Strengthening Resources and Supports for National Guard Couples and Families

Proceedings Summary

national healthy marriage resource center

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

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Thank you to the Annie E. Casey Foundation for their generous support and encouragement in convening a meeting of marriage and family strengthening representatives concerned with the well-being of our National Guard members who dutifully serve our states and country. The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC) would like to thank Mike Sullivan, a consultant on military leader development and future force requirements, for facilitating this forum. We also wish to thank the participants for sharing their ideas and experiences to inform the development of this paper.

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The findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

This guide is a publication of the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center led by co-directors Mary Myrick, APR, Jeanette Hercik, PhD, and project manager, Rich Batten, ThM, MEd, CFLE.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Annie E. Casey Foundation and the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC) collaborated on a groundbreaking effort to convene many of the best minds on the subject of the intimate relationships of National Guard service members and their families. The day and a half event held in Tampa, Florida in September of 2010 included more than two dozen respected leaders, advocates, clinicians and researchers devoted to understanding and supporting intimate partner relationships and identifying best practices among existing and developmental marriage/relationship education and treatment programs. Particular attention was paid to the role of marriage and relationship education (MRE) in helping couples and single parent families navigate the stress of multiple deployments and disconnection from the services typically afforded other military families. This paper summarizes the discussion of the challenges, emerging practices and next steps to support the relationships of National Guard families.

The Guard faces challenges unique from other branches of the military. For example, Guard families may not be located near a base where services are available; they may not know other Guard families; Guard families are less likely to be prepared for a deployment than active military families; and there is often a disconnect between "citizen" and "soldier" resources. Existing national efforts such as the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program and the Strong Bonds Program and local programs such as the Essential Life Skills for Military Families (North Carolina) and the Strength at Home (Massachusetts) programs have emerged to care for the family and relationship aspects of the Guard. Chaplains and Family Readiness Groups (FRG) are internal resources provided by the military, but most are tasked with a variety of needs across the Guard and their services can vary greatly by state. The group discussed the aspects of these programs that are effective and the need to expand and diversify services for Guard members and their families.

The overarching theme that emerged from the discussion was *the importance of relationships* in identifying and effectively dealing with the stress of multiple deployments for the "citizen Soldier." Meeting participants identified a variety of challenges and stressors placed on these families. Issues such as deployment, post-traumatic stress, unemployment, navigating multiple systems, and lack of support networks among Guard families arose as key challenges. Participants also discussed various research findings and lessons from the field that create a framework for delivering marriage/relationship education programs to singles and couples in the National Guard. Specific recommendations for further research and action were categorized into three general areas:

Gaps in Knowledge

- A nationally representative needs assessment of Guard/spouses/families should be conducted.

Gaps in Connectivity

- An insufficient system is in place to connect spouses with services and people in the unit and other supporting structures. While there has been significant work done to provide online services, military spouses and families are in desperate need of "low tech/high touch" systems of service and connection to prepare families to successfully handle issues and prevent crisis. To build both military and civilian connections, one suggestion is to recruit, train, and deploy Guard spouses as peer mentors to offer education-based peer support.

Gaps in Structure

- Developing and managing "Family Readiness" across the National Guard is a dire need and difficult to address without buy-in across states and units. Family programs should be tied to

deployment and continued throughout the entire time of service. It was recommended that a "Relationship Core" be developed and implemented as a part of basic training for all service members and then reinforced at re-enlistment.

To evaluate the outcomes of these recommendations a "Return on Investment" study was suggested. This study would quantify the long-term health care and recruiting savings of better preparing Guard personnel and families for the emotional, relational, and familial stress of deployment.

BACKGROUND

The National Guard serves 50 states and four territories as well as the federal government, making it a unique and valuable U.S. resource. The National Guard is made up of approximately 470,000 men and women. The Guard is called on to respond to crises, whether domestic (such as Hurricane Katrina) or international. U.S. involvement in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars has greatly increased the deployment of National Guard members in active duty overseas. This development has raised awareness of the new and often prolonged stress and challenges placed on these military members and their spouses/partners and children.

