with creative resilience programs include Michigan, Nevada, Nebraska, California, New Hampshire, Ohio, Wisconsin, Maryland, Delaware, Illinois, Montana and Kansas. More steps to build resilience within the Army National Guard will continue across the 50 states, three territories and the District of Columbia, all sharing the challenge of finding unique solutions to recurring problems such as post-traumatic stress and suicide among Soldiers.

State Efforts

The essence of the Army National Guard is the Soldier and his or her “battle buddy.” The Michigan National Guard “Buddy-to-Buddy” program draws upon this in a collaborative effort with several Michigan universities. Soldiers are trained at one of two levels to identify Soldiers who may want or need to see a mental health professional. Level 1 battle buddies are Soldiers who deploy with their units and, upon returning home, receive special training in the referral



process. These Soldiers keep in contact with assigned buddies by telephone, e-mail and social media networks. Each level 1 trainer receives instruction through the University of Michigan and has a checklist for referral information. Level 2 volunteers are combat veterans, usually from deployments prior to 11 September 2001. These volunteers receive training in psychological concepts, but they are not mental health professionals. For mental health concerns, level 1 buddies contact the program's director of psychological health for the next appropriate referral source, either a level 2 buddy or a behavioral health professional. The key to the success of this program is that Soldiers often feel more comfortable talking with fellow Soldiers about behavioral health needs. With the steps provided through the Buddy-to-Buddy program, Soldiers needing professional assistance can be guided toward appropriate treatment by people they trust.

The Nevada National Guard devised reintegration teams of veterans—similar in purpose to Michigan's

* To read more about the Army's resilience program, see AUSA's Torchbearer Issue Paper “Building Resilience: Comprehensive Soldier Fitness,” April 2010, http://www.ausa.org/publications/ilw/torchbearercampaign/torchbearerissuепapers/Documents/TBIP_ComprehensiveSoldierFitness_042010.pdf.

“Buddy-to-Buddy” program. These teams go from the state to the demobilization sites to talk to Soldiers about deployment and combat experiences. They strive to improve Soldiers’ comfort level with talking to one another, family members and professionals. This focus on reintegration and communication is intended to help Soldiers settle into a “new normal.” These reintegration teams interact with the state overseas contingency operations coordinators and transition assistance advisors.

The Nebraska National Guard, building upon the buddy-to-buddy theme, has concentrated its efforts to strengthen resilience on fellowship groups aimed at helping veterans and their spouses resolve issues related to combat stress and readjustment from trauma experienced while on active duty. The goal of the groups is to help individuals cope more effectively with a wide range of issues, including family and relationship discord, depression, anxiety, anger, guilt, impulse control, decisionmaking, styles of communication and self-medication. The fellowship groups assist servicemembers in coping with the impact of combat experience and in understanding how deployments affect their lives and provide them with opportunities to interact with, support and learn from one another. Discussions of personal issues, situations and experiences are strictly confidential. These fellowship groups are hosted by the Lincoln and Omaha veterans’ centers.

The California National Guard also focuses on the importance of mental health awareness; however, unlike state programs that focus on creating support networks, it puts the initial responsibility for spotting potential mental health issues on professionals. It has an embedded psychologist program, whereby behavioral health professionals are assigned to units to increase opportunities for early intervention. Since 2006 more than 30 units have been a part of this program, helping thousands of Soldiers with behavioral health conditions. With this program, Soldiers were able to receive treatment or counseling for issues that otherwise might not have been identified; individuals referred for treatment frequently show some post-traumatic stress symptoms.



New Hampshire and Ohio have tackled behavioral health initiatives through formal memoranda of agreement. Along with their respective state mental health groups, they have formed alliances for networked care. The area of eligibility for Soldiers and families in need is thereby broadened into a continuum of care. Related to this continuum of care is the preventive work many states and territories are doing by focusing on resilience training.

The Wisconsin Army National Guard, meanwhile, has implemented a community wellness program that prepares Soldiers for the challenges they may confront throughout their careers. The goal of this program is to train Soldiers, family members and civilians to identify the realities of challenging environments, develop skills to thrive and be resilient in the face of these realities and learn how to use these skills to help themselves, fellow Soldiers and those they lead.

