The Military Family Research Institute (MFRI) at Purdue University continues to reach across boundaries and find new ways to support military-connected families. Nationally, regionally, and locally, we work to use data and research to build impactful policies, programs, and practices. We aim to connect organizations seeking to help these families with the results of rigorous, peer-reviewed studies and, through our own collaborations, help others use this ever-growing body of research to inform important policies, practices, and programs. Marrying research with practice creates the kind of effective programs that military-connected families deserve. We call that **RESEARCH WITH IMPACT**.

In this report, we document our activities and accomplishments during 2015 and 2016. We detail our impact on those who provide front-line services to military and veteran families, as well as our work to influence national policy impacting military and veteran families, and our promotion of the use of evidence-based information to create change. MFRI’s initiatives address behavioral health, higher education, mobilization of local communities, and strategic planning for cross-sector collaborations in future conflicts.

### CHANGING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

#### NATIONAL

**Training providers, expanding services**

**Growing.** In 2016, a collaboration between MFRI and the National Guard brought Star Behavioral Health Providers (SBHP) to Oregon, home to more than 12,200 National Guard and active duty forces and 11,700 spouses and children. According to the director of the Oregon Army National Guard (ORANG) psychological health program, “SBHP meets the needs of Oregon to have an increased selection of military-informed community providers, as well as creating a way for these resources to be consolidated for easy review and referral. Their partnership with the Center for Deployment Psychology (CDP) ensures the collaborators and providers that the trainings will be of the highest quality and in accordance with the latest evidence-based practices.”

SBHP also was launched in Utah in 2016, thanks to a grant awarded to the American Association of Suicidology and the National Center for Veterans Studies by the Department of Defense (DoD) Suicide Prevention Office. This collaboration expanded the role of the SBHP registry to Utah and other states, and represents the ability to reach a population of more than 150,000 veterans, 16,000 service members, and their more than 27,000 family members. This means that during the 2015-2016 grant cycle, SBHP’s development in Oregon and Utah enabled SBHP to reach nearly 550,000 more military-affiliated people. During 2015 and 2016, SBHP provided training to 4,078 individuals across 7 states. This represents more than 38,800 hours of training of civilian providers.

#### EXPANDING OPTIONS  New SBHP client military affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From Dec. 2015 to Nov. 2016, 350 providers reported accepting 1,230 new military-affiliated clients — good news for families, since the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) does not serve them.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>408</strong> veterans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>370</strong> service members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>408</strong> family members</td>
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*Numbers do not equal 1,230 since some respondents did not report affiliation category.
Sustaining. We are very pleased that many SBHP states are finding ways to sustain the program with a variety of funding sources, including state governments. Our partners provide funds to MFRI for technical assistance, helping to support our involvement in the program. In an even more important step toward sustaining attention to the training of community-based providers, SBHP was an impetus for national legislation that provides special designation for civilian community mental health providers who demonstrate, either through training or experience, a strong knowledge of military culture and evidence-based therapies to treat issues that the population commonly faces. The legislation also requires DoD to maintain a regularly-updated online registry that helps those seeking help to find it. This law reflects MFRI’s significant impact on improving the lives of military-connected families.

Transforming. We continue to work on ways to increase access to training while limiting costs and maintaining quality. With CDP, MFRI is working on virtual world technology and evidence-informed, distance-learning platforms to expand training opportunities. These are now being made available to SBHP registry providers at far lower cost than face-to-face trainings, but still with high quality and personal contact. This represents another step towards transforming DoD systems for ensuring that providers are well-prepared to serve military and veteran families.

REGIONAL/LOCAL
Close to home, MFRI continues to work to strengthen the behavioral health infrastructure in Indiana. We are continuing to train providers, maintain the SBHP registry, and collaborate closely with the Indiana National Guard to ensure that service members, veterans and their families learn about the providers who are ready to serve them.

CHANGING EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

NATIONAL
New opportunities for military-connected women
Data show that women student veterans experience a unique configuration of challenges. These include struggling to pursue higher education while meeting personal responsibilities, feeling isolated and misunderstood as female veterans, and facing challenges to receive the services they need. Although women veterans may experience unique challenges, we also know that they have great potential for academic and career success — which we aim to help them achieve. Based on these data, MFRI created the Focus Forward Fellowship in 2016, the first program of its kind in the nation.

The inaugural 2016 cohort consisted of 14 women veterans from 10 states and 13 institutions. MFRI brought the Fellows together in Indianapolis for a three-day residential experience. This is being followed by an online learning community that is continuing throughout the 2016-2017 academic year to sustain the cohort and help the women to achieve academic and career success.

Since SBHP’s launch, more than 8,000 participants have received more than 80,000 hours of training.

The number of SBHP participants has doubled since 2014.

More than 85% of trained providers use program materials in their work with clients.

The military health care infrastructure in participating states has grown by 240 providers.

During 2015-2016, SBHP providers treated more than 2,000 military-affiliated clients.