- In a national sample of National Guard spouses, about one third (37%) said they were well prepared for the deployment associated separation (Caliber Associates, 2003).
- In a study of deployed Army married spouses, no factor predicted positive coping and adjustment more than having a strong marriage (Orthner and Rose 2006).
- Having a strong marriage increased the likelihood of good adjustment to the separation by 289%. The next most predictive factor was having strong social support, which increased the likelihood of adjustment by 24% (Orthner and Rose 2006).

  Huebner, A. J., Mancini, J. A., Bowen, G. L. and Orthner, D. K. (2009), Shadowed by War: Building Community Capacity to Support Military Families. Family Relations, 58: 216–228.

Guard families are not likely to live on or close to a base with supportive services readily accessible. There is a great need to identify gaps in current support systems and resources available to those serving in the National Guard. Although hard data is difficult to locate, anecdotal reports indicate that National Guard families are especially vulnerable to divorce and family dissolution, in part due to the stress of deployment (as they may be less prepared for deployment compared to their active military counterparts) and the financial strain of deployment. The hardest hit among Reservist and National Guard families are the younger, more recently married couples with children. A 2002 *Survey of Spouses of Activated National Guard and Reserve Component* members classified recently married families with children under age five as high risk.[1] It is important to note that this data was collected prior to the mass deployment of these members to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The nation continues to struggle with the long-term effects of the Global War on Terror and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. A large share of this burden has been, and is being carried by, the millions serving in the armed forces and their families. Since around 2003, many institutions, advocates, and social researchers have studied these effects. Those in the military responsible for training and caring for service members and their families have tried, through training and incorporating community resources, to minimize the negative impacts of these burdens. In two particular segments of the armed

1 Caliber 2002 *Survey of Spouses of Activated National Guard and Reserve Component*

forces, the National Guard and Reserves, there are particularly complex challenges to prevention, intervention, and treatment.

Some community-based services and programs have been created/adapted to meet the family needs of the Guard. The NHMRC is interested in the role of MRE in supporting single and married Guard members. With support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the NHMRC convened a meeting to further the dialogue about the need for services among Guard families/individuals and support what the military is already doing in this area. A participant list is provided in Appendix 1.

The goals of this meeting were to 1) document available relationship strategies/resources for National Guard families; 2) build awareness among community-based marriage and relationship education providers about the needs of National Guard families; and 3) highlight strategies and resources to strengthen military couples and single parents.

INTRODUCTION

A variety of MRE programs are offered in communities and by the military/Guard. Connecting the Guard (through Chaplains and family support programs) to community-based MRE services can provide needed supports to Guard families coping with stressors related to deployment, employment, and lack of connection to other Guard families in their community.

Two continuing and broadly applied efforts discussed throughout the meeting were the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program and the Strong Bonds Program. The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program, for example, is linked across virtually every corner of the National Guard community. Military Chaplains involved with the program contend it is very effective as a conduit for information but, like other programs with similar aims, is dependent on each particular Guard unit's emphasis, financial resources and available support staff. As for The Strong Bonds Program, which aims at building and sustaining family readiness and resilience through a focused, training regimen delivered by Chaplains, the group discussed how the effects are largely a derivative of the unit and individual family's commitment to its principles and tools.

This paper summarizes the key challenges and stressors the Guard members' families face and identifies emerging programs, promising practices, and existing resources to support the specific needs of National Guard couples and single parents.

CHALLENGES AND STRESSORS

Many core MRE skills (such as effective communication, problem solving, working together as a team and conflict resolution) can help Guard families as they experience a deployment or reintegration. MRE was framed as a family resilience strategy to support Guard members. Meeting participants discussed the research and findings about intimate partner relationships and the stress caused by Guard involvement. Stressors include employment issues, post-traumatic stress, and a disconnect from the military.

The dual civilian and soldier nature of the Guard creates a unique dynamic compared to other branches of the military. This has implications for outreach, logistics, and language. The most daunting challenge is achieving consistency in what is communicated and what is actually made available to the spouses and families across the 54+ National Guard and Reserve structures at the state and territorial levels. There

are historical, traditional, constitutional, financial and community impediments to anything but token progress in breaking these barriers.

