

W. K. Kellogg Foundation Community Engagement Scholarship Award

Project Title:

**HELPING NATIONAL GUARD FAMILIES AFTER DEPLOYMENT:
A UNIVERSITY-MILITARY COLLABORATION**

Applicant:

Adrian J. Blow, Professor

Department of Human Development and Family Studies
College of Social Science
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Community Partner:

Michigan Army National Guard

1. Abstract

A collaborative and productive partnership has existed for the last decade between the Michigan Army National Guard and Dr. Adrian Blow and his team at Michigan State University. A major goal of this strategic partnership has been to understand and improve the reintegration processes of National Guard Service members and their families, a critical event that often results in negative outcomes (e.g., depression, substance abuse, suicide, domestic abuse) for enlisted personnel, family members, the community, and the military at large. This partnership has resulted in significantly improved post-deployment reintegration programs adopted by the National Guard, the Buddy-to-Buddy peer support program, and the training of almost 800 mental health providers around Michigan in working effectively with military personnel and their families. Finally, this partnership has resulted in nearly \$3 million in federal funding, over 20 publications, and a featured story on the B1G network's series LiveBig.

2. Relationship and Reciprocity between the Community and the University

The issue that has been the focus of this partnership is National Guard service members returning home from war time deployment and reintegrating with their families and communities. This is an issue of significance for a number of reasons. The United States military is large, with 3.5 million active duty and reserves, and 19.3 million veterans from all wars. These military connected individuals do not live in a vacuum but interface with their romantic partners, children, and families post deployment. Almost half of all military members are married, and there are 1.8 million children connected to military members. Unfortunately, after a war deployment, service members are not always returning home the same as before. National studies show that approximately 33 percent of veterans returning from war report a mental health/cognitive condition and 18.5 percent meet post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or depression criteria. In addition, 320,000 veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars report a probable traumatic brain injury.

Adrian Blow, Lisa Gorman, and colleagues studied these same variables in Michigan, and found comparable rates of mental health difficulties in National Guard soldiers, i.e., 11 percent PTSD, 21 percent depression, 5 percent suicidal thoughts, 20 percent hazardous alcohol use, 40 percent having one or more mental health problems. In surveying romantic partners of soldiers, these rates were also high, with 17 percent screening positive for PTSD, 22 percent for depression, 10 percent for suicidal thoughts, and 3 percent for hazardous alcohol use. Thirty-four percent of romantic partners screened positive for one or more mental health problems. Suicide rates of veterans are extremely high, with 20 veterans dying daily by suicide (35 percent higher since 2001, and 85 percent higher for women veterans since 2001). The work of Dr. Blow and colleagues has focused on finding ways to improve reintegration processes of National Guard

families and prevent disruptions in family life caused by mental health difficulties, suicide, and abuse, a truly critical need.

The partnership began in October 2006, and has, over the last decade, included a number of activities such as ground-breaking reintegration events, the Buddy-to-Buddy peer support program, impactful longitudinal research, and dissemination of the evidence-based Star Behavioral Health Provider program (SBHP). Due to the leadership of Dr. Blow, the partnership includes military personnel, clinicians, and researchers from across the US. This collaboration has included numerous personnel from the Michigan National Guard, Lisa Gorman (formerly MSU and now at the Michigan Public Health Institute), researchers from the University of Michigan (Drs. Michelle Kees, Marcia Valenstein, Gregory Dalack, John Greden, and Sheila Marcus, to name a few), researchers from the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at MSU, the Military Family Research Institute at Purdue, and the Center for Deployment Psychology in Maryland. Each project has required a unique collaboration, and all have involved members of the Michigan National Guard. In all cases, the goal of university partners was to add value to the lives of National Guard members, and as one General Officer termed it, to be “force multipliers.”

3. Impacts

3.1 Impact on Community Partners

In our first grant application to FACT (Families and Communities Together Coalition), we set out to generate knowledge that would inform reintegration efforts of the Michigan National Guard. As a result, we consulted with leadership of the guard, enlisted members, and the family support office of the guard, in order to have a study design that met scientific standards of rigor but also was feasible in the National Guard context.