In addition to solely state- and professional-level initiatives, a number of states have partnered with community agencies to secure the safety net surrounding Soldiers and their families. For example, the Maryland National Guard developed a service called Partners in Care, a network of faith-based organizations whose volunteers provide practical services for Soldiers and their families. Delaware, Illinois and Montana also offer Partners in Care networks, and the concept is moving across the Army National Guard. A directory for unit leaders is maintained by the Joint Forces Headquarters (JFHQ) Chaplains’ office in conjunction with participating churches. The directory is distributed to commanders of all units and identifies available services, locations and points of contact to help the commander refer the Soldier or family to an appropriate agency or professional. The participating congregation offers support to all referred Soldiers and families within the limits of the congregation’s resources and abilities. Services include counseling, education and mentoring, emergency food, clothing, household and auto repairs, housing and transportation.

While all of these states have taken important and creative steps to sustaining reliance within the Army National Guard, the Kansas National Guard is at the forefront in developing a robust resilience training curriculum for Soldiers and families. Kansas Flash Forward for Leaders, a resiliency training course, consists of one eight-hour session addressing various topics, including stress, family issues, chaplain services and instruction on biofeedback (stress) evaluation. Each training module consists of a video, lecture and small group component. The program is partly based on stress inoculation training. Life Ties, part of the Kansas Flash Forward for Families program, is also underway. This training



program provides a comprehensive range of education, physical tools and skills to cope with high-stress environments, helping Soldiers and families identify and resolve potential problems.

Individual civilians have also started programs at the state level. Two daughters of an Illinois Army National Guard Soldier host the “Kids are Heroes Too” program—a website where children of servicemembers share stories of what it means to them to be a military kid, what happens when a parent deploys or what to do if a parent is involved in a serious or catastrophic incident. The primary goal of the site is to normalize the experiences of military kids by connecting them in a geographically dispersed virtual environment and by providing a safe outlet to share experiences and build resilience.

Several Adjutants General have expressed interest in piloting virtual-reality exposure therapy as a way to increase resilience as well as to treat post-traumatic stress effects. Individuals diagnosed with stress symptoms can relive traumatic experiences in a controlled clinical setting, allowing them to better process stress related to war. Stress-inoculation therapy is administered as part of virtual-reality combat training. Warfighter physiological response to intense combat conditions is recorded during stress-inoculation therapy and normal virtual-reality combat training prior to deployment. The predeployment measures constitute a baseline against which future measures can be compared.

These programs, as developed by the Army, states and local communities, reveal common threads and themes for resilience, including the importance of:

- the battle buddy and knowing that someone cares;
- a support group, especially including other combat veterans;
- involving professionals, especially embedded behavioral health specialists, when and where needed;
- early intervention; as with most medical conditions, early detection usually means that more treatment

options are available and success rates are usually higher;

- confidentiality, as feelings of ostracism and fears of stigma are real, despite efforts to minimize stereotyping and insensitive reactions;
- self-awareness, self-help and self-initiated resilience;
- the essential role of the employer as a first-line defender; and
- involving family members and helping the “support team” to understand the particular condition and the need for coping skills.

Federal Efforts

In addition to recognizing and relieving mental health issues, the Army National Guard acknowledges employment outreach and attainment as another necessary step in building resilience. The Job Connection Education Program (JCEP), the Employer Partnership Office (EPO), the Guard Apprenticeship Program Initiative (GAPI), the General Educational Development Plus Program and the Patriot Academy are good examples of employment, certification and education outreach programs.

JCEP is an Army National Guard employment initiative designed to help improve the quality of life of National Guard Soldiers who are unemployed or underemployed. This initiative focuses on how Soldiers seek, obtain and retain civilian employment by assessing skills and experiences that lead to updated resumes, effective interview training, job search training, and education and job expositions. JCEP aims to connect Soldiers to civilian employment opportunities. JCEP staff work individually with Soldiers and closely with local employers to establish formal relationships that match skills with the requirements of potential employers. Classroom activities and practical exercises result in improved Soldier self-confidence, more job interviews and better employment rates. Currently, JCEP is operating as a pilot program in Fort Worth and Houston, Texas; the Army National Guard hopes to develop a JCEP in each state, in the territories of Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, and within the District of Columbia.