The Community Provider Readiness Recognition Act was inspired in part by SBHP.

SBHP has now been recognized with significant community engagement awards from the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities and the Washington Center.

In 2015 and 2016, the return-to-duty rate among INNG soldiers receiving care from SBHP-trained providers was 9% higher than among those receiving care from VA/non-SBHP providers.

INNG soldiers’ days lost to behavioral health issues have declined by more than 50% since the advent of SBHP.

Since SBHP’s launch, there have been zero INNG soldier suicides in those treated by SBHP providers.
Together, all the elements of the Fellowship are designed to ensure that Fellows will:

» connect with each other while working as a team;
» strengthen personal effectiveness and build confidence;
» mobilize resources at their home campus;
» master skills to support their academic and career success; and
» sustain relationships with other students, faculty members, and mentors.

The Fellowship effort has engaged experts from Purdue and around the country as advisors, mentors and teachers. Program evaluation measures are being implemented at multiple points throughout the academic year to measure impact. So far, participation in the Focus Forward Fellowship has produced the following outcomes:

» Fellows evaluated residential program activities very favorably, with average ratings of 88 out of 100 overall.
» During the fall 2016 semester, two Fellows experienced personal challenges that otherwise would have threatened their academic progress. With support from Focus Forward mentors and MFRI staff, academic progress was maintained.
» Fellows are building community. They are contacting an average of three to five other Fellows once or twice a week via Facebook, texts, group messaging and in the Fellows’ Forum.
» The success of the inaugural program has resulted in funding from Got Your 6 to expand program capacity in Indianapolis, along with support from Colorado State University to host the fellowship at a second site in 2017.

Connecting student veterans with allies and advocates

Student veterans have many actual and potential allies and advocates across the educational, corporate and community domains. Whenever possible, we aim to connect these individuals to each other, helping to infuse these interactions with attention to solid research. For example, MFRI’s director of education and employment, Lauren Runco, is the elected national chair of the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA)’s Veterans Knowledge Community (VKC). Such work helps to influence institutions of higher education to use evidence-informed models to better serve this population.
In 2016, MFRI was invited by the National Association of Veteran Program Administrators (NAVPA) to conduct a national survey of VA School Certifying Officials. The purpose of this survey was to assess the impact of the Post-9/11 GI Bill on the role and function of academic certifying officials, the degree to which students’ needs are being met, and institutional outcomes for eligible students. After learning about the survey, the VA distributed it to all certifying officials and hosted two national webinars to encourage participation. Results will be released during 2017.

Throughout 2015 and 2016, MFRI mobilized allies and advocates to support student service members and veterans in the following ways:
» In 2015, evidence from the Lilly-funded Operation Diploma initiative was disseminated nationally by the Student Veterans of America (SVA) via a series of eight Landscape of Higher Education reports. The series was introduced at SVA’s 2015 national conference, which was attended by 1,200 student veterans from 475 SVA chapters.
» Forty-one institutions participated in topical, monthly mentoring calls with student veteran organizations both regionally and nationally.
» In 2016, 17 faculty and corporate representatives mentored the inaugural class of Focus Forward Fellowship.
» More than 1,000 leaders of student veteran organizations on more than 800 campuses from all 50 states have now received in-person training developed by MFRI and SVA.

**REGIONAL/LOCAL**

**Promoting academic success**

For several years, MFRI has conducted monthly conference calls for Indiana SVOs. Because campuses see constant student veteran leadership turnover, these calls are important opportunities to share information with new and existing leaders. The calls also are opportunities for students to raise issues, find solutions collaboratively and become educated through guest speakers. In 2015, 11 universities from two states were involved in the calls. However, interest in the calls grew as a result of allies and advocates, and in 2016 the calls were opened up to a national audience. Within three months, 41 institutions from 19 states were participating — more than a threefold increase.

In 2015 and 2016, our work continued with the Midwest SVO Conference. In 2015, the conference was held at Purdue and we invited key, veteran-friendly employers to the conference, including Eli Lilly and Company, Enterprise Holdings, Caterpillar and Dow Agroscience. We also received funding from Phillips 66 to support the event, which was attended by 28 individuals from 15 Midwest universities. In 2016, the Midwest SVO conference attracted more than 90 student veterans from 16 universities. It also provided MFRI an opportunity to mentor student leader Zach Quett, who attended the 2015 conference, and then stepped forward to plan the 2016 event, which was held at IU South Bend. Representatives from Eli Lilly and Company, Team RWB, Student Veterans of America, Operation Job Ready Veterans, The Woodward and Homes for Heroes either attended or offered support.

