

Family Tree Military Family Assistance Program (MFAP)

When we think of those who serve our country, we picture episodes of bravery and sacrifice, punctuated by emotional experiences of separation from home and loved ones. For those fortunate enough to return home, we imagine the joy of homecoming, of reuniting with their spouses, children, parents, and friends...of concluding their service and sacrifice. This is often where our images stop – families happy to be reunited – but for many it is the beginning of a different kind of suffering.

Despite the valuable skills many have acquired during their months or years of service, a high percentage of our returning troops are unable to find work in a civilian world that is not prepared to receive them. In the robust economy of 1992 -2003, the unemployment rate for military personnel two years after separation was more than double that of the general population (9.5% to 4.3%). In August of 2005, it was concluded that veterans age 20-25 had an unemployment rate of 15.6% as compared to 8.7 for non-vets in that same age group.

At least 29,038 US troops have been wounded in action during their deployment in Afghanistan and Iraq as attested to in an article from January 2008 entitled, *Honoring the Fallen: US Military KIA, Iraq/Afghanistan* www.BlueNC.com. For many, the wounds received in combat resulted in traumatic injury to their brains. According to Charles S. Ciccolella, Assistant Labor Secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training, "What you're seeing is a recognition that each war is different. Each war has its signature injuries, and TBI and PTSD are those of Iraq and Afghanistan, where service is characterized by successive deployment and frequent blasts from roadside bombs."

These invisible wounds, PTSD and addictions, can be just as debilitating as the physical ones and impact not only the service member, but also their families. For example, Army researchers saw alcohol misuse rise from 13 percent among soldiers to 21 percent one year after returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, underscoring the continuing stress of deployment for some troops. Post-traumatic stress for returning troops and veterans deployed once is estimated at 30% according to the National Center for PTSD www.ncptsd.va.gov. Separation anxiety hits every family of a deployed troop. In addition to stress reactions, some returning soldiers experience depression that culminates in suicide. According to a June 16, 2008 article in Time magazine, at least 115 Army soldiers killed themselves last year, including 36 in Iraq and Afghanistan. That's the highest toll since the Army started keeping such records in 1980.

Many soldiers returning from Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) struggle to reconnect with spouses who have had to cope with life's challenges on their own. Many fail in those attempts, and the divorce rate amongst the military community has risen from 9% to 15%. They also face the challenge of parenting children who have grown and changed. The increased risks of child abuse and neglect as well as domestic violence are issues that our veterans and returning troops face. In post-deployment reassessment data, researchers saw soldiers with anger and aggression issues increase from 11 percent to 22 percent after deployment.

Recognizing the impact of military service on the stability and functioning of families, Dr. Donald Cassata, Director of Adams County Department of Human Services, chose in November 2007 to partner with Family Tree, to provide support to active duty military personnel and veterans in the form of financial assistance and connection with community resources, including those focused on employment, physical and mental health, housing, clothing, and transportation. More recently, Arapahoe and Jefferson Counties have also partnered with Family Tree to help restore the stability to families who have risked all they had and all they were to serve and support us. Since 1976, Family Tree has provided a broad range of services and shelter to families and youth of metro Denver to overcome child abuse, domestic violence and homelessness. Family Tree is proud to now also serve military families with respect and honor, working with them to solve the unique challenges they face. Family Tree is committed to providing effective and successful programs that deliver demonstrable impact in the lives of our clients, and recently received the 2009 Governor's Service Award as the Outstanding Non-Profit Organization.

To qualify for the services offered by Family Tree's Military Family Assistance Program (MFAP), you must be active military or a veteran residing in Adams, Arapahoe or Jefferson County with dependent children. For more information on MFAP, go to the Family Tree website at www.thefamilytree.org.

John Baumann
Supervisor of Family Tree Military Family Assistance Program

Moose Robinson
Case Manager Family Tree Military Family Assistance Program – Jefferson County