



## KENTUCKY IMPLEMENTS PREVENTION STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS SUBSTANCE MISUSE AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ISSUES WITHIN MILITARY-CONNECTED INDIVIDUALS

In 2015, the Kentucky Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental and Intellectual Disabilities (DBHID), received the Strategic Prevention Framework Partnerships for Success program (SPF-PFS 2015 grant from the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). One of the objectives of the grant was to strengthen substance misuse and suicide prevention and behavioral health promotion efforts within the SMVF population through needs assessments, capacity building, planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Military families experience unique challenges that may increase their risk for substance misuse and behavioral health issues.

Between 2010 and 2019, the rate of military suicides increased by 18% and between 2010 and 2015, the rate of military fatal overdoses nearly doubled and was than the increase in the non-military population. Additionally, military-connected youth may be impacted by their family member's service. In a survey of over 100,000 10th graders with 1 or more military connections, youth reported higher rates of bullying (5.66%), past 30-day use of alcohol, tobacco and marijuana combined (1.5%), opioid use (1.33%), serious psychological distress (3.4%) and suicide (3%) compared to their non-military connected peers.



As a result of the PFS 2015 grant Kentucky implemented several strategies to address the SMVF population, specifically military-connected youth.

- The Prevention branch leadership realized the importance of our work and secured funding for a full-time Military Family Resiliency Specialist. The role of the Military Family Resiliency Specialist is to assess the needs of the SMVF population across the state and provides training and technical assistance to Regional Prevention Center (RPC) System and community coalition members on best-practices to engage the SMVF population.
- The Military Family Resiliency Specialist in collaboration with the PFS 2015 Project Director brought the Purple Star Program to Kentucky. This program was chosen based on the results of a focus group with a State Military Teen Council. For more information on the Kentucky Purple Star Award Program Please visit: <http://www.kypurplestar.org/>. We would also greatly appreciate it if you visit and like our Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/KYPurpleStarAward>. Governor Beshear and the First Lady have publically expressed their support for the Kentucky Star Program. <https://youtu.be/cPAY0j5dxYc>





- The Yellow Ribbon Resiliency program was developed in partnership with the Kentucky National Guard. The program uses high quality curriculums and strategies proven to increase protective factors and reduce risk factors for suicide, violence, bullying, and substance use/misuse. The program allows us to deliver selected prevention services at events attended by military youth only such as week end Yellow Ribbon events and summer youth camps.
- The Dinner Table Project, developed by Four Rivers Behavioral Health Regional Prevention Center in 2015, is a program for families to eat together, have fun, and grow closer through conversation. The program promotes parental bonding and is based on research that shows that youth of families who have regular meals together have less substance abuse and behavioral health problems than those who do not. The program was modified in 2020 to make it more culturally relevant to the SMVF population.  
<https://thedinnertableproject.org/>

## Outcomes

As a result of our efforts

- Service Providers (RPCs) reported significant gains in capacity to address the SMVF population. At the outset of the grant RPC directors were asked to assess their Center's readiness to deliver prevention services to the SMVF population. Directors were asked to assess their staff's readiness to address the needs of SMVF population in their region on a scale of 1 to 10 1 being not at all ready and 10 being very ready. The average score of all 14 Regional Prevention Centers combined was 2. Five years later at grant's end that score had improved to 7. Additionally, 35% of the RPCs reported having military representation on their local coalitions as compared to 0% at the outset of the grant. Significant gains were made in reduction of substance misuse of our priority substance as well.
- Opioid use among youth most at-risk (youth with two or more military connections dropped from a baseline of 7.3% in 2014 to 5.9% in 2018. While use among youth with one military connection dropped from 6.3% to 4.7%. In total, a decrease of 25% among those reporting one connection and 19% among those reporting two or more connections. This report confirms that we are reaching military-connected youth through our universal prevention strategies.

In summary, our work with the SMVF population has made a, systemic change across our prevention system. Our Regional Prevention centers regularly include SMVF-focused activities in their work plans are actively collaborating with our Military Family Resiliency Specialist to bring our SMVF prevention efforts to scale.