**SVO CONFERENCE SURVEY** How participants will change as a result of the conference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Will share knowledge/information/resources with colleagues.</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will work within organization to implement improvements in the way things are done.</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will incorporate new ideas into work.</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“It was an amazing eye opener to the struggles and successes other SVO groups have done. This was my first conference and I thoroughly enjoyed it.” – Student veteran
Building career success

For seven years, MFRI has engaged in the planning and evaluation of the annual Operation Hire a Hoosier Veteran (OHHV) employment fair. During the past two years we collected surveys from more than 300 employers (165 in 2015; 143 in 2016). According to survey data, participating employers represented Indiana industries primarily in the areas of manufacturing, healthcare, transportation and government. At the 2015 and 2016 OHHV job fairs, employers conducted a total of 438 interviews, resulting in a total of 134 job offers to veterans.

Our 2016 surveys from job-seekers revealed that most were men aged 45-64 (78 percent) who were interested in receiving educational resources (70 percent). Additionally, only 22 percent had previously participated in a career fair preparedness workshop, but approximately 50 percent expressed interest in attending future employment preparedness trainings. The OHHV planning committee is working to respond to this interest in time for the 2017 event.

CHANGING COMMUNITIES

Around the country, communities and organizations are trying to make life better for military and veteran families. Seeking to be more supportive, they aim to reduce unemployment and homelessness, improve mental and physical health, and strengthen connections to services. MFRI is working to help them achieve these goals.

NATIONAL

Mapping progress for military and veteran families

One of the “grand challenges” of this work is to assemble data to document how communities and the people in them are changing. MFRI has taken on this challenge through our Measuring Communities initiative, developed in collaboration with Purdue’s Center for Regional Development.

Measuring Communities provides users with access to more than 50 indicators of military- and veteran-specific information across 10 content domains. These data about places and the people in them can be used by local, state, and national decision makers, community leaders, not-for-profit service organizations, and military entities to inform and focus their efforts to serve military and veteran families. Site users can download data, look for trends over time, and use multiple indicators to look for gaps in services or to compare communities — defined according to whatever geographic boundaries are meaningful for them.

MFRI provides access to Measuring Communities to organizations that commit in writing to the measurable impacts they intend to pursue. Since the site’s April 2016 launch, agreements have been completed or are in progress with 21 organizations serving more than 3 million military connected individuals. More than 50 percent are national organizations, while the rest reach constituencies at the local, state and regional levels.

How are Measuring Communities organizations using the website? One example is that the initiative now helps to support National Guard Bureau’s (NGB) Building Healthy Military Communities, a multi-state pilot program that aims to enhance
military recruitment, retention, readiness and resilience among more than 430,000 military members and their families. Overall site data analyses reveals that users are using information to study historical trends, and searching multiple content domains to help them find gaps. The most searched section is the demographic domain, suggesting that users are seeking to better understand military and veteran populations in specific geographical areas. As we have hoped, users are bringing data about places together with data about people to focus their change-making. MFRI will be watching to see what happens next.

REGIONAL/LOCAL
Researchers define community capacity building as the interaction of “human, organizational, and social capital existing within a given community” to solve collective problems and/or improve or maintain well-being. Research has also shown that the goal of community capacity building should be to engage parties in making connections. Guided by this evidence, MFRI works throughout Indiana to build state and local community capacity and foster collaborative partnerships to benefit military-affiliated families, as described below.

Working across the state
MFRI’s leadership role in Joining Community Forces Indiana (JCFI) allows us to link change efforts at the state and local levels. As an ongoing partnership between MFRI, the Indiana National Guard, the VA, and the Indiana Department of Veterans Affairs, JCFI was established as part of the NGB’s Joining Community Forces initiative. As the JCFI executive committee recognizes issues emerging in multiple communities around the state, it creates workgroups to develop resources to support community responses.

One example of JCFI’s impact is the work being conducted by the financial literacy workgroup, in which MFRI plays a highly active role. During the past two years, the group partnered with Military Personal Financial Counselors, Regions Bank and PricewaterhouseCoopers to develop a financial literacy education curriculum that includes military-specific talking points and provided training for military members across Indiana.

As part of broader JCFI efforts to increase the knowledge of first-line organizations in every county of the state, MFRI trained 37 staff members who work in 2-1-1 call centers serving the Evansville, Columbus, Indianapolis, Kokomo, Ft. Wayne and Crown Point regions. The training focused on how operators can communicate more effectively with military-affiliated callers.

A new workgroup created in 2016 addresses suicide prevention. The result is a collaboration with Community Health Network (CHN) to assist in implementing a SAMHSA-awarded Zero Suicide grant. The grant enables CHN to train its occupational and physical therapists as gatekeepers on a front line of defense against suicide. Another goal is to train 100 military-connected and non-military-connected trainers who can then train others.

MFRI also facilitated a meeting with Franciscan Alliance to discuss training its own employees; together, these two health systems have the potential to reach an estimated 230,300 Indiana veterans and their families. Both CHN and Franciscan Alliance are considering having key staff attend 2017 SBHP trainings and making policy changes, including creating specific protocols for managing suicidal patients.

