



ANNUAL REPORT

20 19



Vermont National Guard
Family Programs



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MESSAGE TO OUR STAKEHOLDERS:



Mr. David Leonard
State Family Program Director

ONCE UPON A TIME....Isn't that how all stories begin? We wanted to tell many stories with this year's Family Programs Annual Report. When working with veterans, service members and their families, there are no fairy tales, but sometimes, there are happy endings. Each of our programs' has a story to tell-it might be one of perseverance, or about making a connection. But in all cases, we do what we do for our families.

In March, 2019, we lost one of our own-Ms. Laura Talley- Laura was our Budget specialist but she was so much more to us. She was our repository of all things Family Programs as she had been a part of this program since 2006. Laura was our confidante, colleague, and above all, our friend. She was what I would call "queen of the comeback", she was quick-witted and always had something funny to say to help us not take things too seriously. Laura was a USA veteran, retired from the Vermont Army National Guard at the rank of Master Sergeant and then joined Family Programs in 2006. The loss is deep, but her legacy lives on in her 3 children and many grandchildren and her friends at Family Programs. We miss her every day.



At the April, 2019, Military Family Community Network (MFCN) meeting, the network was privileged to receive a Certificate of Appreciation from the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Certificate was in appreciation for the network's dedication to strengthen the support of our Nation's Veterans and their families, caregivers, and survivors. It was signed by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Robert L. Wilkie.

Also in April, our Survivor Outreach Services Coordinator hosted a 2 day event at Jay Peak. This was unprecedented- a weekend for our Gold Star Families to come together and connect with other Gold Star Families in the spirit of support and shared experiences.

In June, 2019, our Vermont Veterans Outreach team presented 14 Vermont Service Medals and Certificates signed by Governor Scott to veterans living at Birchwood Health and Rehab in Burlington. With the assistance of the Vermont Office of Veterans Affairs and Birchwood Terrace Activities Coordinator, 14 Vermont veterans were honored for their service to their community, state and country. Additionally, a Vietnam combat veteran also received the Vermont Distinguished Service Medal which is awarded to Vermont Veterans who served in combat. It was truly humbling to be in the company of these veterans-the pride each veteran displayed when receiving their medal is something none of us will forget. Each veteran felt honored hearing their name called out and rightfully so, felt special that day.

On the pages following, you will read about the events I mentioned above and so much more. Let's begin,
ONCE UPON A PROGRAM....

VERMONT VETERAN OUTREACH



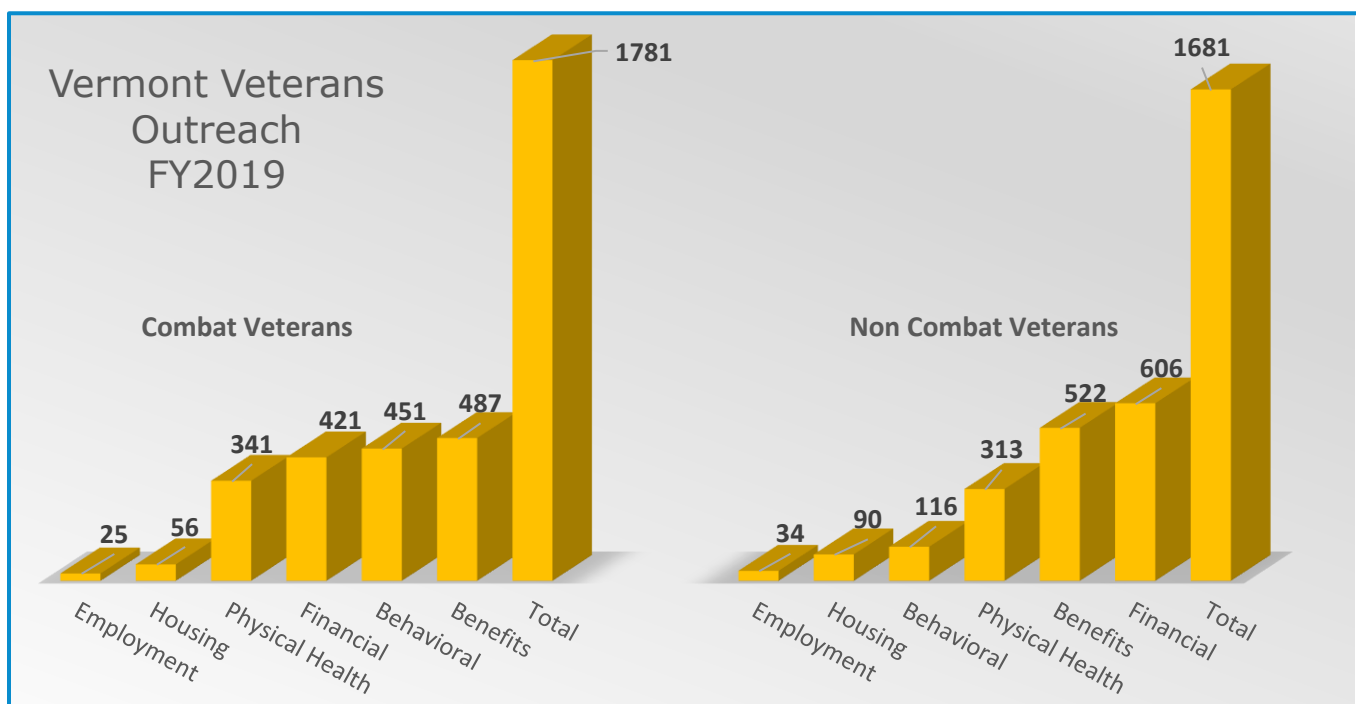
Andre Wing
VT Veteran Outreach Program Manager

Commitment.....Diligence....Perseverance.....

These adjectives describe the Vermont Veterans Outreach (VVO) Program. The efforts of the VVO team to connect with as many Vermont veterans-combat and non-combat-from the four corners of the state is unparalleled. The Outreach Specialists assess the issue(s) the veteran is experiencing and through a great deal of commitment, diligence, and perseverance-resolve the issue(s) to a positive outcome if possible.

Some of the cases the team encounters are heartbreaking as well as frustrating; not every veteran will accept help or feel they need it. The team works with end of life issues with respect and compassion. If there are medals to be given to a veteran facing the end of their life, the team will find them. Because every veteran, every service member should be recognized for their service to their state and country.

From humble beginnings of a five person team in 2007 to the nationally recognized program it is today is a testament to the commitment of those involved; past and present. The below graph also tells a story-the data the team collects on a monthly basis includes what we consider “core” issues: Financial, Behavioral, Housing, Benefits, Employment and Physical Health. It is interesting to note how our combat veteran clients’ top issue is benefits whereby our non-combat veterans struggle more with financial issues. For our combat veterans, if there is a service-connected injury, we want to be sure they are receiving the benefits associated with that injury. The non-combat veterans may not be eligible for the same financial resources as combat veterans. With this information, the team knows where to place their focus-where the greater need may be.



The vignettes below are called “success stories” because that is how the team sees every interaction, every referral, and every connection-an opportunity to affect a positive change if possible:

(Army) Non-Combat Veteran

Referred by a Congressional Delegation office. This Veteran was having significant health issues and was being seen at Dartmouth. He became extremely unhappy with his care and tried to enroll into the VA healthcare system himself.

Office of Veterans Affairs contacted me asking for assistance with this veteran because he had become very frustrated. I met with the Veteran and filled out a 1010EZ as well as requested his service records. Once we submitted his application to the eligibility office, he received a letter stating that he was enrolled in the VA in category 5, with no copayments because he was below the financial threshold.

A few weeks later the Veteran received another letter in the mail stating that he was not enrolled in the VA and that his social security number was wrong. I verified his social, he requested a new Social Security card and we pulled his tax records and what the IRS had for him- verifying his social in every way we could think of.

I went back to the eligibility office at the VA and the veteran's social was/is being used in CA by a veteran whose birthday was 2 months later than my veteran. Eligibility flagged the other veteran in the system and was able to bypass the double social and re-enroll my veteran back into the VA. He made copies of all documentation that we had and sent a letter to the “big VA” to explain the situation.

A month later the veteran had called me and was extremely happy. He said that everyone at the VA was so friendly, his doctors listen to him and that he has never received such great care before. He said that if it weren't for me constantly contacting the VA and Social Security he would have given up and stopped going to the doctor all together because he was so angry.

(Navy) Non-Combat Veteran

This veteran was referred to me by my Team Lead, the veteran's sister called the call center looking for assistance for him. He had a recent suicide attempt and was in need of assistance finding housing and establishing care upon his return from the hospital. The client had neglected his prior residence due to his depression and was unable to return to the apartment. He was temporarily residing with his sister in Island Pond but this would not be a suitable long term solution.

I contacted a social worker with the VAMC's HUD/VASH program for the Northeast Kingdom. I felt that due to the client's depression, multiple instances of homelessness, and multiple suicide attempts he was in need of intensive case management. I transferred the client's care from the MA VAMC to the White River Junction VA and established his care at the VAMC CBOC in Newport. He continued to see his Primary Care Physician in Island Pond as well as began Mental Health counseling there. I then contacted the client's prior landlord and obtained the total due for repairs to his prior residence. I referred the client to the Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging for their companion program.

