

Improving Mental Health for Children of Military Families in Contra Costa County

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Advocacy:

I choose to address how might we improve the mental health of children of military families. The stressors tied to being a child of a military family are far greater than the average family and which results in a greater risk of mental health consequences.

As a Board Member for the non-profit, John Muir Community Health Fund, my goal was to engage community organizations to identify the needs and create mental health solutions for children of military families.

My efforts towards this goal included working meeting or speaking with over 60 individuals, clinicians, schools or leaders in the community. I learned that no organizations in Contra Costa County were able to quantify the number of military children, where they lived, their ages or what their needs were. Lack of demographic data coupled with the shortage of mental health resources were the largest barriers that organizations faced while considering mental health of military families. One organization considered launching an effort to collect demographic data at intake in the spring of 2020, but that possibility was derailed by COVID-19. I learned it is challenging to influence strategy for organizations as an outsider despite the possibility of financial support, organizational goals and leaders within the organizations who might be champions. Post COVID-19, resources for most community organizations are even more limited.

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Results

- Total of over 60 individuals/leaders/organizations/clinicians interviewed:
 - Veterans (retired and active, reserve), and those with intergenerational military families.
 - Clinicians: Psychologists, SW, MFT, Patient Care Navigators,
 - Physicians: UCSF, Contra Costa Regional Med Center, VA, PAMF, John Muir Medical Center,
 - Community Health Organizations: La Clinic De La Raza, VA center, Concord Veteran Center, Travis AirForce Base
 - Community Organizations: First Five, Contra Costa Crisis Center, Village Resource Center, VFW
 - University: JFK University in Contra Costa
 - Advocacy Groups: AAP, Veteran AAP subsection
 - School Districts: Brentwood and Oakley Superintendents
- The project launched in January 2019 and we concluded this project in December 2019.
- In November of 2019, the Contra Costa Crisis Center indicated an interest in adding military family as part of their demographic intake process and linking it with their existing referral networks. After some consideration they stated it would be revisited in March 2020. COVID-19 derailed those efforts.

Next Steps

- Circle back with organizations that expressed interest in collecting demographic data.

Lessons Learned

- Lack of demographics data is a barrier to implementing any initiative
- Best practice is to learn about annual goals of organization.
- It challenging as an outsider to influence strategies of organizations.
- Ask questions like: are there internal champions with leadership positions inside organizations?