Also in 2016, a new JCFI-led workgroup was formed to focus on legal issues. As a result, Indiana Supreme Court Justice Steven David asked MFRI, the Office of the Court Services and the Indiana Bar Association to develop a legal summit about military and veteran needs. The December 7th event brought together 100 court and social service professionals from communities across the state for a day of education on the legal resources available to military and veteran families, including information on Veteran Treatment Courts (VTCs).

**Linking state and local efforts**

In 2015 and 2016, MFRI sponsored and organized Battlemind to Home (Battlemind), an event that brought representatives from local communities together with the JCFI executive committee to learn with and from each other. During these two years, more than 540 service providers were educated about the needs of veterans and their families. Behavioral health providers, community service providers, benefits administrators and others used the information gained to better serve military-affiliated families. Now called the Battlemind to Home Mental Health Summit, it was renamed in 2016 after leaders at Richard L. Roudebush VAMC asked to combine their mental health summit with the event. Leaders from Roudebush

**BATTLEMIND** During 2015 and 2016 Battlemind to Home events, more than 550 community providers heard evidence-informed information and focused on ways to address veterans’ needs.
VAMC, the Indiana National Guard (INNG), the VA Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, veterans, and MFRI sat on the planning committee for the 2016 event. Because MFRI partnered with Got Your Six to participate in 2015 education and outreach throughout Indiana and northern Kentucky, we received a $25,000 Got Your Six grant that helped to fund 2016’s Battlemind.

In 2016, Battlemind was held on September 22 to coincide with Suicide Awareness Month. Speakers shared evidence-informed expertise in suicide prevention, treating military sexual trauma, access to VA services, and housing homeless veterans with more than 200 behavioral health care providers, postsecondary educators, veteran service organizations, criminal justice professionals and others. In addition, veterans shared personal stories of strength, overcoming obstacles and empowerment. Nearly 20 percent of attendees shared session information from experts across social media, their tweets reaching more than 85,000 Twitter accounts and leaving more than 1.2 million impressions across a single social media platform. In a special session, local communities described their key needs and gave “marching orders” to the Joining Community Forces executive committee, aiming to create stronger networks and discover regional strategies for working with military and veteran families.

Evaluations from Battlemind helped organizers understand Battlemind’s impact. “Attendance at Battlemind challenged my approach to PTSD, separating PTSD from morality, and I learned about moral injury, which was new to me,” said one provider. “It reaffirmed the need for services to help homeless veterans,” said another. From Battlemind, communities take knowledge gained and priorities developed and move forward with action plans. Past symposia identified a need for veteran treatment courts in Indiana, leading to a statewide legal summit organized in partnership with the Indiana Supreme Court in 2016.

Battlemind is one of the ways MFRI builds strong linkages of support for military and veteran families, using evidence-informed information to guide and achieve a sustainable, statewide system of coordinated support that we hope will be a model for others.

**Change through community collaboration**

MFRI’s Community Mobilization Team (CMT) holds monthly meetings that draw participants from 46 out of Indiana’s 92 counties, which have grown from an average of 12 to 60 members. We also help to coordinate seven bimonthly Indiana National Guard Veteran Resource Group meetings. These meetings bring organizations together to share information, build resources and collaborate on behalf of military and veteran families.

Excluding veterans who were served at Stand Downs, job fairs, town hall meetings, or other MFRI-led programs or events, at least 4,000 military and veteran families were served directly as a result of 2015 and 2016 CMT meetings. MFRI constantly works to be strategic in its approach to community outreach. One specific example is in the area of homeless veterans. Rather than focusing just on previously-identified homeless veterans, we have helped communities to do a better job of locating homeless veterans during the national Point-in-Time count, an annual census of the homeless population that is used to allocate resources to communities. In one community, MFRI coordinated a unique effort whereby on the appropriate day, homeless veterans were invited to go to the local veteran service office to receive bus passes donated by a local church.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

In 2016, CMT leaders educated, informed, trained and connected with more than 500 organizations across Indiana.

Using #b2h7, attendees shared information across digital platforms, expanding Battlemind’s reach.

**#B2H7 REACH** Battlemind on the digital domain

85,095 accounts reached • 1,214,069 impressions
As a result, 18 more veterans were counted than would otherwise have been recorded, and the community received three times more housing vouchers for veterans than they have ever received. At the same time, the homeless veterans were introduced to the veteran service officer and are now receiving benefits.

In another example, community mobilization efforts actually saved a life. A veteran who participates in our community mobilization efforts suggested that a mental health check should be performed for a veteran. MFRI’s staff member notified community organizations and the veteran received assistance the same day. At the next meeting in that community, the VA suicide prevention team trained the entire mobilization committee.