I requested the reimbursement for the client's prior landlord from Friends of Veterans and it was approved. The client worked closely with the HUD/VASH program and found a sustainable apartment in Island Pond and Veteran's Inc paid for his deposit and first month's rent. I worked with the client on his disability compensation claim with the VBA as well. The client is now sustainably and securely housed, he is sustainable financially, and working with his mental health counselor and spending time with his companion from the council on aging.

Veteran – USN – Bay of Pigs

Client was referred by a neighbor as an aged Veteran who was dealing with isolation. Assessment of the client's situation uncovered numerous allegations of fraud and/or theft by the Veteran's family members and other individuals who would enter his residence against his will. The case was further complicated due to the Veteran repeatedly being hospitalized for severe medical issues. Through coordinated efforts by Vermont Veterans Outreach, Age Well, Burlington Police Department, Elderwood Care Facility, and numerous other agencies, the Veteran was appointed a guardian to investigate fraudulent activities and assist him with the sale of his home. Throughout the months of case work there were repeated efforts by individuals attempting to defraud the Veteran of the proceeds from the sale of his home. Finally, a room was secured at The Gazebo and the Veteran's real estate sale was transferred to his attorney to reduce the pressure placed on the Veteran. During a conversation with the Veteran at his new residence he was almost in tears as he explained what a relief it is to not have people breaking into his home anymore.

USA Vietnam Combat Veteran '68-'71

I have been working with this veteran for almost 3 years and have established a lasting friendship with him and his spouse. This veteran had been dealing with Myelodysplastic Syndrome (MDS) a type of cancer which started affecting his mobility. The driveway

leading to his home was turning into an ice rink during the winter months and I was concerned about him and his wife having to try and navigate getting up to his home. I spoke to him about working with some of our resources to help find financial assistance, which would cost \$1,042. We reached out to the Combat Veterans Motorcycle Assoc (CVMA) and War Veterans Assistance Group (WVAG). Both were able to split the cost to have his driveway repaired. We also reached out to the VA, specifically the Home Adaptation department, to see if we could get assistance with replacing his front stairs. We submitted an application to the VA, and within 2 ½ weeks we were approved for the \$6,800.

USA Veteran '82-'84

Working in partnership with Bayada Hospice, I was introduced to this veteran who resided at the Barre Gardens Health & Rehab in Barre, VT. This veteran was confined to his bed for the last 5 years after suffering a stroke. Right from our very first visit, I knew that he was a smart and very humorous person.

For the first couple of visits I wasn't sure how or if I was providing any kind of benefit to him. Until when I was walking down the hall, after my third visit with him, a nurse came up to me and said how much this veteran looked forward to my visits. After hearing this, our friendship really grew. He loved to tell jokes. Some over again at our next visit. I didn't mind and he still would make me laugh.

The one thing that I appreciated, was that no matter how much pain he was in, he would always ask how I was doing and how my family was doing. Unfortunately, I could see that his health was declining quickly. A little worse after each visit. My last visit with him was on 11 Jul 19. He wasn't coherent, but I was hoping he knew I was there, even if he could no longer speak. On 17 Jul 19 he passed away. My wife and I attend his funeral and met most of his family and friends. They all expressed their gratitude towards me, but I told them that it was my honor to have met him.



Veterans Recognition Birchwood Manor Burlington, VT June 2019

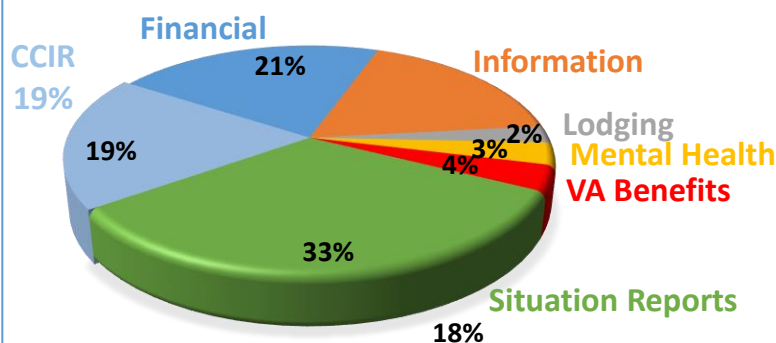
MILITARY AND FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER

The Vermont Military and Family Support Center operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year. The call center specialists include a combination of current Vermont National Guardsmen as well as Vermont National Guard retirees. This center is the first point of contact for soldiers and veterans needing immediate assistance.

The categories of calls noted in the graph to the right include financial, VA benefits, lodging, mental health and transportation. Due to changes to the Vermont Veterans Outreach program, calls for “transportation” assistance were zero for FY2019 because the Outreach Specialists can no longer provide transportation services.

Commander’s Critical Information Requirements (CCIR) are reports the Call Center completes which includes information required by Commanders to assist them in making informed decisions that directly impact the successful execution of military operations.

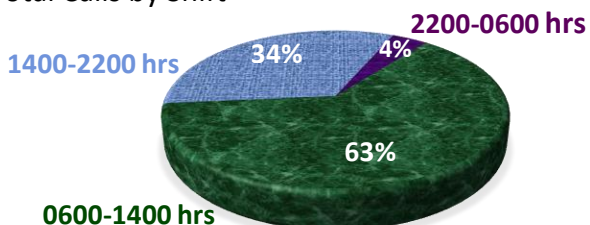
Military & Family Support Center: FY 2019 Categories



CCIR: Commander's Critical Information Requirements
Situation Reports: Updates and Follow-Ups

Each call that requires assistance generates a written situation report that is forwarded to the VTNG leadership and Family Programs staff. Family Programs’ staff will then provide the Call Center with updates and then a “final” update that closes the report. The goal is to always provide a positive outcome to the inquiry, which is not always possible.

Military & Family Support Center:
FY 2019 Total Calls by Shift





The Call Center has three shifts; this graph here shows the total percentage of calls taken during each shift for FY2019.



Each month the Call Center surveys callers for feedback on how their call/situation was handled. Most respondents report satisfaction with the professional manner in which the call was handled and the majority of callers feel that their needs were met. When we can connect a caller to a Family Programs ‘staff member who is able to provide the caller with a solution, we view that as a win. In some cases, callers do not qualify for assistance: asking for transportation assistance, service member doesn’t qualify for VA benefits, etc. Because the call center is able to connect the caller to Family

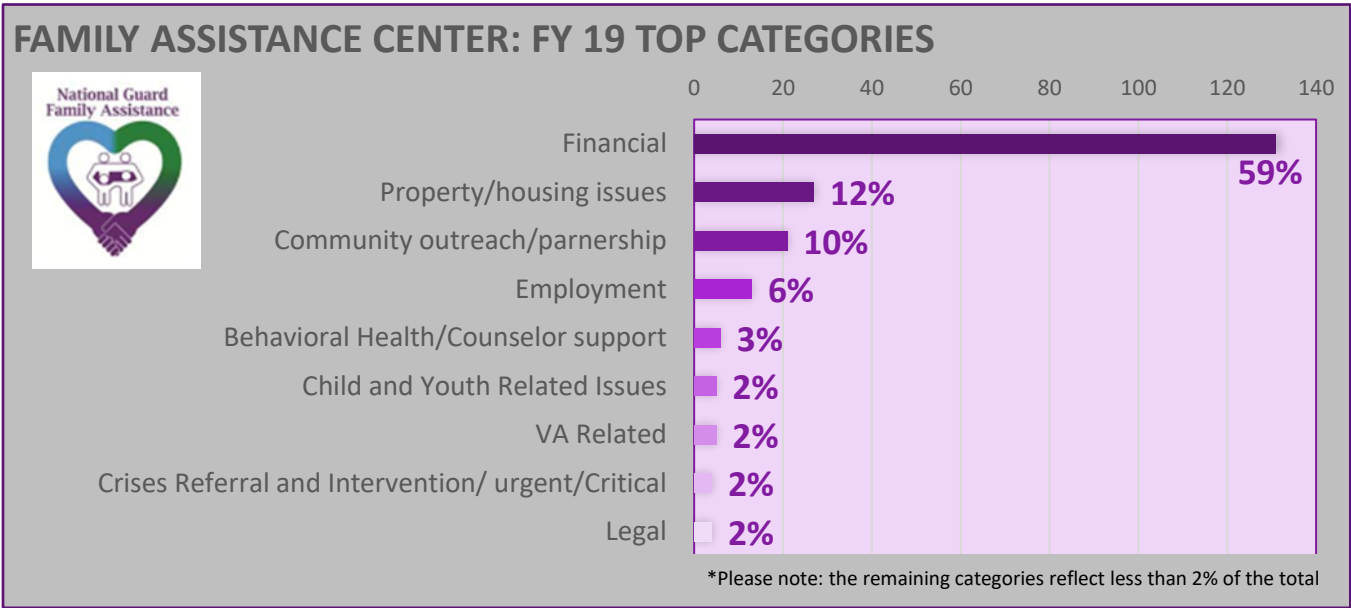
Programs, which we call a “warm handoff”, Family Programs can provide an answer to the caller, even if it is not what they want to hear.