Despite continuing efforts to increase education benefits and placement services, the unemployment rate among Army National Guard Soldiers has risen above 11 percent. This rate is higher than the 9.6 percent unemployment rate in the United States, according to Department of Labor November 2010 unemployment statistics. The Army National Guard Employment Branch has developed several initiatives to assist Soldiers in connecting with employers. The Army National Guard



has been partnering with the Army Reserve since June 2009 and brought the EPO program to Army Guard Soldiers in October 2009. The EPO assists Soldiers through its website and Program Support Managers (PSMs). The EPO mission is to conduct job searches by Military Occupational Specialty, civilian job title and region. Soldiers can apply and submit resumes from the EPO website directly to a network of more than 900 EPO business partners and Fortune 500 companies.

To help Soldiers improve their job skills, the Army National Guard has also created the Guard Apprenticeship Program Initiative (GAPI), partnering with the Department of Labor and the Department of Veterans Affairs. GAPI helps Soldiers complete certifications and increase professional skills while earning wages. Eligible Soldiers receive educational benefits through the Department of Veterans Affairs as they pursue an apprenticeship program.

For entry-level employment, the Army National Guard General Educational Development Plus Program enhances readiness by producing high school equivalency graduates and preparing Soldiers for Basic Combat Training. The Army National Guard goal is a 95 percent graduation rate. So far, the fiscal year 2011 success rate is 98 percent. The Army National Guard continues to monitor progress, evaluate results and remain flexible, while maintaining or improving success rates, one Soldier at a time.

The Army National Guard also runs the Patriot Academy, the nation's first accredited high school. The Patriot Academy is available to non-prior service, split-training option high school drop-outs who are single with no dependents. Students enrolled at the Patriot Academy enter an accelerated path to earn their high school diplomas while receiving military pay (E1/E2), training (including physical fitness) and community service experience. This program gives students a second chance to obtain a high school diploma and will ultimately benefit the student, the community, the family and the nation. Since its inception in June 2009, the Patriot Academy has graduated 127 Soldiers and is capable of growing to nearly 500 Student-Soldiers per year.

Conclusion

People—Soldiers and their families—are the first and most important element of the Army. Caring for them is a vital part of the nation's defense; it requires the utmost attention of leaders and citizens and demands significant application of resources. The Army's values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage go beyond Soldiers to include their families as well. Taking care of Soldiers and families remains the number one priority for Army National Guard leadership. Resilience programs are intended to help Soldiers and their families by giving them the tools to become even more emotionally, professionally and financially resilient.

Useful Websites

Buddy-to-Buddy Volunteer Veteran Program (Michigan)	http://www.buddytobuddy.org
California Army National Guard, Operation Ready Families Program	http://www.calguard.ca.gov/readyfamilies
Kansas Flash Forward for Leaders	http://kansastag.ks.gov/RESIL.asp?PageID=99
Life Ties, Kansas National Guard	http://kansastag.ks.gov/RESIL.asp?PageID=343
Maryland Army National Guard	http://www.mdarmyguard.com/images/pic1.pdf
Nebraska Army National Guard Assistance Programs	http://www.neguard.com/familyassistance
Nevada Reintegration Program	http://www.nv.ngb.army.mil/yellowribbon
New Hampshire Army National Guard	https://www.nh.ngb.army.mil
Ohio Army National Guard	http://www.ong.ohio.gov
Wisconsin Army National Guard Wellness Program	http://dma.wi.gov/dma/SHR/symmetry_wellness_topics.asp
Employer Partnership Office (EPO)	http://www.employerpartnership.org
Job Connection Education Program	http://jcep.info
Guard Apprenticeship Program Initiative (GAPI)	https://esc.pec.ngb.army.mil/rendercontent.aspx?contentID=163
General Educational Development Plus Program (GED Plus)	http://www.nationalguard.com/benefits/enlistment-options/ged-plus
Patriot Academy	http://ngpatriotacademy.com/