Other programs such as SBHP had the goal of impacting services provided to military personnel and their families. Members of the team contributed to the content and the delivery of reintegration programming offered to returning veterans and their families at Yellow Ribbon Reintegration workshops. Together this collaboration resulted in the development of the Buddy-to-Buddy program (buddytobuddy.org), and in the delivery of the SBHP program to mental health professionals around the state (starproviders.org). The team surveyed over 1,000 veterans and their families and used these findings to inform National Guard programming; such programming is being adopted military wide. The SBHP program has trained providers all over the state including training 789 mental health providers in military cultural competency, 392 providers in psychological health rates and treatment types, and 298 providers in evidence-based treatments for post-traumatic stress disorder, insomnia, depression, or family resilience.

Nearly \$3 million of funding has been generated to support these programs. Also, 20 peer-reviewed publications have resulted, along with 6 book chapters/other publications and many more manuscripts in progress or under review. Initially, this work was funded by a \$5,000 grant from the Michigan National Guard and a \$25,000 grant from MSU's Families and Communities together program. Later, it was funded by larger grants from the US Department of Defense (\$1.3 million), the US Veterans Association (\$1.1 million), and the Ethel and James Flinn Foundation (\$300,000). Work is ongoing and additional funding is being sought for new projects. This work was also a featured story on the BIG network's series LiveBig (btn.com/2013/02/12/btn-livebig-msu-helping-soldiers-scholars), promoting the need to support veterans.

3.2 Impact on University Partners

From a university perspective, our goal was to generate knowledge and evidence-based practice that made an impact on the State of Michigan first and then on the national stage, while also generating funding to support this research agenda. As university partners, we were changed. First, all of us interfaced with military personnel and their families on a continuing basis. These face-to-face meetings resulted in deeper understandings of the military and the challenges of deployment. Second, we learned numerous lessons in establishing and maintaining a relationship with a military organization. As stated in our article about the development process of this collaboration, published in *Psychiatric Services* (Dalack, Blow, et al., 2010, p. 1071),

Collaborations such as this require flexibility and humility to adapt and change initial individual and institutional aims into joint aims. We recognized the need to integrate different cultures. The other academic institutions (i.e., Purdue University and University of Michigan) had similar aims for their respective involvement, but their institutional cultures differed in some ways. The goals and timeline of the Michigan National Guard were dramatically different from those of either academic partner, and the Michigan National Guard had a culture less tolerant of the research focus and leadership ambiguities that typically characterize academic endeavors.

The team's scholarship was also changed. Even though we published numerous articles in leading and high impact journals, the challenge was to make this work quickly relevant to the lives of veterans. We obtained grants from Federal funding agencies and from state foundations. However, even though this knowledge was generated and featured in press releases and in high impact outlets, it remains a challenge to disseminate the information

into the hands of key policy makers and stakeholders. Dr. Blow has talked to members of the state legislature about the needs of veterans and their families. He has been a member of think tanks in Washington DC about the impact of trauma on veterans and families. He has presented to members of the NG in Michigan. The challenge remains to take important knowledge generated in these studies and use it to change policies and programs over time. Finally, Dr. Blow has worked with graduate students in having an impact on military constituencies. Four doctoral students of Dr. Blow have all focused their doctoral studies around veterans and veteran issues.

4. Lessons Learned and Best Practices

There were numerous challenges in this partnership. While most of the university partners stayed constant, personnel at the National Guard have changed constantly through promotions and retirements. This has required developing and redeveloping relationships with changing personnel. Military personnel are not inherently trusting of civilians and we had to provide “sweat equity” in order to gain trust. Building relationships with the Michigan National Guard has meant listening to the stories and experiences of soldiers, spouses, senior leadership, service providers, and veterans. Over time, those relationships became the foundation for trust, and are a critical variable in sustaining the partnership. Our military constituents want to know that academic partners were genuine and sincere about helping their soldiers and families.