FAMILY ASSISTANCE CENTER

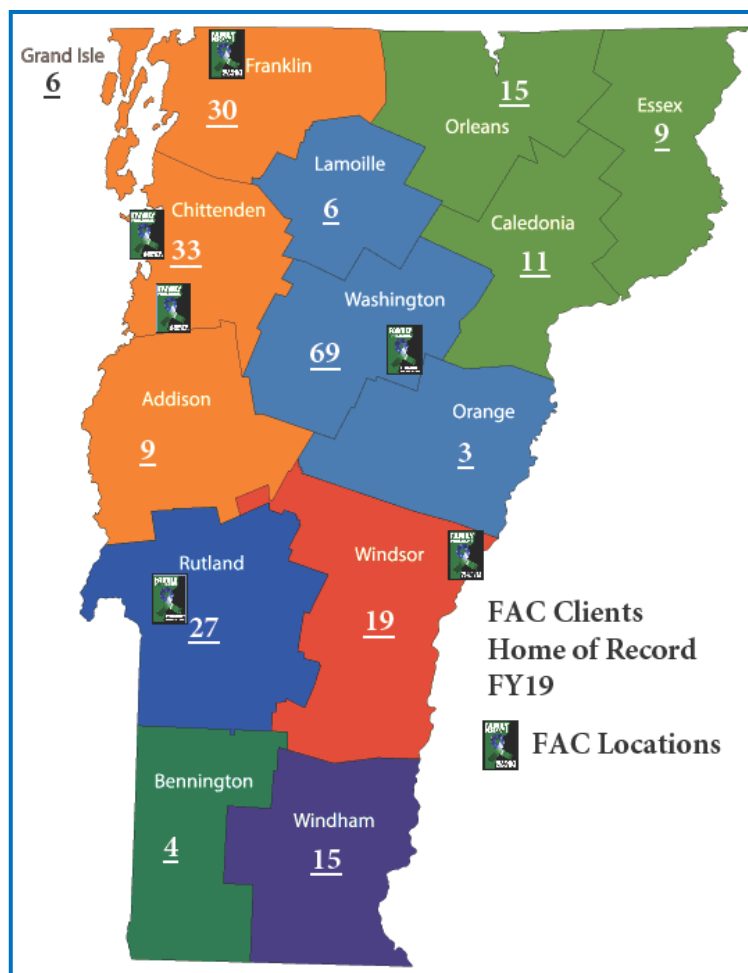


Brendan Richards
Family Assistance Center Coordinator

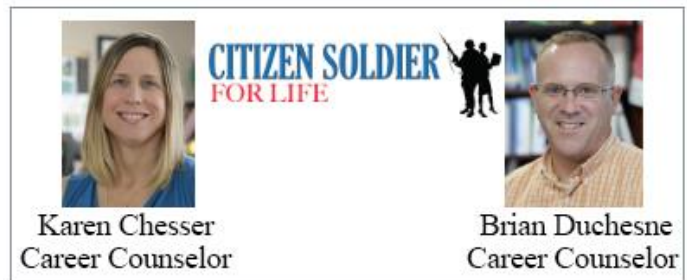
Our Family Assistance Center Specialists led the charge for identifying resources available to our veterans, service members and their families. With over 200 cases for FY2019, our specialists assisted our families with a diverse array of issues. As our resource and referral specialists, this team has the task of finding resources in an environment of ever-decreasing pool of resources.



The map to the right details the home of record of the clients assisted by our Family Assistance Center Specialists. With Vermont being mostly a rural state, keeping track of where our clients reside helps us see if there are any areas we need to outreach to more or identify gaps in the individual counties. The placement of the specialists in the VTARNG armories around the state assures a wide coverage to all counties.



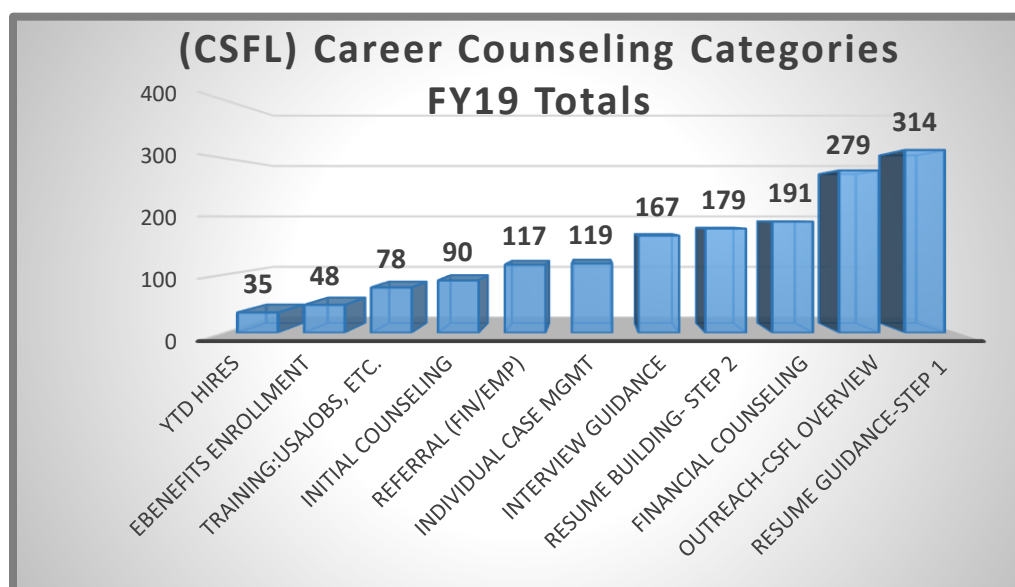
CITIZEN SOLDIER FOR LIFE CAREER COUNSELING



The Citizen Soldier For Life (CSFL) Program began in September 2016 with their primary focus on the new recruits entering into the National Guard. This population requires more “hands-on” assistance than say a seasoned service member or retiree. It was important to National Guard Bureau to assist this group in making the best choices-such as financial, education and employment to set them up for success in their National Guard careers. The Vermont National Guard was allocated their first Career Readiness Counselor located at Camp Johnson for fiscal year 2018. In FY19, due to our early success, another Career Readiness Counselors (CRC) was added to assist the southern part of Vermont.

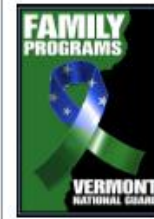
In addition to the new recruits, the CSFL Career Readiness Counselors assist service members, veterans, dependents and retirees with services to assist them where they are currently in their military careers and where they would like to be. Career Readiness Counselors provide a wide range of services aimed at assisting the service members, veterans, their families and retirees through education and training. Some of the services available through the CSFL program include: resume preparation and review, cover letters, job search, financial education and career transition.

The **Goal** of the CSFL program is to boost the resiliency of the Armed Forces by enhancing military and civilian career opportunities and developing financially literate, transition ready, and employable Service Members.



The graph to the left depicts the robust year our Career Counselors have had. The program assisted with **35** new hires! This number represents a wide range of military members/dependents able to secure new or better employment with the help of our Career Counselors. The program's story continues to pay dividends and provide invaluable services to those who will, do, and have served.

PERSONAL FINANCIAL COUNSELOR



Megan Sather
VT Veterans Personal Financial Counselor

Testimonial # 1:

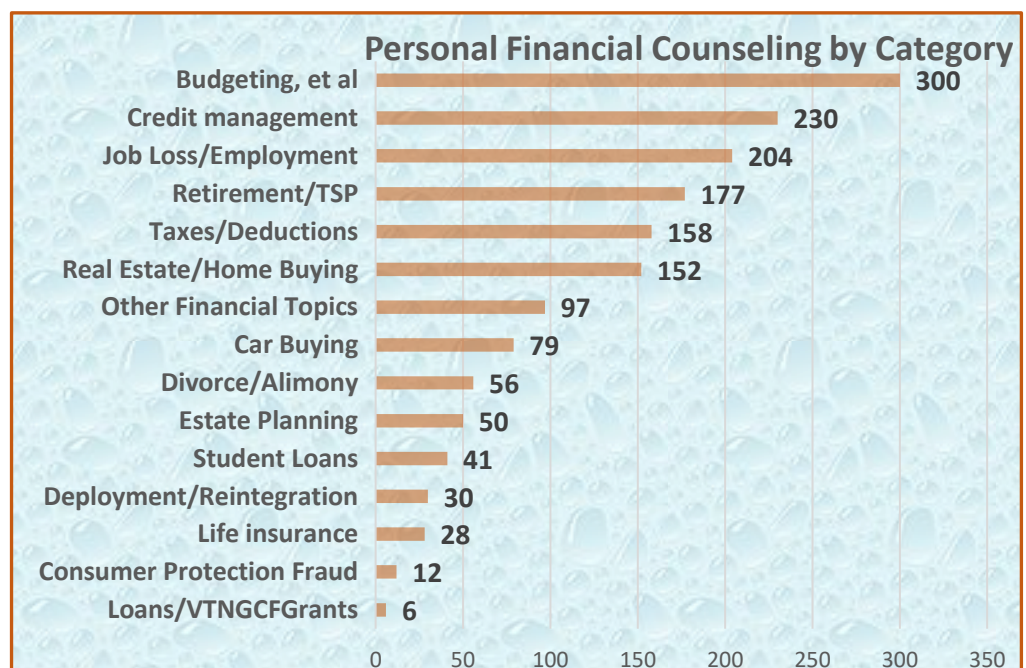
After going through financial struggles, I met with the Personal Financial Counselor (PFC) to go over my family's budget. I was thrilled to find out that the Vermont National Guard offered this free financial resource to military families. After meeting with the PFC, my family and I felt confident that we could make some minor spending changes to create a more sustainable budget. We are now able to not have to live paycheck to paycheck, save money, and even have a little fun money for a family outing now and then! We sincerely appreciate having access to these services and have spread the word to other service members about our success!