- **National Guard and their families do not have access to the same services as active members of the military**

According to one meeting participant, an author, advocate and National Guard spouse, Guard and Reserve families *do not* have the same access to programs and services as their Active Duty counterparts. Although many web-based resources are available to Guard families, they may be underutilized or not adequately meet the needs of Guard families. Many meeting participants agreed that Guard family culture and needs are *not* identical to active duty family culture and needs. For example, Guard members and their spouses are not active duty personnel and do not "know the rules" or understand how to navigate military systems. For all intents and purposes, they are civilians. It was reported that few Guard partners/spouses/family members have a clear sense of what their Guard-member is doing.

> "The lack of programs and services developed for and tailored to the unique needs of Guard spouses, couples and wives of combat vets is a mission failure. Because as the Guard spouse goes, so goes the veteran, the marriage and the kids. The key—the key to strengthening Guard couples is providing culturally appropriate services that address the unmet deployment related mental health needs and reintegration realities of the reservist's spouse." –Stacy Bannerman, Author and Guard Spouse

- **Guard families need *high touch* and *low tech* resources**

Currently available resources tend to be high tech and low touch, such as websites and written resources. One participant drew from research showing that many Guard spouses say the Military OneSource and MFLC counseling programs are ineffective or insufficient to address their mental health needs and the realities of deployment from the home front.

> "The problem is not a commitment on the part of the Guard to offer help to those in need; the problem is in getting the information to the people who need it in a 'low tech, high touch' manner as opposed to the current reliance on the 'high tech, low or no touch' modes in place." –Chaplain Quentin Collins, Army National Guard

The group discussed and affirmed the role of the Chaplains, who provide a personal aspect to support Guard families. However, the ratio of Chaplains to Guard families is quite low, making this an inadequate support for prevention-oriented services such as relationship education. Existing services such as Strong Bonds programs were discussed as valuable prevention efforts, but unable to reach the number of families who might benefit from such a program.

- **Services to National Guard and their families differ in each state**

The more than 50 Guards are organized and primarily funded by the individual states and territories; each is inclined to approach the problems in their own way. The geographical dispersion of Guard units across the nation further complicates matters. Families may be hundreds of miles away from installation support services, and due to geographic distance, informal networks are often weak or non-existent. Many Guard families live in rural communities and therefore are not only disconnected from military installations but also from the resources that are often centralized in major metropolitan areas.

This raises the additional challenge of how to effectively replicate and scale good programs/services.

- **The skills that help soldiers and their leaders succeed on the battlefield may be the exact opposite of the skills that help them succeed as fathers, mothers, husbands, and wives**

Meeting participants highlighted the fact that the military prepares a Guard member to go into combat, but may not be as well-equipped to "retrain" a Guard member returning home. Community-based MRE programs can provide the skills and relational connections necessary to increase the probability of a soldier's successful reintegration into family and community life.

- **There is agreement that taking care of families is central to maintaining overall force readiness, yet accomplishing this is an ongoing challenge**

Analysis of military data collected over time finds that the more honest and supportive relationships a person has—both inside and outside of a marriage—the more likely he or she will make a positive adjustment before, during, and after a deployment (Orthner). Meeting participants reported that senior military leadership tends to agree that taking care of families is central to maintaining overall force readiness. Although the Guard has made an investment in family support resources, how that translates to actual delivery of support at the lowest levels is entirely dependent on what busy unit leaders see as their primary responsibility on any given day.

- **MRE fits with the mission of chaplains, but they have many competing demands on their time**

Chaplains have been the primary vehicle for delivering MRE (e.g., the PREP – Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program training effort). They have worked with the curricula developers to make PREP better for military families by suggesting changes and adaptations of the curricula. An advantage of working with Chaplains is, by nature of his/her role, they are both part of, while one step removed from, the Army. For military families who may see the Army as both supportive of—but also responsible for—their stressors, chaplains may be in an ideal position to build and maintain effective rapport. However, Chaplains are often occupied with crisis management and are spread too thin to be the primary source for MRE. In Alabama for example, about 30 Chaplains serve 15,000 National Guard/ families; this number includes those who may be deployed or reside out-of-state. All but one of these Chaplains are part-time.

