



Operation Immersion

A Federal State Collaboration

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Operation Immersion

**An innovative, collaborative
military immersion training for behavioral
health practitioners**

Why do a military immersion training?

- Survey of Tennessee Behavioral Health providers found that most providers had little to no familiarity with military culture.
- Web trainings while easier to coordinate, lack the realistic and experiential nature that an immersion training provides.
- Most providers are civilians. Immersion training gives credibility to providers when treating service members, veterans and their families-you took the time to walk in their boots, understand their world and perspective.

What Does it Take to Put On Operation Immersion?

- Strong cross agency relationships with your state's National Guard and/or active duty post
- Leaders who say "Yes!"
- The right people to cultivate the relationships, who are creative in harnessing existing resources, and the energy to make it happen
- Access to training facilities
- Access to experts; they are in your own back yard!

What Tennessee Had in Place

- Existing Relationships
- Veterans Task Force
- Engaged Leadership
- Leveraged existing resources and manpower
- We had no budget for this, and we made it happen!

The Format

- Day and half training
- Spend the night in the barracks...bag drag
- Wake up using the trash can alarm
- PT-Not sanitized, legitimate PT
- Chores and Inspection
- Meals in the Dining Hall
- MRE for lunch
- Tours of TNNG Aircraft
- Tours of TNNG facilities rarely accessed by the public

Training Didactics

- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Suicide Prevention
- PTSD
- Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment
- Homelessness
- Barriers to Female Soldiers accessing mental health services
- Sexual Trauma in the Combat Theater
- The Experience of Serious Physical Injuries
- Programs and available resources

The Most Important Part-Personal Stories

- Stories are real, raw, uncensored
- Focus on pre and post deployment
- Include SM, Vets & families and spouses
- Makes it real for attendees; real human emotion, real human experience
- Soldiers shared full depth of their experience from serious physical injuries to PTSD

What we Learned from Our First Experience

- People were hesitant about the barracks and PT
- Had to sell the idea to people and demystify it
- People wanted to see more of the training site; specific requests to learn about missions of the military
- Had to limit number of presenters; overwhelmed
- Some providers (ATR) did not connect with why they should do this training, since they were not serving the population

2nd Operation Immersion

- More people embraced the idea of the staying in the barracks
- Raised the bar on PT and attendees rose to the challenge
- Added access to aircraft
- Set a less aggressive agenda
- Expanded to include all publicly funded addiction treatment providers in Tennessee

3rd Operation Immersion

- Thanks to SAMHSA, in 2010 Operation Immersion went national!
- 19 states and 5 tribal nations came to Tennessee
- Nursing students from Columbia State
- Providers left with the skills to implement the model in their state

Operation Immersion: Intended Outcome

- Attendees would learn the language
- Attendees would become more empathetic
- Attendees would better understand how to offer a more appropriate service mix for service members, veterans & their families
- Attendees would implement the model in their states

Operation Immersion in Other States

- California, Rhode Island, Hawaii, Arizona, Missouri, Indiana have all had a military immersion training based on the Tennessee Operation Immersion Model
- SAMHSA put momentum behind states ability to plan & coordinate.
- Opportunities to grow, and make part of a standard curriculum in training behavioral health practitioners, primary care providers, etc.

Action Plan for Implementation

- What Resources Does Your Agency/State Have?
- Who Do You Know, Who Do You Need to Know?
- Who in Your State Can Lead this Effort?
- Do you have the Support of Your Leadership?

Assistance is Available

Happy to share information and ideas, materials

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Link you to contacts in your state and SAMHSA for additional information