The partnership was a win-win relationship. The National Guard received help from committed professionals, and the academics were able to collect data and generate new ideas. Challenges that arose included working with other players, including other mental health professionals, other researchers, and people who had good intentions but who were not skilled in helping the military. There were also cultural clashes with the university research/academic

world rubbing up against the military culture characterized by “taking care of our own.” In our article published in *Psychiatric Services* (Dalack, Blow, et. al., 2010, p. 1071), we state the following:

The final product has benefited from these somewhat disparate cultures: Program development and implementation moved at a more rapid pace than is typical for academia, and an evaluation and research component has been developed to a greater extent than might ever be planned by a military organization. It was critical to establish trust between university partners and the MIARNG, including all levels of commanders and civilian staff working in the family programs office. There has been no substitute for ongoing face-to-face work to blend efforts and achieve mutually desired goals. The joint mission and shared gratification in working effectively to assist returning soldiers and their families have sustained and enhanced the motivation and energy of each team member and continually fueled the collaborative’s resolution to work together to meet the needs of soldiers and families who have given and sacrificed so much to serve their country.

5. Future

This partnership is affected by the tempo of the military and related deployments. Our plan is to continue to offer trainings in the evidence-based SBHP program. We continue to generate ways to provide more effective services related to mental health and family health for veterans, to sustain the engagement of veterans in treatment, and to follow up with them on the effectiveness of their treatments. Moving forward, we are actively preparing supports for integrating our innovative programs into military programming throughout the US beyond Michigan. This well-functioning partnership and the evidence-based programs generated by the

team have the capacity to impact millions of those who have served and sacrificed for our great nation. There are three areas we plan to focus on in the future and we will use resources from this award, should we win, to pilot programs in these areas.

First, suicide is a growing problem in the NG (and in the military as a whole). Our data suggest that strong intimate relationships are protective when it comes to suicide, and when there is not a strong relationship, individuals at risk need additional supports. It is our priority to identify at risk individuals and to assess the levels of support they have in their relationships.

Second, our team is working to deliver marital/relationship enrichment programs in innovative ways. We are exploring ways to use adventure therapy techniques and online programming to strengthen these relationships.

Third, there continue to be vulnerable populations in the military. These include those wounded physically and psychologically in service, those who come from the LGBTQ community, and women. We will seek to study these populations in the National Guard population and come up with interventions to help them thrive.

6. Appendix

- Letter from John M. Engler, Interim President, Michigan State University
- Letter from Joseph P. Messina, Associate Dean of Research, College of Social Science
- Letter from Associate Professor Hope K. Gerde, Associate Professor Rubén Parra-Cardona, and Professor Deborah Johnson, College of Social Science
- Letter from Gregory J. Vadnais, the Adjutant General, Michigan National Guard

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

April 16, 2018

Selection Committee

W.K. Kellogg Foundation Community Engagement Scholarship Awards
and C. Peter Magrath Community Engagement Scholarship Award
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
1307 New York Avenue NW, Suite 400
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Selection Committee Members:

It is an honor to endorse an outstanding MSU project for the 2018 W.K. Kellogg Foundation Community Engagement Scholarship Awards and the C. Peter Magrath Community Engagement Scholarship Award process.

Helping National Guard Families After Deployment: A University-Military Collaboration addresses deployment and reintegration processes for service members and their families.



Office of the President

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president.msu.edu

Dr. Adrian Blow, professor in the College of Social Science, has built and sustained a collaboration between MSU and the Michigan Army National Guard for more than a decade.

The work began because the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York City and Washington, DC caused Guard service members to deploy in greater numbers. Unlike active duty soldiers, Guard service members typically have full-time jobs and family roots where they live and serve. Deployment for these service members—as well as their families—can have a different impact because they are not living on or near a base, nor have they professionally sought to deploy for long stretches of time. The demands of a National Guard deployment means that service members interrupt their professional lives and family lives (often abruptly), and are expected to resume those lives nearly as abruptly when their mission is complete. It can leave them feeling vulnerable and fragile.

I was Michigan's Governor during 2001. One of the first requests from President Bush after 9/11 was for Governors around the country to call up National Guard units to protect airports until better long-term security measures could be implemented. I was among those governors who immediately responded to the President's request. It was a tough time, but we knew that our Michigan National Guard was prepared and ready. They are dedicated men and women who are essential to our nation's safety.

