

# Community Clergy Training Program (CCTP)



## Module 4 Resources Building Community Partnerships

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*When all is said and done, the real citadel of strength of any community is in the hearts and minds and desires of those who dwell there. ~ Everett Dirksen*

The Community Clergy Training Program (CCTP) has steadfastly supported the building of partnerships by clergy and others in rural communities for the support of and assistance to Reserve and National Guard warriors and Veterans and their families. Ideally, “others” would include community leaders in government, health care, Veteran organizations, non-profits, and business and any others who are committed to serving warriors. Working together, these leaders can provide the wisdom and energy that will result in increased welfare and quality of life for our warriors.

The importance of effective partnerships to benefit Veterans in rural areas cannot be overstated. Many hearts, minds and hands working together can do so much more than individual effort. The CCTP has partnered closely with the VA/Clergy Partnership for Rural Veterans, a pilot project started in Arkansas that builds grass-roots, community-based partnerships in rural areas to help Veterans and their families. Most of the tips below come from lessons learned in real-life efforts to build partnerships in several states through the VA/Clergy Partnership.

This section of the toolkit provides a rationale for the establishment and maintenance of community partnerships, reasons why congregations in houses of worship can be the backbone of such an effort, and a suggested approach to establishing and maintaining community partnerships.

### 1. *Why are communities important to reintegration?*

No man (or woman) is an island, existing independently from other humans. Warriors grow up in communities and shape and are shaped by their communities. Communities along with families, as remembered, are the expectations that warriors return to after combat. When warriors return, there is often conflict between their expectations of their communities and the realities they experience because both communities and warriors have changed. Yet

beyond that conflict, there is an enormous potential for support, love and healing within and by communities. The response of a community can go a long way to help warriors see that they can adapt in and thrive in their chosen community despite the changes they have experienced. Or communities can teach warriors that they no longer belong. “I am accepted, fit in and belong” or “I am no longer welcome here”. Certain aspects of mental health are determined by the response of communities as perceived by the warrior. Healthy community response is one essential factor in a healing for those returning from combat.

## 2. *Why are houses of worship a foundation for community efforts?*

Houses of worship can be a foundation for community efforts. While reintegration is everyone's responsibility, houses of worship can have a particularly important role in warrior reintegration into the community. There are several reasons.

- Congregations have a history with the warriors. They often know them and their family histories and can be better able to spot changes in returning warriors and identify what might help.
- Warriors tend to be open to support from congregations they return to.
- Family members are often active in congregations even when warriors are not. Said one Iraq war Veteran, “If you want to get to me, start loving my family. I'll come around and find out who you are.”
- Religious communities can be a “safe place” of grace and acceptance.
- Congregations can offer warriors a place of service and care for others.
- Warriors, who have lost the closeness of fellow warriors upon return, can gradually recover aspects of belonging and comradeship in religious congregations.
- Congregations share common and healthy values.
- Faith communities are intergenerational. This characteristic opens the door for supportive and cooperative relationships among Veterans of different eras. The strong sense of esprit de corps found among Veterans can establish a unique support system for returning warriors. It can be the beginning of belonging once again.
- Houses of worship have congregations that include leaders from all community groups that should be included in effective help for returning warriors: government, business, non-profits, Veteran service organizations, health care and others.

Religious congregations have a number of characteristics that offer a unique potential for helping warriors who face the confusion and frustrations of returning to their communities.

3. *What should be considered in forming and maintaining community partnerships?*

There is no “one-size-fits-all” plan for forming and maintaining community partnerships, no set of clear steps or rules to be followed. Forming community partnerships is a creative process that requires sensitivity to people and their preferences and characteristics of the community including cultural aspects, resources and other unique qualities. Nevertheless, some guidance can be given through describing some factors that have been effective in past efforts. Five tips related to these factors are provided below.

Form relationships first.

Relationships of trust and mutual interest are critical factors in successful community partnerships. Often it is the people who care and are excited about your effort who will form the start-up nucleus of your effort. “People don't care about how much you know, 'til they know how much you care.” Heart is critical in all start-ups.