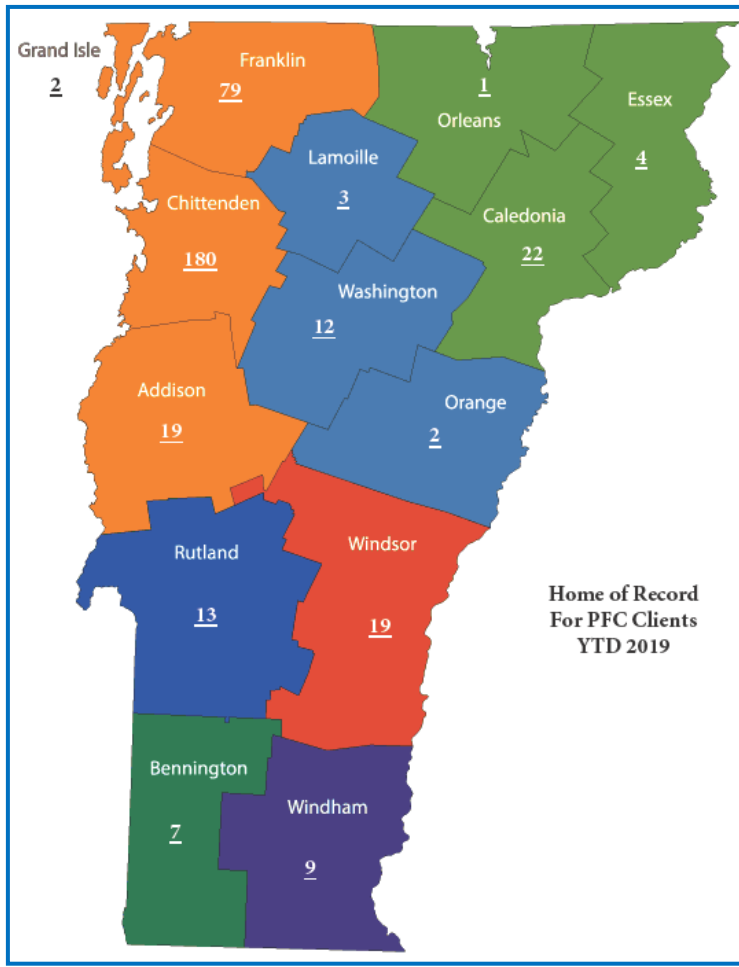
This story is echoed by many other families who were able to utilize our Personal Financial Services. As noted in the graph below, the number one category for services requested in FY 2019 was budgeting and all that entails. At first glance, a budget may seem like a simple thing, but for many of us this is a monumental task to accomplish on the path to financial freedom. Being able to access these services, to have a fresh perspective given on the effectiveness of our budgets is invaluable.

Testimonial # 2:

Met with a couple that wanted to see how making a dramatic career change would affect the household spending. We started off by creating a budget to see the minimum income needed to continue to support the household spending, and then seeing if the new lower paycheck would be enough to live on. By seeing the numbers down on paper, they were able to see places they could cut expenses to make the new income work and decided to move forward with the career change.

We saw an increase in the category of Job Loss/Employment from FY2018 to 2019. Many military families continue to struggle with “under” employment— one, two, sometimes three jobs are needed to make ends meet. But in the case above, working with our PFC led to an exciting new adventure for this family!



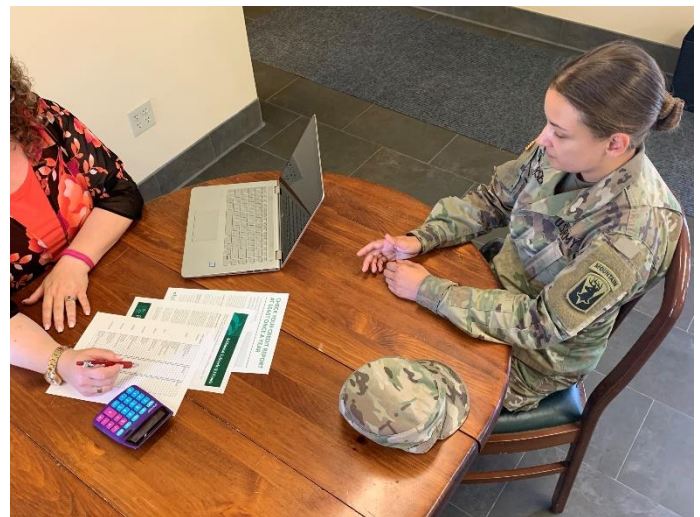


One of the benchmarks we analyze is connecting with our service members, veterans and their families residing in the more rural areas of Vermont. With Vermont being designated 65% rural ¹ or nonmetropolitan (nonmetro) areas. Nonmetro counties will include some combination of a. open countryside, b. rural towns (places with fewer than 2,500 people), c. urban areas with population ranging from 2,500 to 49,999 that are not part of larger labor market areas ²

The poverty rate for rural Vermont is 10.9% compared to 10.5% in the more urban areas. ³ Having a footprint in every single county in Vermont speaks to the reach and amount of travelling our PFC will go to connect with as many military families as possible.

Testimonial # 3:

Met with a Service Member who thought she was never going to get out of debt, it just felt too overwhelming. She started off by keeping all her receipts for a month of spending, then we were able to create a very accurate budget, seeing the numbers she was able to make some hard choices about her spending habits. It took a lot of hard work, but after a few months of following the new budget she was finally able to start making extra payments on her debt, build an emergency fund, and feels a lot less stressed about money.



¹ <https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/>

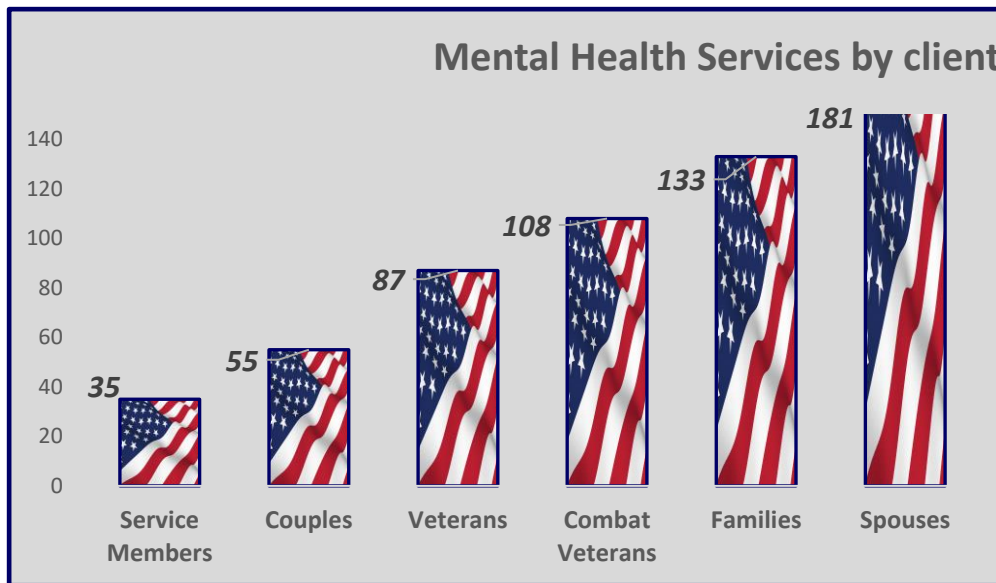
² <https://www.usda.gov/>

³ <https://data.ers.usda.gov/reports.aspx?StateFIPS=50&StateName=Vermont&ID=17854>

MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELOR

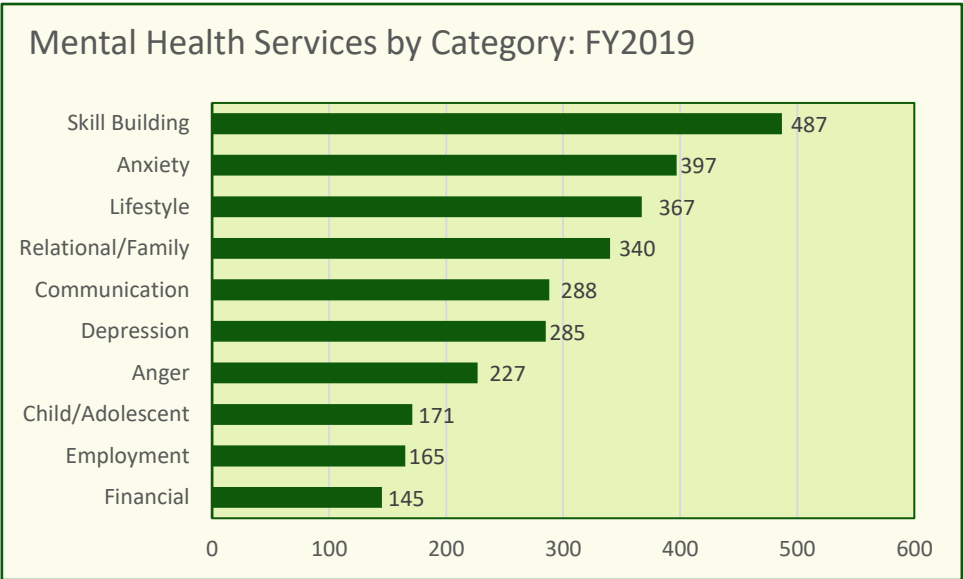


Charlene Caiano
Behavioral Health Services



Our Mental Health Counseling services has many objectives, a primary one is to offer Veterans and their families an accessible resource that doesn't feel threatening to them. This may seem a strange objective, but it is "known" within the military community that veterans are at times opposed to making an appointment with a counselor or mental health facility due to the fear that it may negatively affect their careers. Our trained Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor diligently works to provide non-medical/flexible counseling services with no documentation. Since there is no documenting, this helps Veterans and their family members feel less stressed and more comfortable expressing their issues without the anxiety of losing their jobs.

Through client word of mouth, Veterans and family members may seek assistance early which aids in taking away the stigma of asking for help. Additionally, this allows them to feel more accepting of seeing another trained professional, for example, a Chaplain or a medical technician. Other program benefits include flexible hours and the flexibility of meeting a military client on or off a military installation. While our counselor does meet clients in the traditional office setting, other locations could include a diner, a café or by phone. Traveling to rural areas in the State of Vermont supports many military members and families who may find it difficult to travel and may have a challenging time finding a mental health professional who practices in their area.

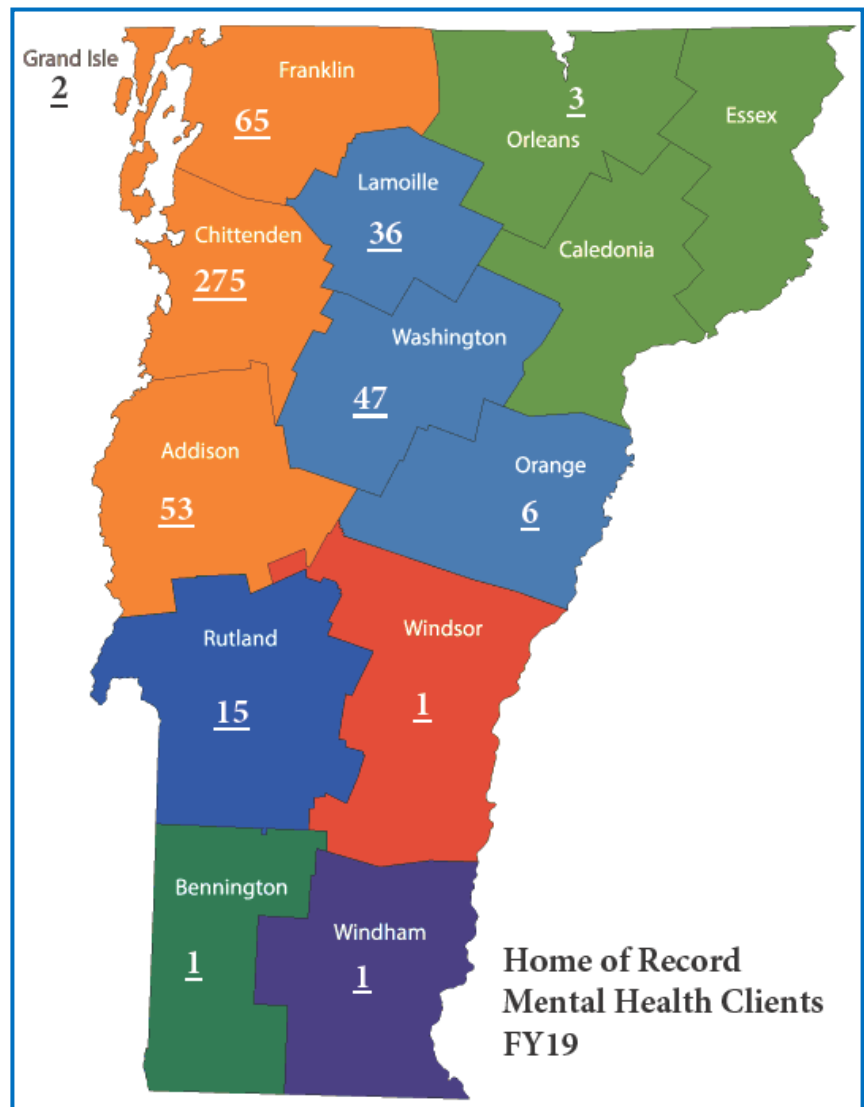


Outreach is another important component to this program’s story. Visiting armories and attending military events and meetings (Yellow Ribbon Events, MFCN meetings, Strong Bond Events, Survivor Outreach Service events, Quarterly Staff Meetings, SRP, Veterans Town Hall, specialty trainings) all around the State becomes an effective and beneficial component in educating the public, service members and leadership about this program. Briefing and presenting mental health topics is another important aspect when doing outreach. As is developing a practical awareness of military culture helps to build a more meaningful and trusting relationship making for a better connection and rapport. This leads to a strengthened therapeutic relationship helping military clients to move forward with the interventions given for their individualized plan leading to an enriched quality of life for these clients.

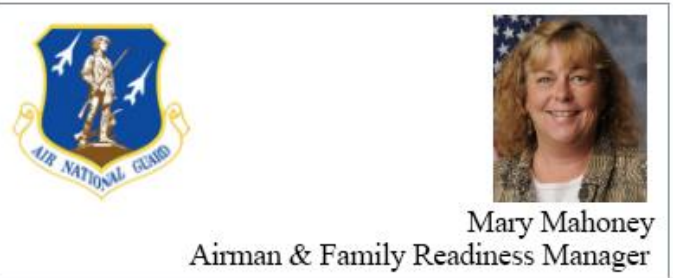
This program has positively impacted the quality of life of Vermont’s veterans, military couples and military family members in the following ways: increased problem-solving strategies, improved communication among military couples and families, better work/life balance, overall feeling better, reduced worrying and sadness, enhanced military and family readiness, and more effective parenting approaches.



While our Mental Health Counselor (MHC) has a dedicated space at Camp Johnson, our MHC actually is on the road most of the time. Sometimes our service members and families would prefer to meet away from “the flagpole” for privacy. The map to the right details the Home of Record by county only. Our MHC does not maintain any records and only notes what county the clients reside in. This is a very important metric we track given that Vermont is 65% designated rural by the USDA. We want to be sure we are accessible to our clients in areas where Mental Health Services may difficult to find.



AIRMAN & FAMILY READINESS OFFICE




The arrival of the F-35 to the Air National Guard Base has been the accumulation of many years of hard work, blood, sweat and probably a few tears as well. Having the F-35s stationed at our base is a tremendous honor and assures the 158 Fighter Wing a vibrant and relevant future. With just under 1,000 National Guard and Active Duty members and countless civilian support staff makes the Air National Guard an invaluable employer.



2019 was a transitional year as we said farewell to the last F-16 jets in April and welcomed the first two F-35 Jets in September. More jets were slated to arrive later in the year. In celebration of the arrival, the Airman and Readiness Office assisted in the planning and execution of an unprecedented Appreciation Day welcoming more than 3000 Airmen, families and community members to the air base in October.

The Airman & Family Readiness Office continues to be an active member of the Community Action Team: working together with other Wing agencies to resolve challenges our Airmen are facing. This office continues to work closely with the Director of Family Programs on many fronts including the semiannual Fort Drum Commissary Sales that take place every May and November.



Essential Air Guard Services for 2019

- 65** *Airmen Service Separation/Retirement Assistance*
- 64** *Outprocessing Airmen for F-35 Training*
- 19** *Attendees for Pre and Post-Deployment events*
- 12** *Air Families with a Holiday "Wrap-Around"*

This graph quantifies just some of the services this office provided in 2019. It runs the gamut of assisting Airmen transitioning out of the Air Guard to making sure our families have what they need at the holidays.