Accomplishments resulting from MFRI’s education efforts, partnerships and development of community collaborations include:

» In Tippecanoe County, the Lafayette community recognized the service of Vietnam veterans by renovating its Veterans Memorial Plaza.
» In Southern Indiana, the Hope for Heroes food vouchers program expanded, and 300 representatives from area food pantries received information about the program Veterans Organizations Involved in Community Education (VOICE).
» In Allen County, an attorney is using MFRI resources to guide his efforts to provide a pro bono expungement clinic, which in 2016 saw 429 veterans. In addition, a weekly job leads and training alert is now distributed to approximately 200 members of the MFRI community outreach network, along with information from Operation Job Ready Vets.
» Porter County has scheduled its first Stand Down and is using MFRI’s Stand Down toolkit.
» In Wabash County, the Disabled Veterans Association worked with the VA to provide homeless travel vouchers to VA homeless outreach clients, and Warrior Fit works to increase veterans’ health through physical fitness.
» In Marion County, the first Veteran of the Year was chosen in the fall of 2016, sponsored by the Epilepsy Foundation.
» Portage held its first Stand Down, where 33 service providers and 29 volunteers assisted 79 veterans. In addition to helping with housing, VA benefits, medical service and substance abuse intervention, veterans also had opportunities to speak with representatives of education, employment and legal services.

Community grants that innovate and serve
MFRI has used its small grant program to help communities to innovate and make change. These grants have shown how small changes can lead to much bigger innovations. In 2015 and 2016, MFRI distributed $27,000 to applicants for 44 small community grants. These grants were distributed to organizations that served military-affiliated families in 25 Indiana counties that are home to 192,000 military-connected people.

MFRI also builds community capacity by helping to fund Stand Downs and by using our Family Stand Down toolkit to train and mentor communities to put on their own Stand Downs. A total of 33 Stand Downs have been held in the past two years throughout the state, serving more than 2,000 veterans per year.
Improving food security and resource access in rural areas

About one in three veterans live in rural areas, where they are less likely than other veterans to have access to needed services, and may not be reached by our other community mobilization activities. To address this gap, MFRI created Reaching Rural Veterans (RRV), in partnership with the VA Center for Faith-Based Initiatives and Neighborhood Partnerships, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Cooperative Extension partners at Purdue and the University of Kentucky.

RRV’s primary objective was to provide food, services and resources to low-income, homeless, and at-risk rural veterans. The concept is simple. In each state, the land grant university (e.g., Purdue or the University of Kentucky) led the project, providing participating faith-based food pantries with training and resources. Approximately 80 percent of the pantry staff and volunteers reported no previous experience working with veterans, underscoring the value of the information RRV provided.

Ten faith-based rural food pantries were selected via a competitive process to receive small grants, training, materials and resources. Building on MFRI’s successful Stand Down model, the pantries regularly brought together multiple services to make it easy, efficient and nonthreatening for veterans to obtain benefits, services and support. The program significantly improved veterans’ food security and access to federal assistance.

A substantial evaluation component helped us to learn more about rural veterans. Most were males aged 45-65 who had served in the Army for an average of seven years. Even though most had children under the age of 18, at the start of the program fewer than 12 percent were using federal food assistance programs for which they were eligible — even programs for their children such as free or reduced school lunches. They were substantially more likely to have disabilities and less likely to be employed than veterans overall, and 69 percent were food-insecure, compared to 12.7 percent in the general U.S. population.

Evaluation also revealed that we reached 1,094 high-need veterans, far exceeding our initial goal of 300. The program may even have helped to save lives. One homeless veteran who was at extremely high risk for suicide found immediate assistance through RRV. A National Guard Family Assistance program specialist and a VA Niches provider recognized the veteran’s high risk for suicide during an RRV event and facilitated the veteran’s immediate transport to a VA clinic suicide prevention program.

The creators of RRV drew on existing research to build effective program to impact military-connected lives. It is a promising collaboration that creates community synergy and increases understanding of a subgroup within the veteran population that is struggling.
CHANGING THE FUTURE

REGIONAL/LOCAL

Impacting the next generation of researchers and practitioners

Research with impact is articulated also through our work with Purdue University undergraduate and graduate students. We strive to help students understand the importance of evidence-informed programs as they develop skills for careers in a multitude of disciplines. More than 200 students have worked as interns or assistants on every MFRI team. They came from majors ranging from computer science to industrial engineering to hospitality and tourism management, as well as psychology and human development and family studies. Our students are award-winning: Current MFRI students hold the Bilsland Dissertation Fellowship, Purdue Research Foundation Doctoral Fellowship; Department of Human Development and Family Studies Outstanding Master’s Student; College of Health and Human Sciences Outstanding Master’s Student; and the Purdue Graduate Student Government Travel Award.

Savannah Wills, a current undergraduate student, is just one example of several students who works with us on our various initiatives. Savannah works with SBHP on the Family Support team. When hired in 2015, her work supported the logistical components of the training sessions. Now she facilitates communications between MFRI and behavioral health providers and helps the program to run smoothly overall. As a hospitality and tourism management major, Savannah’s SBHP event management responsibilities will in 2017 complete part of her mandatory work experience, providing her with real world experience that she can use as she launches her career.

