

# Using the Family Battle Buddies Program to Enhance Family Reintegration following Parental Deployment: Results from a Pilot Study

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# Team members

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# Family Battle Buddies Program

- Modeled on an existing military term (Battle Buddies) which refers to a soldier looking out for one's battle buddy during combat.
- The Family Battle Buddies Program extends this commonly used military term (battle buddy) to the military family units of each soldier in the civilian environment post deployment.

# Family Reintegration

## Expectation



## Reality

- ...family role ambiguity high
- ...family structure that has changed during deployment
- ...soldier that has changed and may have an acquired disability
- ...process of reintegration can take up to three years

# Challenges facing reintegrating families

- Reestablishment of family roles, relationships, routines, and communication
- Need to adjust to normal developmental changes in family members and relationships
- Changes in deployed parent, including disability



# Basic principles behind FBBP

- Recreational therapy approach (active, experiential learning approach)
  - No classroom-based instruction for family
- Focus on family resiliency building
  - Strengths based approach
- Building connections between military family members as well as enhancing individual family strengths
- Challenge activities as metaphoric representations of family stressors and challenges
- Leisure activities enhance family relationships through enjoyment and relaxation

# Why the National Guard?



**The National Guard has changed.**

**E.g. 48% of soldiers in the Middle East during 2004 were National Guard**

- For the soldier
  - Return home to an “in between” status
  - Social connection and proximity to other soldiers is splintered upon return home
- The family also sits in between
- May be limited understanding of their challenges from others in their home community
- May be particularly challenging for children

# BRADFORD WOODS





# **Bradford Woods...**

**... has been running programs in Recreation Therapy, Environmental Education, and Adventure Education since 1955.**

**... sits on a 2,500-acre property with 56 buildings.**

**... sees over 20,000 guests per year, including 1,000 children with disabilities or chronic illnesses and 6,000 fifth graders.**

**...focusing on empirically based program development through various research projects**

Our goal is to improve the  
**quality of life** for people of  
**all** abilities through  
transformative experiences that  
use our unique outdoor setting

# Indiana University's Universally Designed Outdoor Center







# Universal Zip Line



# Adapted Archery



## Alpine Tower





## Sport Pavilion





# Lake and Trails





# Ongoing Condition Specific Programming Research

1. A supportive environment to grow with similar others
2. Others understand you
3. Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) = natural human desire that can be therapeutic for those experiencing disability, illness, or life stressors

## Current research findings from BW...

Knapp, D., Devine, M. A., Dawson, S., & Piatt, J. (2013). Examining Perceptions of Social Acceptance and Quality of Life of Pediatric Campers with Physical Disabilities. *Children's Health Care*.

Dawson, S., Knapp, D., & Farmer, J. (2012). "These are my war buddies": Exploring the Therapeutic Benefits of Social Comparison at a Pediatric Oncology Camp". *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*. 46 (4), 313-325.

Devine, M.A., & Dawson, S.D., (2010) "The Effect of a Residential Camp Experience on Self Esteem and Social Acceptance of Youth with Craniofacial Differences." *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, 44 (2), 105-120.

Dawson, S. & Liddicoat, K. (2009) "Camp Gives Me Hope": Exploring the Therapeutic Use of Community for Adults with Cerebral Palsy" *Therapeutic Recreation Journal*, 43(4), 9-24.

# Program Overview

- Friday – Sunday Family Retreat
- Residential All Inclusive Experience (Food, Lodging, Programming)
- Social Comparison with Similar Others (Family to Family, Veteran, Spouse, Child)
- Strength Based Model (Build on Positives)
- Experiential Therapy (Recreation Therapy and Equine Assisted Therapy)
- Resiliency Building (Walsh, 2006)