Another service detailed above is the 19 Airmen who attended deployment events facilitated by the

(Air) Yellow Ribbon Support Specialist. The events were both pre & post deployment Yellow Ribbon briefs for 13 airmen from various squadrons and another 6 airmen who deployed overseas with a Colorado unit. These "briefs" included presenters such as the Personal Financial Counselor, Veterans Outreach, Finance Office, Military OneSource, Career Readiness Counselor, the Chaplain and the Director of Psychological Health. Folders are always given to each member with information on the resources noted above as well as other community resources. While the 158th FW Air Yellow Ribbon Program may not have been as busy as past years due to the conversion to the F35, the Yellow Ribbon Support Specialist also assisted the Airmen & Family Readiness Program on a regular basis as needed.

CHILD AND YOUTH PROGRAM

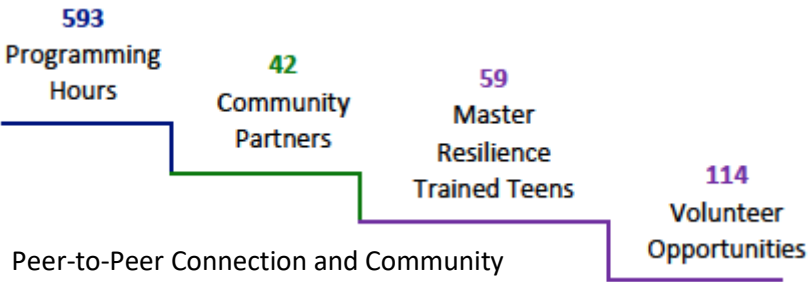
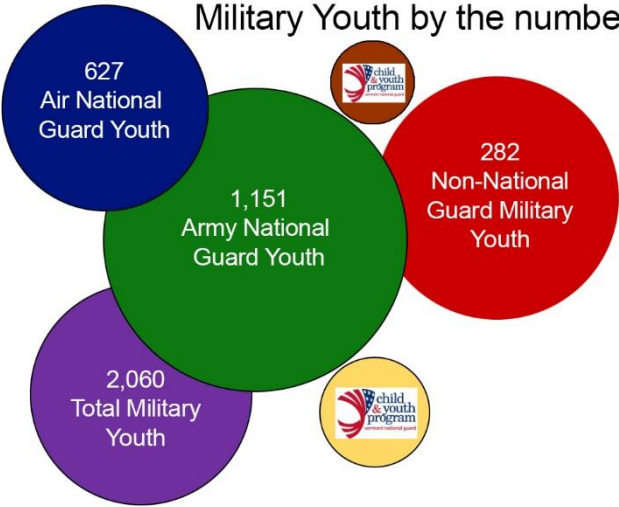


Brian Stoudnour
Lead Child & Youth Coordinator

Military kids serve too!

Our efforts aim to enable them to be 'Resilient & Ready' through deployment, training, and daily life. We strive to impart this on as many military youth as possible.

Military Youth by the numbers



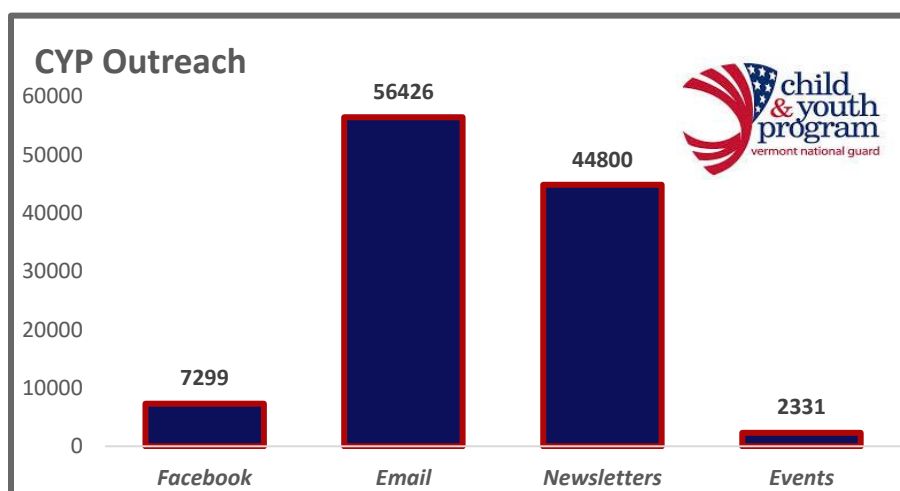
Peer-to-Peer Connection and Community Engagement are critical to the success of our Military dependent youth. As such, we integrate them into ALL our experiences.



Every year we celebrate April as Month of the Military Child. Family Program staff, VTNG leadership, families and, of course, our military youth, travel to the State house in Montpelier to hear the reading of the proclamation in the house chambers. We are then recognized by the State Representatives in the House Chamber and our military youth and families are asked to rise to be recognized by all the members and guests in attendance. The highlight for the military families is meeting with the Governor of Vermont and to witness the Governor signing the Proclamation officially making April Month of the Military Child!



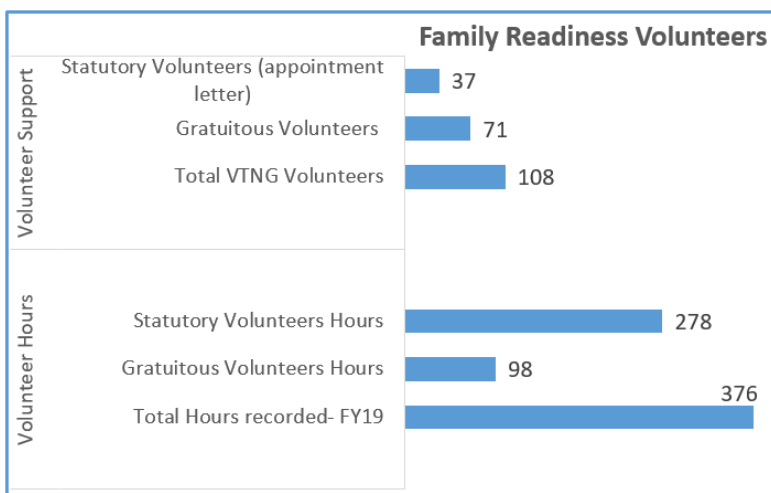
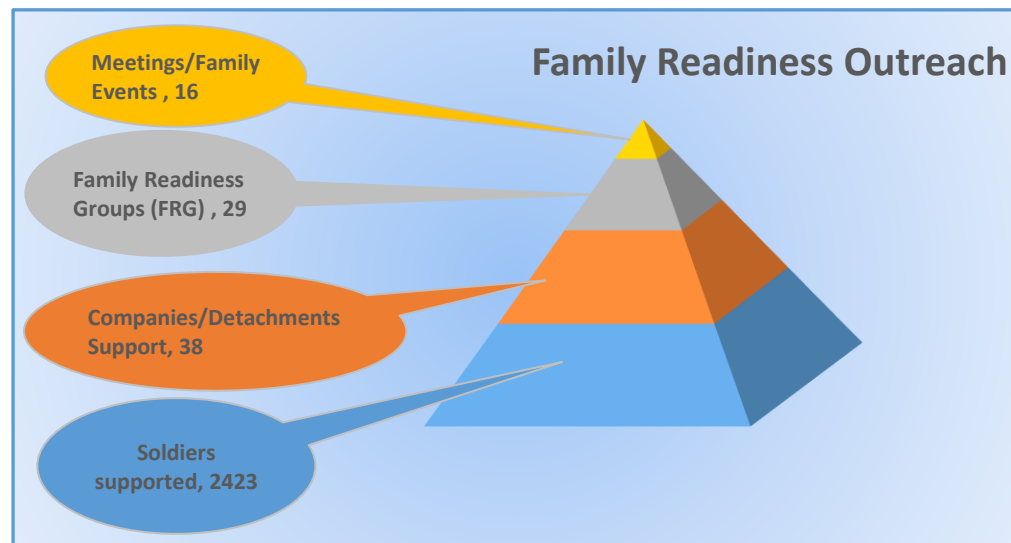
Our Child & Youth Program reaches out to our military families through a variety of communication channels. To be successful in reaching as many military youth as possible depends on our efforts as Vermont is very rural and our military youth are widely dispersed throughout the state. The Graph below details the outreach channels: Facebook, Email, Newsletters, and events as well as the number of efforts we have made.



FAMILY READINESS SUPPORT ASSISTANCE



Our Family Readiness Support Assistance Program added to their story of steadfast support of our soldiers, families and unit companies/detachments. This story included supporting 2423 soldiers, 38 companies/detachments, and 29 Family Readiness Groups as indicated on the attached graph.



The Family Readiness story is not complete without the tireless efforts of our volunteers. Our volunteers are spouses, siblings, military retirees and military community supporters. We could not do what we do without them. We have Statutory Volunteers who are appointed by our commanders for positions including FRG leaders, Treasurers, and Telephone Tree Coordinators. In addition to these amazing individuals, we have our gratuitous volunteers who stand ready to assist. What an amazing story!