Some MFRI students, like Savannah, come from military and veteran families. Graduate student Keisha Bailey analyzes data, contributes to academic publications and helps to supervise undergraduate students. She explained what working at MFRI means to her: “Traveling the country as a military dependent did not afford me a ‘textbook’ childhood. While I have only completed one year at MFRI, the opportunities to lead others, explore my interest, design system innovations, and conduct research have exceeded my expectations for what graduate school would be like.”

Growing the body of research for families by examining Family Journeys

MFRI’s commitment to research with impact begins at our front door. Family Journeys: From Deployment to Reintegration, MFRI’s largest research project, started with Lilly Endowment Inc.’s initial grant. The project’s goal is to increase understanding of families’ deployment experiences. In partnership with the Indiana National Guard, we started gathering data in 2010, sending teams to family homes to interview the Guard member, partner, and children six times: once prior to
deployment, twice during deployment and three times after reunion. In 2013, the Defense Health Program endorsed this project, awarding MFRI funding to augment and complete this research. By November 2014, the Family Journeys project had become independent of the Endowment’s funding.

As of December 31, 2016, MFRI has now completed 2,649 interviews with 351 families, including 144 families who have completed the entire cycle of interviews. We expect data collection to extend into 2018, but have already begun analyses. These data can address critical questions about how family relationships change throughout deployment. For example, we have presented evidence showing that among siblings, warmth erodes and antagonism increases during deployment (Whiteman, Loeser, Covington, Topp, & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2015). This is important because research with community samples demonstrates that the quality of sibling relationships is uniquely associated with adolescent adjustment.

Stressors associated with deployment can interfere with relationships among couples and within families. During the 2015-2016 grant cycle, MFRI made new discoveries about the effect of deployment on military families, and more than 30 articles, books and chapters have been published. Other research findings focused on:

- how husbands and wives communicate during deployment (Wilson, S. R., Marini, C. M., Franks, M. M., Topp, D. B., & MacDermid Wadsworth, S. M., 2015);
- how military parents seek help for their young children’s problems (Flittner, A. E., MacDermid Wadsworth, S. M., Willerton, E., Cardin, J. F., Topp, D. B., Mustillo, S., & Lester, P., 2015);
- how the family experiences of male and female service members differ (Southwell, K. H. & MacDermid Wadsworth, S. M., 2016);
- anxiety and peer problems among young children exposed to parental deployment (MacDermid Wadsworth, S. M, Cardin, J. F, Christ, S., Willerton, E., & Flittner, A. E., 2016); and
- how couples handle conflict as they work to re-establish their relationship during reintegration (Marini, C. M., Franks, M. M., & MacDermid Wadsworth, S. M., 2016).

Our research helps to illuminate practical ways to address the negative impacts of deployment, while highlighting the resilience of military families. For example, our analyses showed that an individual’s marital satisfaction is related to how well they understand their own conflict engagement behaviors and perceive that their partner’s way of dealing with conflict is similar to their own. Because conflict engagement strategies are teachable, these analyses are revealing opportunities for developing interventions to promote marital satisfaction at reunion. In addition to the publication of our research outcomes, MFRI books and chapters have been downloaded more than 12,700 times, and Military Deployment and its Consequences for Families is one of the top 25 percent of books in its category at Springer Publishers.

Developing interventions to get research findings from the “bench to the bedside” is a challenging goal. Recognizing this, MFRI has a well-established relationship with Nathanson Family Resilience Center (NFRC) at UCLA. NFRC is recognized among military circles for developing Families OverComing Under Stress (FOCUS), one of the largest military family intervention programs, currently operating at 30 installations. We have allocated part of our federal grant to NFRC to help us leverage the clinical utility of our findings. Now that a substantial number of families have completed six waves of data collection, NFRC has started to review our data toward this goal.
We are currently collaborating with NFRC to coauthor an encyclopedia chapter about communication during deployment, which is laying the groundwork for future analyses aimed at FOCUS.

MFRI also works to disseminate its findings through traditional scientific sources, as well as outlets directly aimed at informing practitioners. The speaking invitations we receive from a diverse range of practitioner conferences reflect the value of MFRI’s research. Recent examples include the California Conference for Community-Based Behavioral Health Practitioners and the America’s Warrior Partnership Conference.

**Highlighting research that links policy and practice**

In 2015, MFRI established the Excellence in Research on Military and Veteran Families award to help close gaps between researchers, policymakers and practitioners who focus on military and veteran families. This is given to the researcher(s) who publish the highest-quality study in the field of military and veteran families in a given year. The Association of the United States Army (AUSA) has joined the effort, sponsoring the award ceremony and promoting the research to policymakers and practitioners.

In 2015, the winning article was “Reinstitutionalizing families: Life course policy and marriage in the military,” published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family*. This study is uniquely significant because it increases understanding about the implications of the military’s pro-marriage policies for both military and civilian families.