How do you find such people? Meeting with them and listening is the key to finding. That often starts with a meeting, training session or other gathering during which there is time for all present to communicate and discuss. Use your time in the meeting to identify several individuals who appear particularly motivated to engage in care for warriors. Then meet with each individual. Again listen to identify particular interests of each individual and emphasize the unique contributions that individual can make. Minimize email contacts. At this stage, the formation of a trusting and committed relationship is what is sought. That is best accomplished through personal contact.

Persistence and patience are important. Be willing to have your emails or phone calls not responded to. Be willing to tolerate some no shows at meetings. Continue making contact with each individual to communicate, exchange information and encourage. Show up at their events as well as inviting them to yours.

Bring everyone to the table.

Invite and welcome anyone to your meetings who would like to come. That will often mean people and resources that you did not know existed, or you did not think would be interested. All kinds of resources will emerge that will widen your net of resources and ideas.

Start out with brainstorming with your core individuals and with whomever else you can pull together. Set a consistent meeting place and time as soon as possible. Remember that small is good. Five people meeting consistently once monthly will be more productive than fifty people eating donuts at a training session!

Plan a simple outreach or educational event as soon as possible to get people working together on a common project and emphasize that this is not “just another meeting.”

Encourage diversity. Plan to get at least one committed member of the clergy, a warrior and family member of a warrior, a business or government leader, and a mental health provider. Male, female, old, young, racial diversity, religious diversity. Diversity increases perspective and creative thought.

Be aware of the fact that diversity of perspectives can bring tension. It is important that a clergy/community partnership be open to all faith perspectives. Those in your group may be cooperating with certain other faith communities or other mental health providers for the first time. Be sensitive to that and emphasize that the partnership is solely about extending support to Veterans and their families. It is not about promoting any one church, faith perspective, or mental health provider. This has usually proven to not be an issue. Most of your core group understands the mission and is willing and eager to cooperate with like-minded individuals and organizations who care. You might also remind your group that although they themselves might not benefit from a certain resource of faith group, there is going to be some warrior or family member in their community who needs that group or resource.

Pay special attention to collaboration between clergy and mental health professionals.

Respectful and trusting collaboration between clergy and mental health professionals is essential to effective services in your community. You have certain things going for you in encouraging that collaboration. First, both clergy and mental health professionals have the same goal in mind: the well-being and abundant life of those they serve. Second, both live in the same community. They work and play with the same people. Third, both clergy and mental health professionals are attempting to help others with many of the same difficulties: depression, addiction, guilt and shame, homelessness, unemployment, marital or family problems, and meaning or purpose in life.

But there are also barriers to collaboration. Many barriers are formed by lack of knowledge and trust. For example, both clergy and mental health professionals may see themselves as having different belief systems from one another. While that may be true to an extent, the belief systems are often not as extreme as they are believed to be. Also, both clergy and mental health professionals may lack knowledge of the other's role and functions. Certain assumptions can be made that hinder collaboration (e.g., “They only pray for healing!” or “They'll just medicate my congregant into oblivion!”). Finally, if there has been limited past experience, clergy and mental health professionals simply may not know each other personally or may not know how to collaborate.

Approaches to increasing collaboration should begin with relationship. First, clergy and mental health professionals must be brought together and encouraged to get to know one another. This

step is the beginning of forming a trusting bond. Many partnerships have hosted “pew and couch” lunches in which 5 clergy and 5 mental health providers are brought together for lunch for no other agenda or reason than to try to get to know each other and their perspectives. This can lead to the building of trust and cross-referrals between faith communities and VA/mental health providers. Additionally, education about the roles and functions of each is important. Finally, encouragement to work together, at first on simple things, can lead to better understanding and trust.

#### Focus on small things rather than big things.

Big things: dinners, welcoming events, celebrations, Veterans Day parades.

Small things: cutting a warrior’s grass while he’s on deployment, taking food to a military spouse for his family, showing up at a child’s baseball game and cheering him when his dad or mom can’t be there.

Big things do provide awareness and are appreciated. These types of activities can involve both clergy and others in ways that support collaboration. They have an important role. However, small things that satisfy personal needs are the things that are most often remembered. They are also the things that are most responded to at a later time. That’s because these “small things” can form the foundation of new personal relationships of trust and caring.

