



Tennessee's *Operation Immersion*

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

**DCoE Webinar
August 26, 2010
Bruce Emery, MSW
Assistant Commissioner
TN Dept. of Mental Health
Nashville, TN**



What Operation Immersion Is...

- **a military immersion training for behavioral professionals developed by the Tennessee Department of Mental and Developmental Disabilities (TDMHDD) and the Tennessee National Guard (TNG) Counter Drug Task Force and the Tennessee Service Members, Veterans and their Families Task Force.**
- **a 1-1/2 day training that immerses participants in selected of military culture and provides information on the unique needs of returning service members, veterans, and their families.**



Why Behavioral Health Care for Active Duty, Veterans and Family Members Matters in Tennessee

- ❑ **Fort Campbell (TN-KY border) supports 3rd largest military population in the Army and the 7th largest in the Department of Defense.**
- ❑ **Headquarters of 101st Airborne, base is home to 30,000 soldiers, 56,000 family members, 113,000 retirees, 3,900 civilian employees, 18,000 members of Army Reserve & National Guard.**
- ❑ **Tennessee has the 6th largest National Guard in the nation.**
- ❑ **More than 50,000 troops from Tennessee have served in the Iraq and Afghanistan theatres of war, including nearly 20,000 Tennessee National Guard troops.**
- ❑ **Majority of Tennessee National Guard troops have deployed multiple times; largest deployment of Tennessee troops since WWII.**
- ❑ **One hundred six Tennessee citizens have lost their lives in OIF/OEF**



Why Create *Operation Immersion*?

Cultural Competence: Surveyed our network of 150 behavioral health providers, and found most knew little about military culture.

Service Quality: Make available more behavioral health providers who understand the unique aspects of military culture.

Create Bridges: OI's goal is to remove barriers to care by training behavioral health providers in military culture and similarly engage military personnel in behavioral health.



How *Operation Immersion* Works

- **Attendees stay in barracks**
- **Go through early morning PT**
- **Eat a Meal Ready to Eat (MRE)**
- **Tour military aircraft and facilities**
- **Learn about missions of the Guard**
- **Hear about special mental health, substance use and support needs of active duty, veterans and family members.**

Operation Immersion: The Most Important Part

Service Member's and Veteran's Personal Stories of Deployment

- Stories are real, raw, uncensored
- Focus on pre and post deployment
- Include families and spouses
- Makes it real for attendees; real human emotion, real human experience

Pre-Deployment

Who was I before I left?
Who were my friends before I left?
What did I enjoy before I left?
What was I like before I left?
What did I think about the Military before I left?
How did it affect me?
What did I think about it?
What did my family think of it?
What were my thoughts going in?

Post-Deployment

What did I expect?
What did my family expect?
How did I change?
How did my relationships change?
What was my mood when I got back?
How long did it take to function normally?
Do I have recurrences?

Personal Stories of Deployment

A Typical Day

- ❑ What was there to do?
- ❑ How was my relationship to my family while on deployment?
- ❑ What was my overall mood in Iraq?

A Not So Typical Day

- ❑ What happened?
- ❑ How did it affect me while I was in country?
- ❑ What went wrong?



Special Topics Covered

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Suicide Prevention

PTSD

Barriers to Female Soldiers accessing behavioral health services

Sexual Trauma in the Combat Theater

The Experience of Serious Physical Injuries

Homelessness

Online Peer - Peer Programs

Substance Abuse Resources Available

TNG Family Assistance Programs

Tennessee Yellow Ribbon

Crisis Services'

NAMI Battle Buddies

Physical Injuries



Operation Immersion: What it Takes

- **Relationships**
- **Energy**
- **The Right People**
- **Leaders who Say “Yes!”**
- **A shared belief that this is the right thing to do!**

Operation Immersion

Intended Outcome...

Providers would learn the language

Providers would become more empathetic

Providers would better understand how to better serve veterans/families

Actual Outcome...

“I loved hearing the service men's experiences before and after their deployment. I could not have gotten that part of the training anywhere else.”

“There were excellent presenters that were knowledgeable passionate and informative.”

“Possibly next time there should be a smaller group allowed to experience PT and daily life in the service members shoes.”



Operation Immersion Outcomes

Since 7/09, Access to Recovery Program has enrolled

- ❑ **16 National Guard Service Members**
- ❑ **304 military veterans**
- ❑ **22 military family members**

We go National

- ❑ **24 States and 3 Tribal Nations**
- ❑ **Director's of Psychological Health**
- ❑ **Invited business leaders**
- ❑ **Teach other states how to implement OI**

Reintegration in Tennessee: *Operation Immersion*

Contact: Bruce D. Emery
Assistant Commissioner
Tennessee Department of Mental Health
(615) 532-7783
bruce.emery@tn.gov