



**national
healthy marriage
resource center**

NHMRC July 2010 Webinar Frequently Asked Questions

**Developing Partnerships with the Military to Serve
National Guard Members and their Families**

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1. Who are the key persons or programs in each branch or at local bases to contact to offer marriage and relationship education?

Rico Figueroa: I would say one other resource to consider that's been a real success for us is the Airman and Family Readiness Centers (sometimes called family readiness centers).

Patricia Dumas: On the Army bases, you'd want to reach out to ACS, Army Community Services. And they have different counseling and family programs. Also on Army bases, it's called MWR-- Morale Welfare and Recreation. Within the Navy, it would be the ombudsman. If you have a Naval Reserve or an active naval base, there could be an ombudsman that you would contact to talk about the family programs or a family program office. Within the Air Force, we have also found success with the family advocacy program.

Colonel Robert Hicks: Right, and Air Force bases, too. And the Soldier Support Center consolidates a lot of those functions.

Webinar Audience Member: A great starting point for someone desiring to connect with the Military community, yet not knowing any points of contact, is Military OneSource (MOS) at 1-800-342-9647 and ask for contact info on the Military OneSource Joint Family Assistance Program (JFSAP) Consultant for that State. This JFSAP Consultant will many times have contact data for the various branches within their State. Individuals can also work with the JFSAP

Consultant if they are interested in providing some sort of resource to Military families.

2. Do the marriage enrichment seminars use curricula? If so, which ones?

Colonel Robert Hicks: Right now, the overarching umbrella program is called Strong Bonds, and every new chaplain coming in to the Army gets trained in several programs.

Probably for marriage enrichment, we have been using the PREP program, but it's really up to the individual chaplain. You know we're changing that now simply because PREP is a week-long course that we cram into a day-and-a-half – and it's just not really workable, so we pick and choose what we're going to use out of that program and give it our own particular spiritual twist, depending upon the group that's there.

Rico Figueroa: We use Within our Reach, which is almost identical to Strong Bonds, the difference being that Strong Bonds has a lot of military references in it. And as you're working with couples that have a military background, they can add a lot to it. One of the benefits has been the ability to go to a chaplain and say, "Look, you're already certified in Strong Bonds. We teach Within our Reach. They're basically the exact same program." And we've done retreats where the chaplain taught a couple of sections and then we taught some sections. It has worked out really well that most of the chaplains we have worked with are already versed in PREP and are certified.

3. Would you clarify the difference or interplay between Guard/Reserve support structure/organization for service members & families vs. Army Community Service, Airman & Family and Fleet & Family for active duty?

Patricia Dumas: They're all distinctly different. There is the Joint Family Support Assistance Program and as a Military and Family Life Consultant (MFLC) for that program, we reach out to every component. Each component has a different family program. The culture of that military component is also going to be slightly different. You have different histories. You have different tasks that they perform. As you approach each of those separate units, you're approaching a different population of service members. If you go in and you're working with the Marine family program, it's going to be slightly different from the National Guard Army soldiers. You have linguistic differences, but also cultural differences. And that's why it is important to reach out individually with each branch and with each program. There will be at some point some unifying programs of Yellow Ribbon, but right now, these programs have been addressing each branch individually and their service members individually.

4. How are you coordinating with services provided by the US Department of Veterans Affairs?

Patricia Dumas: That is a completely different program. Department of Veterans Affairs goes into a completely different population, because through that, you have the Vet centers, which is different from the VA. That is another whole segment of the community, of the military population that you

could approach, different from the active Guard and Reserve, so you'd have to seek that out through a veterans hospital in your community, to go through – I would go through the social work or the chaplain entities in those hospitals or reach out to a Vet center in your community, which is also serving the veteran population. You can Google Vet centers in your state, and you will get a listing.

5. What marriage education curricula are you finding most popular and effective in working with military couples? What are typical education formats; are they classes? What days of the week and times do the classes take place? Do you provide child care? Food?

Rico Figueroa: We do 8 hours for our workshop, which is a long day, but we find that the one day works best. With Buckley Air Force Base, they are actually doing it all day Friday. So I'm not sure how that works logistically on base, but they were able to get 15 couples and their spouses to the workshop. As far as child care goes, we let the base take care of most of that, depending on where it is. If it's a retreat with the National Guard, they usually take care of that. One of the Army chaplains called us and asked if he could send 15 to 20 couples to our retreat and wanted to know about child care. What we worked out is they would arrange for all of the child care and we would provide the space. They usually have the best connections and know exactly what their families need.