#### Gain and maintain pastor involvement.

This can be difficult because of the busyness and multiple priorities of pastors. There are so many demands on the time and energy of pastors that regular attendance at warrior-related events or meetings can be daunting. Consider inviting lay persons from congregations. This could include retired social workers, nurses, business people, Veterans, or any others who have the time and passion for warrior issues.

Pastoral involvement can also be encouraged with a focus on moral injury or other spiritual issues of importance to warriors. Issues like guilt and shame are often arenas where clergy are the experts, not mental health providers. Introducing these Veteran issues to faith communities through seminars or workshops can demonstrate to clergy that this partnership with mental health is a two-way street where both groups need each other and benefit from collaboration. Active engagement in discussion with clergy leading the conversations can build clergy interest, trust, and commitment to your process.

One other tip in developing community partnerships is simply to acknowledge that you don’t need all the clergy of a community. A helpful motto is, “We’re looking for a few good clergy!” Ultimately, you want to find a few members of the clergy who are very committed to warrior issues and their welfare. These few will form the nucleus of your team along with a few mental health providers and others as mentioned above.

### Find the warriors who need help.

We know that warriors in rural communities have significant needs for help. About one in five returning warriors have PTSD or depression six months after their return. Warriors with needs, however, are not always easy to identify and connect with. The self-reliant characteristic of military culture and the avoidant characteristic of PTSD can ally against a warrior, supporting a failure to report troublesome issues.

Such warriors have hidden in what some have called “civilian camouflage”. Often without our knowing it, they live in our communities, shop in our stores, send their kids to the same sports as our kids and attend our houses of worship. So how do we identify these warriors hidden among us?

There is no guidebook on finding your hidden warriors but there are some tips based on what others have found.

- Events to honor warriors: An event that acknowledges service to one's country will sometimes draw out a warrior into the company of other warriors.
- Participate in other Veteran organization meetings and events. Veteran service organizations, Veteran Coalitions, and Veteran service providers exist in every state. Many of those active in efforts to support other warriors are in need of support and resources themselves.
- Coffee shop time for warriors: Some communities have advertised and set aside a regular time and place that allows only warriors to meet with other warriors.
- Networking with groups: Network with other groups such as VA, community mental health or other health clinics, Veteran Service Organizations, etc.
- Worship: Mention warrior issues during your worship service and see who shows an interest.
- Ask: Ask your congregation who is a Veteran/warrior and who is a family member of a Veteran/warrior.
- Activities of service to warrior families: Warriors' family members provide the most support and are still the number one means of finding Veterans who need help. Offer services to the families of warriors. Child care for military spouses, educational activities for spouses and children related to the military, support groups for family members. Be creative in offering services related to family needs. When you see family members of warriors in your community or house of worship, simply ask how they're doing.
- Places where warriors go: Think outside of the box. Truck dealerships, tattoo parlors, video game rental stores, gun shows, bars, sporting events.

- Times that warriors choose: Many warriors choose to do their shopping late at night to avoid crowds. Think about businesses that operate 24/7 such as Wal-Mart or certain restaurants or bars.
- Accessing warrior networks: Warriors are usually a part of an informal network. They know one another upon meeting and periodically will meet again. That network can be very helpful in identifying warriors. Truly help one or two and they will come and find you when they are in need.

#### 4. *The Vision: A Reminder of Why We're Here*

There exists a member of the clergy with a heart for the care of warriors in a rural community. He or she calls together friends, colleagues and others with like hearts to learn more about warriors' needs and to choose new ways to serve them in that community. Those who are called come together regularly, watch training events via the Internet, discuss the information in the video presentations, and explore together the unique challenges and opportunities in their rural setting. Through the time together and the discussions, bonds of common passion and purpose for warriors are created. Those bonds of common purpose serve as a new foundation for community ministry. Partnerships among community Veteran resources are formed. In that rural community, there is a reduction of broken marriages, fewer problems for the children of military families, lower levels of substance abuse, less homelessness, improved physical and mental health and a low incidence of suicide. Clergy and communities have taken back their ancient roles of healing.