“The biggest policy implication of our research relates to all families, not just military families. Some policymakers and family advocates have argued that the government should promote marital formation. But on the basis of the military example, marriage is widespread in part due to stable, decent-paying jobs and transfers of health care and education benefits to family members. Given growing class inequality, precarious underemployment, and long-term unemployment, perhaps there are some aspects of the military employment model that could be extended to all U.S. youth.” – Lundquist & Xu (2014 p. 1078-1079)

The 2016 winning article, “War and marriage: Assortative mating and the World War II GI Bill,” was published in the journal *Demography*. The authors examined the long-term impacts of the legislation, finding unexpected positive consequences for families that included better-educated spouses and better prospects for their children.

“The WWII GI Bill increased the human capital not only of veterans themselves but also among the families they eventually formed. ...This suggests an important mechanism by which socioeconomic status may be passed on to the next generation.” – Larsen, McCarthy, Moulton, & Patel (2015, p. 1431).

MFRI’s annual research award raises significant awareness about key advances in the field. As practitioners and advocates, the AUSA and the National Military Family Association support this award because they know the best research is a valuable tool for their efforts. The outcomes of MFRI’s convening activities are increased knowledge about the military and veterans’ families among key U.S. leaders. This award aims to get research into the hands of policymakers and practitioners, strengthens connections between producers and consumers of research, and raises awareness of the best of the best in terms of the research that is being done on military and veterans families.
Changing systems of support

Perhaps our most ambitious goal is to change the ways that organizations think about and prepare for future conflicts. In September 2015, MFRI convened a broad range of high-ranking individuals to reflect about, discuss and distill the implications of lessons learned about serving military and veteran families. Participants and contributors included top U.S. policymakers, including representatives of Mrs. Michelle Obama’s office; the Department of Defense; U.S. and Canadian Departments of Veterans Affairs; more than 70 representatives from the corporate world and philanthropy; behavioral health community, nonprofits, and professional societies; and research funders, think tanks and higher education. MFRI organized and facilitated all aspects of the event and is editing the resulting book *A Battle Plan for Supporting Military and Veteran Families During Wartime*. Key insights focus on how legacy and emerging organizations can work together more effectively, how congressional committees can adapt their usual way of functioning to the wartime demands of service members, veterans of their families, and how funders can more efficiently and wisely propel powerful change.

Currently in development, the book is anticipated to be completed within the year and published by Springer. It will be an excellent showcase for MFRI’s work and will further enhance our reputation as a thought leader in our field. About the effort, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Michael Mullen commented: “You have been incredible in terms of persistence in continuing to engage on these issues and actually expand those in ways that …[we could not] have imagined. We need to be ... pushing the services in what lessons have we learned and then how do we get ready for the future, and you’re clearly doing that. And I would argue you’re probably ahead of the military services in that regard.”

We anticipate that the book will be a welcome and valuable resource within the offices of key organizations and policymakers. It will provide the information needed to ensure that, during the next major U.S. deployment, these leaders will have a compilation of much-needed information to ensure military families are better served.

LOOKING FORWARD

As we look ahead to the next phase of our work, the military-veteran space continues to evolve. There are both encouraging and worrying signs about the degree to which family issues will receive sufficient attention from national and regional leaders. As always, we will be watchful, vocal, constructive and collaborative, aiming to help every organization that we can to be more knowledgeable, competent and effective in their efforts on behalf of military and veteran family issues.

In our work with local communities, we plan to refine our approach to draw more heavily on other evidence-informed models in order to put even more powerful tools in the hands of communities. This is especially important now that the MyVA Communities effort is increasing VA participation in community mobilization efforts, offering the possibility of much stronger connections to VA leaders and facilities. We want Indiana to shine among other states across the nation as a model of community collaboration and impact. We will continue to pursue support to allow us to sustain and grow Reaching Rural Veterans.
We also will maintain our state-level work to coordinate the JCFI executive committee and collaborate in other ways with organizations whose work touch multiple parts of the state. Here too, we will be looking to create more tools that will produce impact and empower partners in and beyond Indiana. New leaders in the Indiana National Guard are very concerned about the readiness, retention and health of their force; we have already begun to build collaborations to address those issues.

Nationally, we are moving forward energetically to get Measuring Communities in widespread use around the country. Built for collective impact, Measuring Communities is designed to provide a platform for collaboration as well as for impact. We will draw attention to communities where the military and veteran population is struggling — or doing well — with the goal of helping to focus the attention of the nation. We also will continue to work to support and expand SBHP to ensure that whenever and wherever they seek help, military and veteran families can work with a professional who is sensitive to their experiences. We are grateful to our good colleagues at the Center for Deployment Psychology for supporting upcoming trainings in Indiana.

In the education and employment arena, we are excited about the early success of the Focus Forward Fellowship and will be working to refine and grow it in the coming years. We are very pleased to have already received funding that will allow us to offer two classes in 2017. We also are finalizing plans with SVA to prepare content for Leadership 3.0, the next phase of training for student veteran leaders.