MILITARY ONESOURCE



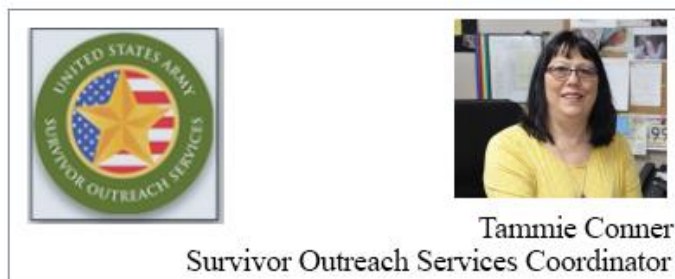
FRANKLIN & GRAND ISLE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP
 NAVY OPERATIONS SUPPORT SOLDIER READINESS CHECK
 MILITARY KIDS VERMONT COAST GUARD
 MILITARY FAMILY **Outreach** STATION SUPPORT
 COMMUNITY NETWORK RECRUITMENT SUSTAINMENT PROGRAM
 KITCHEN SPOONS & COMBAT BOOTS CROSSROADS

Military OneSource’s story is about connections-connections with community partners, local, state and national resources to provide our military families all the services they need to build their best MilLife. The above diagram shows just some of the diverse entities our Military OneSource Consultant has connected with in 2019. It is only when we cast a wide net that we capture a vast bounty. Military OneSource is a comprehensive DoD program that is constantly searching for more connections that will aid them in assisting their military families.

The graph to the right demonstrates the results of all the connections made in 2019. In addition to these numbers, our Military OneSource Consultant identified and initiated relationships with 14 new community, state, and national resources.

Military OneSource: Connections	
<u>Outreach:</u>	
403	Community Capacity opportunities supporting...
5300	Service Providers
<u>Events:</u>	
28	Supported Events with...
8900	attendees
<u>Education:</u>	
40	Small group informational sessions reaching...
600	service member and families

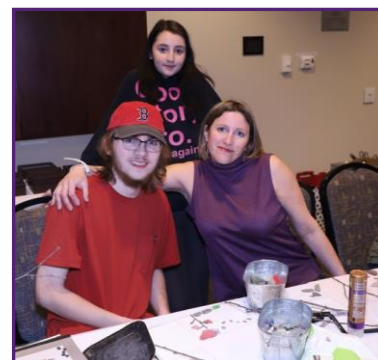
SURVIVOR OUTREACH SERVICES



"The bravest are surely those who have the clearest vision of what is before them, glory and danger alike, and yet notwithstanding go out to meet it." – Thucydides

Our Survivor Outreach Services is a story of sacrifice, duty and honor. We owe a great deal to those that serve our state and country-and most especially, those who have fallen. The Vermont National Guard Survivor Outreach Services cares for our Gold Star Families as well as our Families of the Fallen. Our survivors are spouses, children, parents and grandparents. It is critical to assist our survivors in navigating the world of benefits and services that are available to them.

This program is also a story of connections-not just in the first few years after the loss of the service member, but for many, many years afterwards. The Survivor Outreach Services Coordinator (SOSC) stays in touch with the families in person, email and through social media platforms. For example, to the right are pictures from the Vermont Gold Star Family Retreat that was held on April 27-28, 2019 at Jay Peak Resort. This retreat was coordinated and executed by our Vermont SOSC and was attended by 33 Gold Star family members as well as Vermont National Guard leadership.



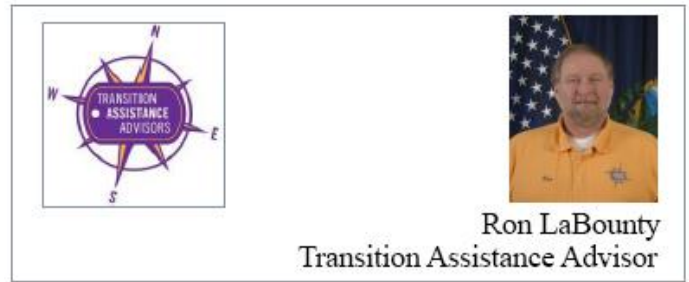
Activities included building a pebble art shadow box as well as a display from a local artist, Odale's display showed how food ties our lives together which included a picture that showed a box unopened-representing those who did not return from war.



The graph below details the top categories of services provided by our SOS Coordinator over the fiscal year 2019. There are two categories not mentioned on this graph due to the large numbers that would be difficult to view in graph form: Event information (196) and Holidays (176). As mentioned above, connections with our survivor families is so important- important for them to know they are still part of the military family. Our coordinator does that by making sure our families know of all upcoming events that will bring them together and hopefully help them make long lasting connections. The holidays can be very difficult for our survivors, so we make sure to include them in our festivities. For example, our families are invited to make pies at the Colchester American Legion, which are then donated. This is a wonderful way to emphasize that they are *never alone and never forgotten*.



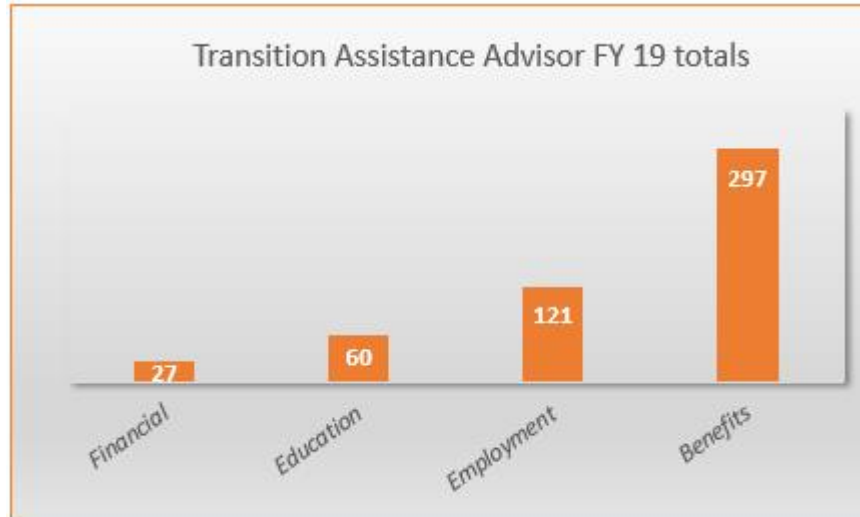
TRANSITION ASSISTANCE ADVISOR



Our Transition Assistance Advisor (TAA) Program plays a vital role for our service members who may be transitioning from Active Duty to National Guard or National Guard to retirement. Our Advisor connects our clients to the Veteran Affairs benefit and healthcare departments and walks them through the system to receive the services they have earned.

This program will see our service members through all the changes in their military service. Our TAA participates in our Yellow Ribbon events to brief and advise members and their families about available VA entitlements and available resources in their communities. In addition, our TAA will ensure that your health and well-being are taken care of. They will help coordinate activities for the Post-Deployment Health Reassessment event (a screening evaluation for any lingering physical and mental health conditions service members may experience at 3-6 months post-deployment).

This program also collaborates with many state headquarter groups such as Family Support, Chaplain Services, Department of Labor, etc. The TAAs are skilled and knowledgeable to create a “wrap-around” for our service members and their families.



As noted on the graph above, our TAA spends a great deal of their time making sure their clients have all the benefits they have earned. Often times, service members transitioning out of Active Duty or National Guard are still young and would like to continue to work in the civilian market. The number two service the TAA provided in Fiscal Year 2019 was employment services. This is where their relationship with the Vermont Department of Labor is so critical to our service member securing a position that is fulfilling after being in the military. It is not an easy transition, but our TAA makes the process easier as they are with the service member every step of the way.

MILITARY FAMILY COMMUNITY NETWORK: MFCN



The Vermont Military Family Community Network or MFCN as it is widely known started its story in 2005. As more and more Vermont National Guard members were deploying into combat zones, the VTNG leadership, Family Program staff, Center for PTSD and Agency of Human Services were concerned that we did not have services in place to assist these service members when they returned from their combat missions. By forming a network of many different support services, we were able to come together in collaboration and education for the benefit of Vermont's service members, veterans and their families. We took the time to identify the issues facing our military families, connect with resources that could help us bring issues to a positive outcome. We were able to identify gaps in service and overcome barriers to support services. Today, MFCN represents more than 140 diverse partners who greatly assist us in serving our military families.

For 2019, we were able to come together four times in person at our Northfield Armory. There were an average of 57 participants at each of these meetings-both in person, online and on the phone. All the meetings included a half hour "networking" time that allows everyone to connect, share business cards and network with the goal of providing support to Vermont's military families.



One of the highlights of 2019 for MFCN was the award given to this network on behalf of the Department of Veterans Affairs. They presented the Certificate of Appreciation for the network's dedication to strengthening the support of our nation's veterans and their families, caregivers, and survivors. This network of Family Programs staff, military service providers, community partners and stakeholders began in 2005 and continues to grow and diversify. We look forward to many more years of collaboration and support for Vermont's service members, veterans and their families.



