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AUTHOR: **M. Koester**

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Home Base offers veterans, military families large range of services

By **MARTHA C. KOESTER**
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Georgia Army National Guard Soldiers conduct a sunrise run during annual training at Fort Stewart, Ga., Jan. 11, 2017. (U.S. Army photo by Capt. William Carraway)

In its eight years, Home Base has treated more than 10,000 veterans and military family members. The challenge for the mental health support program was how to reach the nation's post-9/11 military veterans and their families who do not live near Boston.

The Intensive Clinical Program is a two-week outpatient treatment program based out of Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, where patients receive about 50 hours of individual and group therapy.

ICP treatment is meant to complement veterans' ongoing care in their hometowns. Under the program, veterans receive a comprehensive evaluation; individual treatment; group therapy; stress reduction and resiliency training; fitness and nutrition counseling; family support and education; integrative therapies such as yoga, art and tai chi; and engage in social activities. The ICP is supported by the Wounded Warrior Project through the Wounded Care Network, a national medical care network.

The clinical team decides on an individualized plan for each patient. Because family members are considered an integral part of the healing process, they are encouraged to participate in treatment. Family members also are provided with education and support opportunities. To get started, veterans may call the Home Base Clinic at 617-724-5202 or visit homebase.org/ICP online.

"I speak to a lot of the veterans who have gone through both our regional outpatient clinic and the ICP," said Kristen Chadwick, Home Base director of communication and marketing. "One of our patients who has been through the Intensive Clinical Program told me that if clinicians had left it up to him to set up his doctor appointments when he left, he wouldn't have followed through. He said he felt like he gained so many tools, and he is happy to report he and his family see a clinician in Florida. The Home Base staff sat down with him, dialed the

phone to a clinician, got him an appointment, and they were able to work with them and bring them up to speed on where this patient was with his care.”

For the children

Home Base clinicians and staff have seen first-hand the rough impact a parent’s deployment can have on children.

“We have seen enough commonality that we have seen trends, and so we have developed care models based on that,” said retired Army Brig. Gen. Jack Hammond, executive director of the Home Base Program.

Home Base developed StayingStrong.org, a Web-based program that may be publically accessed to help military-connected children with deployment-related stress and anxiety. The site features 16 scenarios illustrating challenges that children may face, such as separation anxiety, and coping styles.

Many Soldiers have seen the effects their deployments have on their children, including Sgt. Maj. Bill Davidson, Home Base director of peer outreach and support, who also is the senior enlisted advisor for the Massachusetts Army National Guard. Children may react strongly when they see a parent in uniform exiting the home, thinking the parent is not coming back.

“My daughter had separation anxiety,” Davidson said. “She would cry when I would leave, even on a weekend.”

“[Children] see you leaving, and they associate it with how deathly afraid they were the whole time you were gone, and especially when they get a little older and they understand what is going on in the world,” Hammond said. “[Children] in junior high and high school may listen to the news and hear 15 people were killed in Baghdad. ... We have these age-appropriate scenarios on how to respond to those things.

“The medical team feel that not all these kids need to see a psychiatrist,” Hammond said. “They feel that 80 percent of the problems may be solved if you just tell the parents how to handle it. Parents are the best caregivers for their kids. So, the idea behind StayingStrong.org is to provide the tools to the military family members.”

Resilient Soldiers and families

Home Base features a spectrum of care for a full range of injuries, Hammond said. Home Base developed other programs to reach out to Soldiers who are not at a critical point in their mental health. The Resilient Warrior and Resilient Family series focuses on the mind-body connection designed to help veterans cope with stress.

The Resilient Warrior Series is a six-week, 1.5-hour class, designed to reduce the impact of stress through a variety of mind-body techniques as well as skill-building exercises scientifically shown to improve medical symptoms, mood and well-being. Courses also address problems such as insomnia and lack of extended social support.

Home Base officials recognize that deployment and reintegration affect families across three generations. Resilient Family is a series of free courses designed to reduce the impact of stress on military families through mind-body techniques and skill-building exercises. Clinical care is available to spouses and partners, dependent children, parents, siblings and close friends of those who have served, even when that veteran or service member is not in treatment.

“If you think about it, military family members, spouses in particular, don’t witness a traumatic event as the Soldiers do overseas,” Hammond said. “They are not in combat but are suffering from high stress and anxiety, worrying about the Soldiers while they are deployed and then when they come home. Resilient Family works with them and helps teach them how to manage stress and anxiety.”

For more information on either program or to enroll in a class, visit homebase.org/resilientwarrior.

Focus on fitness

Another program is the Warrior Health and Fitness Program, which aims to help veterans who are reintegrating into civilian life by maintaining a healthful lifestyle. The free, six-month program is run by post-9/11 veterans at Northeastern University in Boston. Participants form a new band of brothers and sisters while getting fit.

Each participant receives fitness evaluations and a tailored exercise program, which includes yoga, professional nutrition counseling and mental skills coaching, aimed at combating depression and stress. To sign up or learn more, visit homebase.org/newarriorhealth.

“We realized that a number of veterans, once they leave the service, start putting on weight,” Hammond said. “They start, in some cases, drinking too much ... They’re not doing PT two and three times a day, and then they start having some minor depression because they are gaining weight and they are drinking more than they should. We wanted to figure out how we can get them back on the right track. So we created, in partnership with the Red Sox, the team physician from the Boston Red Sox and the team physician from the New England Patriots, a veteran fitness program. We created a fitness program that is focused on diet, nutrition, sleep hygiene and mental skills, and it’s modeled after what we do with the elite athletes on the Patriots and the Red Sox.”

Lastly, the Adventure Series for veterans and their families aims to strengthen family bonds before, during and after deployment. During the series, veterans and families may explore a new sport, meet other veterans and military families, and learn more about the clinical services, education and research offered by Home Base. Events are seasonal, with eight to 10 scheduled per year.

Learn more and register at <https://hbp.partners.org/eventReg/list.php>.