- **How to effectively connect with Guard families**

Guard spouses tend to be less prepared than active duty spouses to cope with a deployment. A number of challenges were raised about *how* and *where* to reach Guard families given their geographic dispersion, lack of consistent services, limitations of Chaplains, and voluntary nature of services for non-Guard

family members. Although there are a number of formal programs, networks, and services in place to help military families, the reality is that Guard families "live" in informal networks (surrounded by neighbors, friends, co-workers, etc.). The core challenge then is to figure out ways to "bridge" formal programs and informal networks to ensure the one best equipped to deal with a particular situation inside a family is made available and hopefully accessed. In particular, it is important for agencies and organizations to be intentional about building and supporting informal networks of social support. The challenge of reaching dating partners or parents of unmarried Guard members was also raised.

Services do exist for Guard families. There are pockets of success such as Essential Life Skills for Military Families, Strong Bonds, Yellow Ribbon, Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Training, and Master Resilience Training. However, Guard representatives pointed out that they are not necessarily fully and consistently employed or effective. Similarly, there is high dependence on Chaplains to make all of the programs work (such as Strong Bonds) but not much in place to help these Chaplains.

- **Guard families often face multiple stressors**

A great deal of attention is paid to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), but there are many other stressors (some related to post-traumatic stress) which may be identified as interpersonal conflict disorder or "acting out." Other stressors include:

- Many Guard families are dealing with *unemployment* and return from a deployment without a job.
- *Complex family situations* (e.g., handicapped children, life-threatening illnesses, elderly parents) can exacerbate the stress on a family when a deployment occurs.
- Whether or not the likelihood of *losing a veterans' payment* once PTSD is "cured" constitutes a disincentive to get "better."
- The stress of *reintegration* can exacerbate PTSD symptoms. Research on Vietnam veterans found that combat veterans with PTSD were more likely to divorce and less likely to marry.
- *Schools* may not be aware that a child's parent is part of the Guard or has been deployed. If they do know, they may not understand the stressors on the children or recognize the signs of stress.

- Returning veterans may not have *a person to confide in* who they feel safe talking to about their experiences.
- *Legal issues* such as power of attorney are difficult issues for couples to discuss prior to a deployment.

PTSD symptoms include avoidance, numbing, hyper-arousal, etc. Spouses are often devastated by these effects as they seek to reconnect emotionally with the veteran, only to encounter gentle resistance or outright violence. This can and often does lead to serious distress in the marriage and second and third level effects in the children, their friends and schoolmates, and even extended family members.

> "The acquisition of symptoms of PTSD (even short of actual diagnosable PTSD) does considerably more harm to Army couples than the fact of the deployment. PTSD was more likely in soldiers who have more contact with their spouses while deployed if the couples were in less satisfying marriages. Conversely, it seems that soldiers who are able to communicate frequently with spouses sharing a satisfying marriage are less likely to develop PTSD. The quality of relationships is key!"
> –Scott Stanley, PREP Developer and Researcher

- **Violence at home**

It has been found that Reservists specifically report the highest increases in concerns relating to interpersonal conflict in the reintegration period. The unique impact of military deployments and post-traumatic stress symptoms on relationship functioning were discussed, as well as how these experiences may increase risk factors for domestic violence in military families and couples. Efforts were made to understand these unique contexts and the distinctions between civilian domestic violence and domestic violence in military couples.

EMERGING PRACTICES AND LESSONS

It was clear to the meeting participants that although a lot is known about Guard families, there is also a lot yet to be learned. Furthermore, while there is help available for those who need it, serious impediments exist to getting this help to the right places. For example, MRE is one strategy that can produce lasting friendships among couples (or individuals) who meet at the sessions. This expands and reinforces the network of helpful relationships so beneficial in dealing with shared stress. Despite these benefits, MRE is not common. Some emerging lessons on how to reach Guard members and their families/spouses to strengthen their intimate partner relationships are listed below.