KITCHEN SPOONS AND COMBAT BOOTS KS&CB:



In their sixth year, KS&CB continues to provide timely, relevant and excellent content in their monthly online webinars and in person workshops. For 2019, KS&CB provided 17 in person and virtual events that had more than 90 attendees. The top three topics of interest for this year were Financial Readiness, Veterans Benefits, and Resiliency on the HomeFront.

Before this fiscal year, the webinars were primarily facilitated by our Military OneSource State Consultant and our Family Readiness Support staff. For 2019, KS&CB smoothly transitioned to guest speakers who supported 90% of the webinar-content, briefings, etc. This allowed for more collaboration and input from “subject-matter experts”.



The staff at Kitchen Spoons & Combat Boots have provided recorded sessions of your favorite webinars. If you missed one of the webinars, you can tune in and download episodes that are of interest to you. Below is the link to the VTNG Family Programs website and the SecondTIME Around recordings:

<https://www.ngfamily.vt.gov/Programs-Services/Kitchen-Spoons-Combat-Boots/>

The in-person workshops are open to all branches of the military to include service members, families, volunteers, community partners and even the occasional canine supporter!

Below is a photo of the Picasso-in-the-making artists holding their work of art! What an awesome way to spend an afternoon.



YELLOW RIBBON PROGRAM - ARMY

Yellow Ribbon or the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP) as it is officially known, was created in 2008 by the Department of Defense for the National Guard and Reserve. Because of the geographically disperse nature of the National Guard and Reserve, this program sought to bring together service members and families with the military support networks in their states.

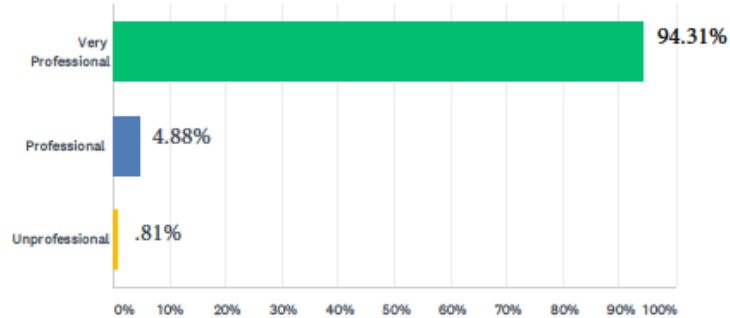
For fiscal year 2019, the Vermont Army National Guard held three Yellow Ribbon events, hosting a total of 168 service members and families. Without a doubt, deployments impact the children of deployed parents the most. The pictures here tell the story much more than words ever could.



HOW ARE WE DOING?

One benchmark we set in 2015 was our “How are we Doing?” survey link in all of our emails and correspondence with clients, community partners and stakeholders. It was important to us to find out from our client how we were really doing-did we meet or exceed their expectations? Were we knowledgeable and professional? The story our graphs show is the skillful staff within Family Programs. The results show how we go above and beyond consistently and deliver the very best service we can. That is what our clients deserve.

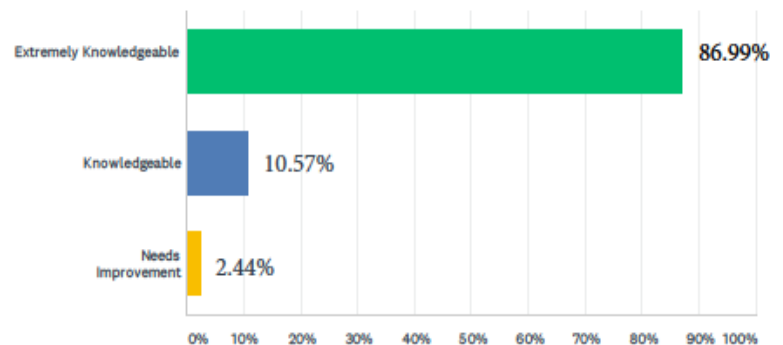
Please rate the professionalism of the representative:



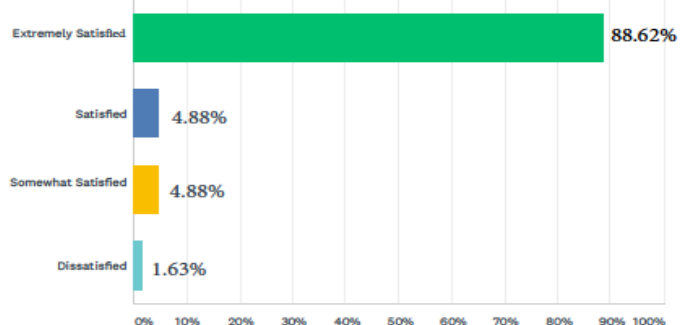
“VT Outreach has supported several of our VET clients at BAYADA Hospice - professional, consistent, knowledgeable. Go to people.”

“I am extremely grateful for all the opportunities the Vermont National Guard Child & Youth Program has offered to us over the years. I have watched my kids grow into confident leaders and active/positive community members. Lastly the Vermont National Guard Lead Child & Youth Coordinator is awesome!”

Please rate the knowledge of your representative:



What is your overall satisfaction with your customer service experience:



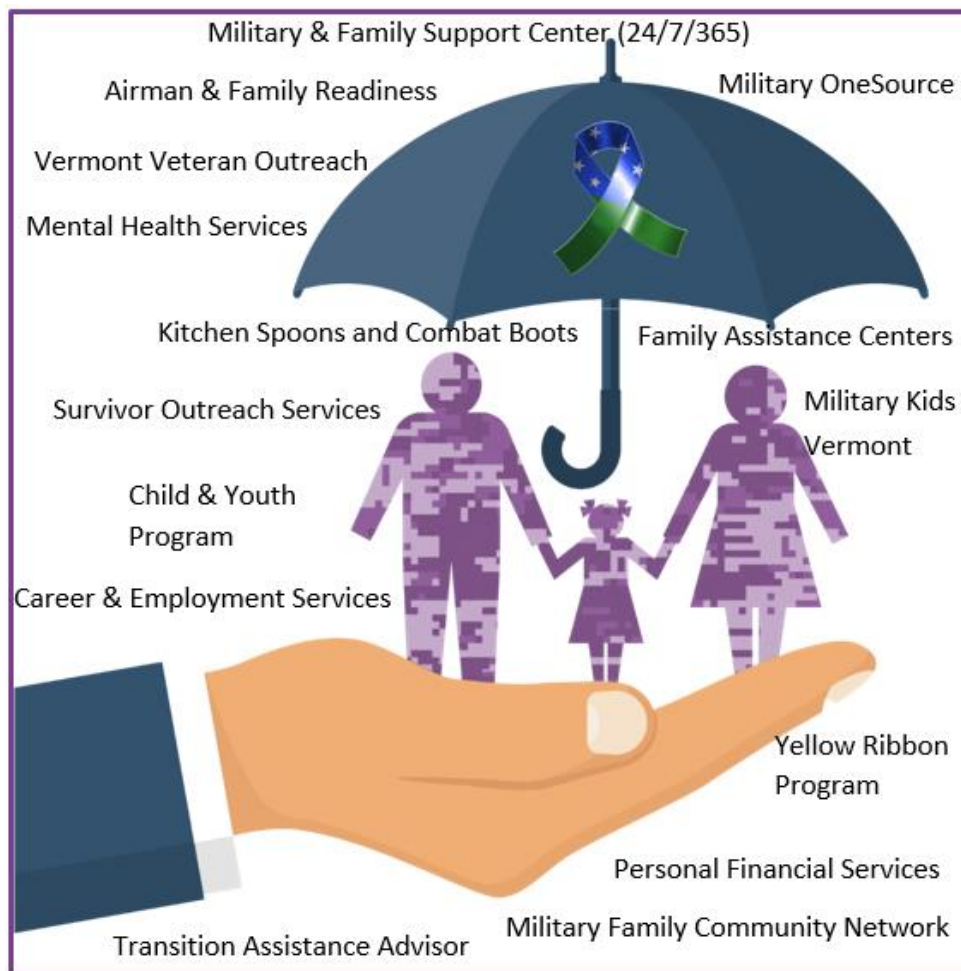
“Thank you for keeping us informed. It makes a difference with my son so far away from home.”

“I will go back and use the financial service yearly.”

How are we doing? Please let us know: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/VT-FP>

CONCLUSION:

We thank you for reading our stories. Hopefully we have portrayed our programs as robust and diverse-but with a common goal: to take care of our veterans, service members and their families. When we think of Family Programs, we think of the graph below. The umbrella represents Family Programs -covering down on our families with all of our different programs. In addition, there is a saying we use-we are purple; Army is green, Air Force & Navy is blue, and so forth. We are purple means we provide services to all branches of service during all phases of their military lives. We are honored to serve those who will, do, and have served-our service members and their families.



Family Programs website www.ngfamily.vt.gov



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