Our efforts to generate and disseminate important new knowledge are continuing. As we move toward completion of data collection for Family Journeys, data analyses are becoming more active and will be flowing into publications and presentations as well as to our FOCUS colleagues for implementation. We will be calling on our research team to help us become even more attentive to measurement in all of our activities, and we will be continuing to engage and train as many students as we can.

As always, we are always working to cultivate new partners, funders and donors, and those activities will continue. We are grateful for matching funds made available by both Purdue University and Lilly Endowment Inc., and are excited to share that news with prospective partners.

Now that the “bully pulpit” from the White House in the form of the Joining Forces initiative has ended, efforts on behalf of military and veteran families are going to depend much more heavily on the interests, initiative, and commitment of individual leaders and organizations. MFRI is already working hard to develop good working relationships with new leaders at the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Defense, and Agriculture, and in the Indiana National Guard, to ensure that family issues are proactively addressed. As our nation is entering what appears to be a period of international tension and turmoil, maintaining vigilance on behalf of families who have served, are serving, and will serve, seems especially important.
2015–2016 PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

Books


Book contributions


Refereed journal articles


**Invited presentations at national or international research conferences**

MacDermid Wadsworth, S. M. (2015, April). *Are we done?* Presentation at Service Member to Civilian Summit, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL.

**Refereed national or international presentations**


Invited lectures, plenaries or presentations


Collette, C., Schleppi, B. (2016, August). *Community-based training for 2-1-1 professionals*. Presentation at 2-1-1 Military Culture Training, Columbus, IN.

Collette, C., Schleppi, B. (2016, August). *Community-based training for 2-1-1 professionals*. Presentation at 2-1-1 Military Culture Training, Evansville, IN.

Collette, C., Schleppi, B. (2016, August). *Community-based training for 2-1-1 professionals*. Presentation at 2-1-1 Military Culture Training, South Bend, IN.
Collette, C., & Schleppi, B. (2016, October). *JCFI update.* Presentation at Senator Donnelly’s staff meeting, Indianapolis, IN.


Harris, J. A. (2015, February). *Military 101.* Presentation at ITCC Columbus/Franklin, Columbus, IN.


Harris, J. A. (2016, September). *Campus diversity and collaboration discussion.* Presentation at Lilly Headquarters, Indianapolis, IN.

Harris, J. A. (2016, September). *Focus Forward Fellowship: Engaging military-connected women beyond the classroom.* Presentation to the Big Ten Military & Veteran Peer Group, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI.

Lepley, P., & Thompson, A. (2016, May). *Community-based training for 2-1-1 professionals.* Presentation at AIRS Conference, St. Louis, MO.


MacDermid Wadsworth, S. M. (2015, March). *Changing family roles across the deployment cycle.* Presentation at program review committee, Fort Dietrich, MD.


 MacDermid Wadsworth, S. M. (2016, May). *Policy dilemmas and directions.* Presentation to the board of directors of the National Council on Family Relations, Minneapolis, MN.


 MacDermid Wadsworth, S. M. (2016, September). *Cultural competence and military and veteran families.* Presentation at the annual meeting of the National Association of State Head Injury Administrators, Columbus, OH.


MacDermid Wadsworth, S. M. (2016, November). *Setting the institutional stage for success: One professor’s perspective.* Presentation at the annual meeting of the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities, Austin, TX.


Runco, L. (2016, April). *Developing your SVO’s sustainability and succession plan.* Presentation at Midwest SVO Regional Conference. South Bend, IN.

Runco, L. (2016, April). *Transition related services and community engagement.* Presentation at ACE Service Member and Veteran Academic Advising Summit, Washington, DC.

Runco, L. (2016, December). *Why join professional organizations?* Presentation at SEC Veterans’ Director’s Symposium. Mississippi State University, MS.


Runco, L., NASPA, Military Family Research Institute at Purdue University, & InsideTrack. (Producers.) (2016, September). *Leveraging resources to help military and veteran students navigate the college admission process.* [Video Webinar.]

Runco, L. (2015, August). *Creating an effective relationship with your chapter advisor.* Presentation at SVA Summit, Dallas, TX.

Runco, L. (2015, October). *The changing landscape of student service members and veterans.* Presentation at CIC Peer Group for Military and Veteran Services, Penn State University, State College, PA.


Runco, L. (2015, November). *Creating an effective relationship with your chapter advisor.* Presentation at Virginia Student Veteran Conference, Roanoke, VA.


Simek, J. (2015, February). *Student veterans as social entrepreneurs: Leadership training through strategic planning.* Presentation at NASPA Veterans Symposium, Louisville, KY.
2015 ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS

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Dean of the California School of Professional Psychology
Alliant International University

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Founder
Wise Whisper

Nora Spinks
Chief Executive Officer
The Vanier Institute of the Family

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United States Army (Retired)
Co-Founder and Chairman
Center for Military & Veterans Community Services (Dixon Center)

Ray Weeks
United States Marine Corps (Retired)
Veterans Outreach Director
Team Red, White & Blue-New Jersey
## 2016 Advisory Council Members

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title/Role</th>
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