- **Practicality matters**

Services must be offered in a *location* where couples can access them—which can be a significant challenge in rural areas. Services should be offered in the evening and, as a means of encouraging attendance, *compensate couples* for things like the cost of gas and child care. Those leading the session must protect participant *confidentiality* and make the workshop a *safe* place for people to talk. Practitioners (clinicians or Chaplains) must have knowledge about *other resources* available in local areas to help couples with other stressors in their post-deployment lives, such as finances and alternative job training.

- **Service delivery at the unit level**

Many participants agreed that integrating MRE into existing Guard services is the most likely way for it to reach those who need it. Adding MRE into an already very busy training regimen for National Guard units is a challenge but can be done. For example, a Brigade of the 101st Airborne at Fort Campbell is using the PAIRS program as part of the duty assignment for the training period.

- **Programs can be most effective when done in a series of sessions over two or three days or over sequential one-day periods over successive weekends.**

Group-based educational programming was reported to be cost effective and meet the high touch needs of Guard families (spouses, parents, partners, etc.). Some programs, notably PAIRS and PREP for Strong Bonds, are having major positive effects; efforts are in motion to both broaden and improve these programs and others. Participants in this meeting reported that some unit and senior leaders have recognized and embraced the value of these programs and it is becoming clear that investments in them are a bargain in the long run. The costs associated with treating families and individuals who require post-deployment interventions are much higher than the costs associated with prevention and support efforts.

These programs are evidence-based and research continues to identify what works best with whom. Research from the PREP program indicates that 8-12 hours of MRE is better than 1-8 hours. MRE varies for couples versus individuals and different families will have different levels of need. For example, more follow-up and more targeted sessions may be needed for couples with bigger challenges. Another approach for MRE is to offer programs such as "Essential Skills for Military Life" as a precursor to MRE as it introduces the concept of MRE without the up-front focus on relationships. See Appendix B for additional information on Essential Skills for Military Life and other MRE programs represented at this meeting.

PREP

PREP for Strong Bonds focuses on teaching and reinforcing three major concepts, or keys, that the developers believe are fundamental to building and maintaining strong marriages. The keys are to make it safe to connect with someone, to actually make a decision as opposed to allowing yourself to slide into a hurtful situation or missed opportunities, and to always do your part as opposed to expecting or demanding the other partner do theirs first. –Scott Stanley, PREP Developer and Researcher

PAIRS

"…the goal of our work and what we've found with couples is that if you can teach skills and experiences that enhance emotional literacy, emotional intelligence, you empower them to find almost the full range of solutions, to address services, to implement solutions in their own lives to take care of their own relationships. But without that foundation, the best interventions in the world are often hijacked by the stress and anxiety of the events that we go through over the course of our life." –Seth Eisenberg, PAIRS CEO

- **Make it OK to talk**

A strategy to intervene and counter stress is to give the partners basic psycho- education on what to expect when combat veterans return and emphasize that it is OK to talk about deployment experiences (although there is no research to suggest how much to talk about). Another strategy is to "normalize" the experience of PTSD symptoms as the typical reaction to traumatic events (it's only considered PTSD if the symptoms persist for a long period) and remove the stigma.

"To tell veterans that it is OK to have such feelings can be very helpful in minimizing their effects and actually co-opting the onset of full blown PTSD." –Sarah Krill, Strength At Home Program Coordinator

- **Build capacity—both within Guard services and at the community level**

Expertise about MRE needs to move into informal networks. One model for building community capacity to support all military families is being developed by Gary Bowen and Jay Mancini. It will connect and refine existing formal programs and services, unit leadership, informal networks, neighborhood resources and training regimens. The project will assess results for the families benefitting from a "model" program while facing the stress of deployment.

Existing services such as Inter-Service Family Committees, State Family Readiness Programs and Family Assistance staff can support the development of networks. One can connect with the Inter-service Family Assistance Committee and other State Family Readiness Programs by visiting the National Guard Family Program page at www.jointservicessupport.org, The National Guard is currently benefiting from many partnerships in its efforts to "get better faster: in caring for families and single parents. The Military Officers Association and any number of State organizations are having significant positive effects for those they reach.