The transitions these military personnel experience can lead to challenges, not only for the service member, but their spouses, children, employers, and others.

Dr. Blow, the Guard partners, and the incredible team they have assembled, are working on a comprehensive package of support programs that address issues such as family

resilience, post-traumatic stress disorder, insomnia, depression, suicide, spousal abuse, and financial counseling.

The project team has produced data collection, evaluation, new protocols, training, publications, nearing \$3 million dollars in federal funding, and an increasingly stronger partnership between MSU and military personnel. Nearly \$3 million in federal funding has been generated for their work, including a \$1.3 million grant from the U.S. Department of Defense and \$1.1 million from the U.S. Veterans Association.

As the nation's pioneer land-grant university, MSU was the prototype for the entire land-grant system created when President Abraham Lincoln signed the Morrill Act in 1862. Since our creation, we have been mindful of our role to promote innovation and discovery that can be shared with all citizens.

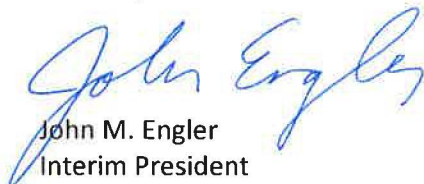
Today, as one of the top research universities in the world, MSU forges enduring partnerships to solve the biggest problems of our time. Community-engaged scholarship is at the heart of our land-grant tradition, and it remains firmly embedded in the culture of the University.

Dr. Blow and the project team members are building a partnership with Michigan Army National Guard personnel that is based on mutual respect, trust, reciprocity, cultural understanding, and shared goals. Their work has been so impactful that the outcomes are bringing about changes in policy and practice for the Michigan Army National Guard, as well as other U.S. military programs and personnel. It is a tremendous honor for Michigan State University to contribute to the health, safety, and care of our service members, veterans, and their families.

It was my privilege to work with the Michigan Army National Guard as Michigan's Governor from 1991 to 2003. It is now an honor to serve Michigan State University as Interim President and write an endorsement for an MSU project that is having a positive outcome for our state's National Guard service members and their families.

I invite you to consider the scope and impact of **Helping National Guard Families After Deployment: A University-Military Collaboration**. Thank you for considering our Michigan State University nomination for the 2018 W.K. Kellogg Foundation Community Engagement Scholarship Awards and the C. Peter Magrath Community Engagement Scholarship Award.

Sincerely,



John M. Engler
Interim President

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

October 3, 2017

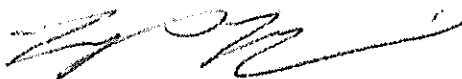
Community Engagement Scholarship Award
University Outreach and Engagement
Kellogg Center, Room 93
219 S. Harrison Road
East Lansing, MI 48824

To the Review Committee:

The College of Social Science has a new strategic plan that highlights and encourages outreach and engagement. The College of Social Science endorses the following application for the 2017-2018 Community Engagement Scholarship Award. Please contact me if there are any issues with the materials or questions about the College's endorsement.

Dr. Adrian J. Blow, Department of Human Development and Family Studies
Project: Helping National Guard Families After Deployment: A University-Military Collaboration

Sincerely,



Joseph P. Messina
Associate Dean of Research



College of Social Science

Office of the Dean

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and Professor
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MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

September 26, 2017

Dear All-University Awards Committee:



College of
Social Science

Department of Human
Development and Family Studies

Lori E. Skibbe
Associate Professor
Michigan State University
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Michigan State University
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With the submission of this letter and materials, we strongly recommend support of Dr. Adrian Blow for the University Community Engagement Scholarship Award for his work with the Michigan Army National Guard. Dr. Blow's work with veterans and their families is groundbreaking and truly embodies the spirit and intentions associated with this award in its service to this community and the military at large.

Critical to his work with Michigan Army National Guard families, over a 10-year-span, is the trust that Dr. Blow and his team have built. These trusted relationships, cultivated over the years, have not only resulted in significant benefits to the university community and military families across Michigan, but have impacted military personnel and families post-deployment internationally through research-informed programming and policy change. Impressively, in association with this project, Dr. Blow has generated over \$3 million dollars in federal funding to date.