Patricia Dumas: Generally, for our marriage enrichment programs through the Alabama National Guard, there isn't child care provided because the

Strong Bonds workshops are a time just for the couple. It's a focus on that marital union and not with the parenting associated with it. The kids stay with relatives or somewhere else. The Yellow Ribbon workshops have the family component, so the kids are a part of that and child care is provided.

Rico Figueroa: For our retreat coming up, we have discussed back and forth with the chaplain whether we provide child care or try to get the couples to go by themselves. His take on it was, "I can get more couples to come if there's child care...I'd rather have them there with their kids, even though it's a distraction, than not there at all."

6. If one has a program/resource that would work with military families, what's the best way to have it reviewed? Is there an organization, person or central clearinghouse who will efficiently evaluate a resource for the whole of the Guard/Reserve versus going base by base or state by state?

Colonel Robert Hicks: If you're looking to do anything nationally, it would probably have to go to the National Guard Bureau for approval, especially if you want money. Anything that involves money has to go to the Guard Bureau. That's where we get our budget for Strong Bonds or Marriage Enrichment. There are some states that will provide funding separately from what the Guard Bureau provides – I think Georgia does – but if it doesn't involve money, you start at the state level or the unit level with a program, whether with family support, family programs, or the chaplain's office. Ultimately, the commander has to buy off on it. And sometimes the

commanders want to do whatever they can for their soldiers and airmen, and sometimes they may not see it as that important. So, you're going to have to sell it to that commander and the first sergeants who have the direct care of everybody under their command. But certainly I would begin with family programs or the chaplain's office at either the unit level or the state level.

7. Patricia, I liked your story of the Special Forces soldier who recognized his own need for some help with parenting skills. How exceptional is that experience? How much demand is there among clients for what you are offering, or do you also need to raise awareness of the benefits of what you offer?

Patricia Dumas: I think the awareness has really increased. Over the past three years, there's been a lot of destigmatizing in all branches of the military about asking for help. The Fatherhood Initiative was amazing. That came out about two years ago, and a lot of work has been done on focusing on fatherhood. From a National Guard perspective, it's not unusual for some of our young service members to leave, suddenly married, come back on R&R, and then come home and suddenly be fathers. We have this very quick turnaround during deployment, so there's been a bigger focus on fatherhood and what that means on relationships. There is also a wonderful resource called the Zero to Three Institute that's going to bring up a lot of information about this special population of kids. Through each of your states, at active-duty bases, the Zero to Three Institute will be doing two-day trainings about that very unique relationship of father and mother with the baby, and

keeping them empowered during the deployment, and also with blended families. I encourage you to look at that web site, Zero to Three and see if there's training in your area. It's a free, two-day training with continuing education units.

8. Can you talk a bit about how you are measuring program impact?

Patricia Dumas: From an MFLC perspective, since our services are anonymous, confidential, and free, we create activity reports that track military component, issue discussed, and location, so we are able to develop statistics as to who is accessing the program and for what reasons. In terms of using measurement tools to see how families have done after experiencing marriage enrichment, I don't believe we have any tools that are monitoring that at this point. I think it would be an incredible area of research in your state to really look at what services are available and how you are doing. This is true especially since we're talking about military families who have gone through multiple deployments. We also have a lot of blended families that are going through second marriage conflicts and marriage enrichment seminars for their new families, so there

are lots of areas that would benefit from research. Currently, from the MFLC's perspective, the only thing we're tracking is raw numbers, issued discussed, and number of times that we're meeting with these individuals or families.

Rico Figueroa: Well, from a grantee perspective, we have evaluation surveys that everybody fills out, but I know when we work with the family advocacy program at Buckley Air Force Base, they have their own set of instruments they use. With our instruments, there's nothing to identify whether participants are military or not, and they're anonymous, so we just continue to use the [same] instruments we use for everybody.

9. I am missing the last slide with contact information for speakers.

Rich Batten: If you go to the Healthy Marriage Resource Center, healthymarriageinfo.org, under the section called *Features* there is "Marriage and Divorce in the National Guard and Reserves." It can be downloaded as a PDF, and it also has contact information for all of the programs and places that we have mentioned today.