More effective and flexible linkages that assure important information and even basic 'education' in acronyms and organizations is pushed to spouses and single parents. Ensuring these folks are made aware of the nuances of what could be called the National Guard 'culture' would have an enormous positive impact." –Lief Noll, MRE Trainer and Researcher

IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The consensus view was that any continuing investment in helping National Guard soldiers and their families build, reinforce, and sustain positive relationships was both important and a bargain for the nation. Keeping a soldier in the Guard is more cost effective than recruiting, training, and integrating a new one. It follows that, if the family and spouse are well supported, the soldier is much more likely to stay with the Guard and ultimately, their family or significant relationships.

Two primary challenges are:

1. Understanding the issues surrounding National Guard members and their families; and

2. Creating a sense of community in the affiliated families.

The challenges of building understanding and a sense of community lies in the fact that the families are often spread out over hundreds of square miles and have access to very different services. Some attendees suggested that it is important enough to be worth any effort to meet these challenges. Selecting and appropriately using good, evidence-based marriage education materials and supporting and equipping program delivery staff will ensure a quality experience for target couples and families.

> "The best results often come to units and organizations willing to take some risk and be innovative in building the sort of connections and relationships in and across communities that offer bridges across barriers for those who need the help." –Jay Mancini, University of Georgia Researcher

Continue the research and learn more about Guard/spouses/families

Researchers want to need to find out why some spouses get very distressed and others are resilient.

Some of the answers may lie in how the partners understand the veterans' symptoms and behaviors. For example, spouses may be experiencing simple fatigue more than a secondary traumatic stress reaction.

Much is unknown about Guard members and their families, especially the needs of unmarried Guard members who may be involved in romantic relationships. The researchers at the meeting strongly recommended that a nationally representative needs assessment of Guard/spouses/families be conducted.

Build connections that are both military and civilian

There is an insufficient *system* in place to connect spouses with services and other people in the unit and supporting structure. While there has been significant work done to provide online services, military spouses and families are in desperate need of "low tech/high touch" systems of service and connection to prepare families to successfully handle issues that arise and prevent crisis.

Refine existing programs

Many opportunities for healthy marriage and relationship training are available both in and outside of the Guard. The challenge is primarily in the areas of connectivity and structure. It was recommended that a "Relationship Core" be developed and implemented as a part of basic training for all service members and then reinforced at re-enlistment.

Gain buy-in at the state and unit levels

It was clear to meeting participants that developing and managing "Family Readiness" across the National Guard and Reserves is a dire need and difficult to address without "buy-in" across states and units. Family programs should be tied to deployment and continued throughout the entire time of

service. It was recommended that a "Return on Investment" study could be tied to this to quantify the long term health care and recruiting savings of better preparing guard personnel and families for the emotional, relational and familial stress of deployment.

Action steps to gain buy-in include:

1. An awareness campaign to alleviate stigmas and energize community based resources.
2. Recruit, train, and deploy Guard spouse peer mentors to offer peer education.
3. Actively and aggressively assist Guard spouses through the maze leading to the help they might need.

The immediate objectives are to develop resources for the field to better meet the needs of the National Guard families in their community. The longer term objectives are to 1) build bridges between the military and community-based providers that will create a continuum of relationship education for these families and 2) to encourage practitioners and policymakers to develop services and programs to eliminate any gaps.

Appendix A: Meeting Participants

Strengthening Resources and Supports for National Guard Couples and Families

Participants

Stacy Bannerman – Author and Guard Spouse, Oregon	Sarah Krill – National Center for PTSD Strength At Home Programs, Massachusetts
Rich Batten – National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, Colorado	John Le Moyne – U.S. Army (retired), Florida
Bettie Ann Carroll – East Carolina University, North Carolina	Jay Mancini – University Of Georgia, Georgia
Beth Clemens – National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, Oklahoma	Lief Noll – DeepLink Consulting, LLC, Ohio
Quentin Collins – Army National Guard National Guard Bureau, Virginia	Dennis Orthner – University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina
Paul Duttge – Military Professional Resources Inc., New York	Keith Renshaw – George Mason University, Virginia
Seth Eisenberg – PAIRS Inc., Florida	Colin Smith – Air National Guard, Maryland