Research findings produced through Dr. Blow's innovative work have facilitated clinician's understanding of how to serve the military most effectively, especially as regard to personnel post deployment, a critical time for military personnel and families both here and abroad. Consistent with Michigan State University's land grant mission to advance knowledge, transform lives, and translate research into specific outreach initiatives, Dr. Blow and his team, in collaboration with the military, designed cutting-edge programming to enhance the well-being and mental health of US service personnel upon return from active deployment. To date, this team has established an effective training program for mental health professionals and have trained over 800 counselors in this programming. Essential to Dr. Blow's evidence-based and community-based approach is a balance between research, practice, and service that iteratively informs the scholarship and outreach; a most difficult balance to achieve. Importantly, by demonstrating the effects of interventions which engage the entire family system (i.e., spouses and children) rather than the enlisted personnel individually, as is common military practice, this work has changed the entire approach of the US Military impacting millions.

As indicated in the supportive materials, this research partnership truly embodies the goal and vision of MSU as a land grant university. Since its conception, this program of research was developed through careful collaborative relationships with military and community leaders. In addition to fulfilling all research goals, Dr. Blow has been asked to disseminate his work and research findings at multiple and prominent forums focused on military

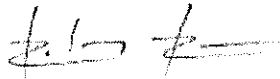
families. In addition, supportive documents clearly describe the complexity associated with this state-of-the-art project and the multiple and varied alliances that Dr. Blow coordinated as the project leader. Most certainly, this challenging program of research could not have achieved its success without a strong commitment to embracing community engagement principles.

We strongly endorse this application because this program of community-based research integrates rigorous scholarship, grounded in true collaborative relationships. For this reason, we hope that this application and line of work can be thoroughly recognized by our academic community.

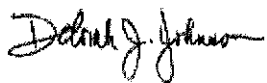
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hope K. Gerde". The script is fluid and cursive.

Hope K. Gerde, PhD
Associate Professor, Michigan State University

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ruben Parra-Cardona". The script is fluid and cursive.

Ruben Parra-Cardona, PhD
Associate Professor, Michigan State University

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Deborah Johnson". The script is fluid and cursive.

Deborah Johnson, PhD
Professor, Michigan State University



STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY & VETERANS AFFAIRS
LANSING

RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

MG GREGORY J. VADNAIS
THE ADJUTANT GENERAL AND DIRECTOR

My pleasure to nominate Dr. Adrian Blow for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Community Engagement Scholarship Award for his work with the Michigan Army National Guard (MIARNG). From October 2006 through November 2012, Dr. Blow and his team were heavily involved in reintegration programming for National Guard service members and their families to include being involved in 30 reintegration events. He worked with colleagues from the University of Michigan to develop the Buddy-to-Buddy peer support program; whereas, the findings from these studies are used to inform support programming for service members and their families.

The MIARNG frequently cites Dr. Blow's work in various ways. Additionally multiple experts utilize his research to improve the overall health of the MIARNG families. Dr. Blow has demonstrated his value as a trusted advisor for the Family Support Programs and the Ready and Resilient Program. These programs incorporated his studies to buffer our internal studies and provide an outside view of the needs of the force.

Notably Dr. Blow is responsible for bringing Star Behavioral Health Providers (SBHP) to Michigan. The programs goal is to improve cultural competency and evidence based training for civilian mental health professionals who work with veterans and their families. SBHP program is a community based program three tiered program that is offered in close conjunction with the MIARNG. The team of trainers trained 789 mental health providers in military cultural competency, 392 providers in Psychological Health Rates and Treatment types, and 298 providers in evidence based treatments for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Insomnia, Depression or Family Resilience. With the SBHP project Dr. Blow and his team diminished the travel time to receive treatment for Service Members and Families by as much as two hours. This program has set the standard for mental health education in Michigan winning support from the Michigan Department of Mental Health and Human Services, the Michigan Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, and the Michigan Association of Community Mental Health Boards.

Sincerely,

GREGORY J. VADNAIS
Major General, MING
The Adjutant General