# Historic Manor House

Fully accessible with 29 beds

Individual Family Bed Rooms

Pool Table

Living Room / Fire Place

Dining Area

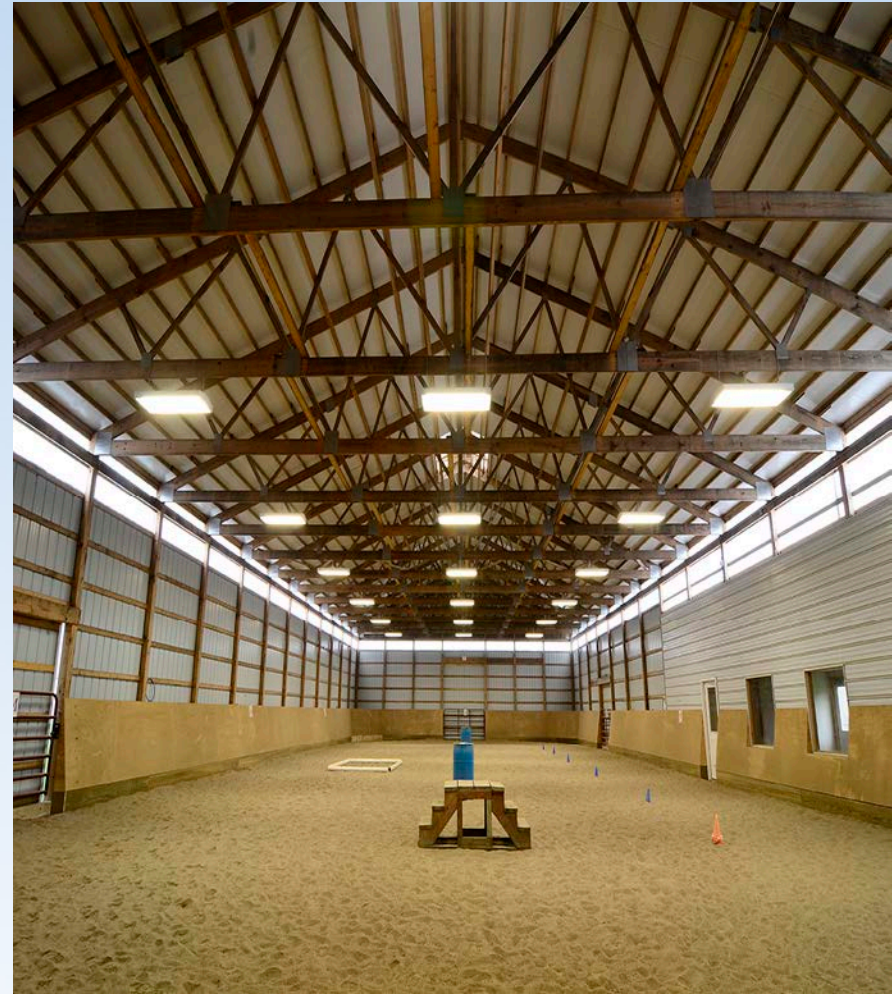
All families under one roof

Informal leisure time together





# Equine Center (Equine Assisted Learning Activities)



# Art and Leisure Counseling Activities

- Family Movie Poster (description of family plot, overcoming adversity, etc.)
- Family Bumper Sticker (humor through adversity in the family)
- Core and Balance Model of Family Functioning (Townsend – research at Bradford Woods)



# Shared Recreation Activities

Adolescent Specific Opportunities

Family Specific Opportunities

Opportunities for unstructured informal support





## Grounds Initiatives & Low Ropes

Purposeful interventions designed to...

1. Increase family communication
2. Build trust amongst family units
3. Reduce role ambiguity



# Findings





# Interviews

- Open-ended questions, semi-structured
  - What were your experiences regarding deployment?
  - What were your experiences regarding the camp?
- Transcribed verbatim
- Themes identified

# Four Main Concepts

- Post-deployment adjustment
- Program strengths/areas for improvement
- Post-program growth
- Interpretation of data



# Post-deployment Adjustment

- Differences in expectations
  - Home parent:
    - Single parent to dual parent
    - Sense of relief and resentment
  - Deployed parent
    - Soldier to civilian
    - Shift in primary social support from unit to spouse
    - Re-assumption of family role

- Reduced access to services
  - Distance to services provided
  - Frequent moving
  - Lack of convenience



# Program Strengths

- Social factors
  - Unstructured time was meaningful and important
  - Structured time with peers
  - Competition between families
    - Emphasis on teamwork within the family
- Physical and mental engagement
  - Action-seeking
  - Less talking
    - But processing clarified understanding

- Whole family focus
  - Important that the entire family came along
  - Gave the opportunity for children to interact with other children
- Removal from daily concerns



# Post-program Growth

- Limited data
- Increased recreational engagement
- Two families maintaining contact with each other
- Talked about what they did



# Interpretation

- Weekend isolation
- Family focus with family comparison
- Focus on strengths over skill acquisition