Jim Fogle-Miller – Army National Guard, Florida	Scott Stanley – University of Denver, Colorado
Courtney Harrison – National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, Colorado	Mike Sullivan – U.S. Army (retired), California
Bob Henthorn—PAIRS Inc., Florida.	Michele Walters – U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, District of Columbia
Robert Hicks – Army National Guard, Alabama	Michael Yudt – National Fatherhood Initiative, Maryland

Appendix B: Program and Resource Highlights

The **Strength At Home Couples Program** is part of an ongoing treatment outcome study funded by the Centers for Disease Control under the supervision of Dr. Casey Taft. The program is aimed at strengthening relationships and preventing domestic violence for recently returning veterans and their relationship partners. The program is cognitive behavioral in its approach and works with couples through providing psycho-education, skills training, and relationship reinforcement exercises.

The presentation at this meeting included a discussion of the effects on relationships of several PTSD symptoms—avoidance, numbing, hyperarousal, etc. Spouses are often devastated by such effects as they seek to re-connect emotionally with the veteran, only to encounter gentle resistance or outright violence. This can and often does lead to serious distress in the marriage and second and third level effects in the children, their relationships with friends and schoolmates, and even extended family members.

http://www.strengthathome.com/

When the War Came Home: The Inside Story of Reservists and the Families They Leave Behind (2006) by Stacy Bannerman. When her husband was mobilized for his first deployment with the Army National Guard in 2003, Stacy began advocating for the troops, veterans, and their families and has emerged as a national leader on the home front impacts of the war in Iraq. She successfully spearheaded state and national legislative campaigns for military family leave, resulting in passage of Oregon H.B. 2744, and introduction of the federal Military Family Leave Act of 2009 Ms. Bannerman has been deeply engaged in the non-profit and education arenas for 20 years as an executive, professor, advocate, and consultant and received the Patriotic Employer Award and the Above & Beyond Award from the Employer Support of the Guard & Reserve. She has created numerous flagship programs for women, children, veterans, and military families, including Sanctuary Weekends™ for Women Veterans and for Wives of Veterans.

http://stacybannerman.com/

Essential Life Skills for Military Families (ELSMF) program, a Healthy Marriage Initiative project funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance, is led by Elizabeth (Bettie Ann) Carroll, Associate Professor in the Department of Child Development and Family Relations at East Carolina University. A multi-university project, ELSMF is designed to strengthen and support National Guard and Reserve Component service members and their families in a workshop setting designed to help military families anticipate and manage a variety of fast-hitting pressures like giving a spouse power of attorney, agreeing on how to spend money, and preparing for the unknown. By taking the workshop, Service Members and their families learn how to communicate effectively in times of stress, find social support systems, and sort out time-sensitive financial and legal matters.

http://www.militaryfamilylifeskills.org

PAIRS (Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills) is an evidence-based marriage education program that attends to ethics, program evaluation, rigorous quality management, and ongoing training for leaders. In recent years, PAIRS has focused on delivery models in collaboration with the Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center and other military and VA facilities nationwide to help active duty, reserve, guard, veterans and family members impacted by combat deployment. The partnership with Charlie Norwood was recognized in 2009 by the Veterans Administration as "Best Practice in Marriage Enrichment."

http://www.pairs.com

Strong Bonds is a unit-based, chaplain-led program which assists commanders in building individual resiliency by strengthening the Army Family. The core mission of the Strong Bonds program is to increase individual Soldier and Family member readiness through relationship education and skills training.

Strong Bonds is conducted in an offsite retreat format in order to maximize the training effect. The retreat or "get away" provides a fun, safe, and secure environment in which to address the impact of relocations, deployments, and military lifestyle stressors.

http://www.strongbonds.org.

Strong Bonds is based on **PREP** (**Prevention and Relationship Education Program**).

http://www.prepinc.com

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The National Healthy Marriage Resource Center (NHMRC) is a clearinghouse for high quality, balanced, and timely information and resources on healthy marriage. The NHMRC's mission is to be a first stop for information, resources, and training on healthy marriage for experts, researchers, policymakers, media, marriage educators, couples and individuals, program providers, and others.

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