Respite for Caregivers and Care Recipients:  
A Break from the Norm

Overview
While our wounded warriors often require care and services for the sacrifices they have made, a group that often goes unnoticed are those that spend their lives caring for these warriors full time. Often, caregivers are family members or spouses that have learned to care for their veteran and who have made sacrifices in their personal and professional lives to do so. The goal of this community solution is to help a community provide caregivers the opportunity to relax and have a reprieve from their duties as caregiver, and also to provide the care-recipient with a time to feel more independent, part of a community of wounded warriors, or as less of a burden on their caregiver. Respite care is, therefore, a benefit to both the caregiver and receiver’s mental health.

The following steps are designed to provide a simple, effective means of starting a respite care service in your community. They are 1) Understand the types of respite care; 2) Narrow your scope; 3) Map your project; 4) Secure resources; 5) Finalize your plan; 6) Implement your respite project; and 7) Wrap up your project.

Is it being done already?
Many behavioral health providers conduct their own outreach within the military community, and some may already have respite care programs in place. Contact local providers, hospitals, state and national chapters of mental health associations, behavioral support organizations, etc. and inquire as to their respite care programs. Even if they already have extensive respite programs, you may be able to provide support and build capacity as a partner.

Step-by-Step Implementation

Step 1: Understand the Types of Respite
There are a few different types of respite care, so before your community decides which one(s) to focus on, it would be valuable to understand the pros and cons of each option.

- **On-site care:** One way to offer respite care is to provide it on-site at a facility that employs trained caregivers to take over once the recipient is dropped off. One pro of an on-site facility is that less caregivers are needed when compared to at-home care (where at least one caregiver will be needed at each home). However, your facility must be equipped with the resources to provide care in a safe and legal manner. If you have a facility, but it only has the capability to care for certain conditions, then you must limit the scope of who is eligible to come there for respite care.

- **At home care:** Another way to offer respite care is through at home services. In this situation, a pro is that a caregiver will come to the house and care for the Veteran while the primary caregiver is having free time. This can be helpful because the equipment to
care for the Veteran will be in the house already. However the con is that more caregivers will be required, since one will have to go to every house.

- **Activities for care-receivers and caregivers:** One way to host respite care if your resources are more limited is to host activities for both caregivers and receivers at a facility. This way, care-receivers can interact with others and hopefully break up their normal routine, while caregivers can meet each other, exchange stories and tips and feel a sense of community with other caregivers. This can also be helpful because if for some reason the Veteran needs his or her caregiver, they won’t be too far away. Activities can also be scheduled weekly, giving both participants something to look forward to and something to break up their week.

- **Transportation assistance:** Sometimes all that a caregiver needs is a little help with their regular activities. One way to help would be to provide transportation assistance for care-recipients to-and-from appointments. Relieving the stress of getting from point A to point B can help caregivers not feel over-burdened and prevent them from getting burnt out. If your community has access to a vehicle that is accessible, this could be a fairly simple way to help out.

- **Vouchers:** Some local communities provide vouchers (also known as respite grants or caregivers’ grants) that can be exchanged for respite care services.

### Volunteer Opportunities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title:</th>
<th>Respite Caregiver Project Coordinator</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task:</td>
<td>Develop a respite caregiver/recipient project in order to provide reprieve for respite caregivers and recipients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributes:</td>
<td>Enthusiastic, resourceful, familiar with non-profit organizations, and interested in the military community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who:</td>
<td>Non-profit program affiliates; community organizers; members of the military community are encouraged to apply.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours:</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
</tr>
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### Step 2: Narrow Your Scope

Now that you understand the different types of respite care, it’s time to narrow down your program by learning a bit more about the other aspects of respite care. Risk and liability need to be defined, partners should be chosen, and a program should be decided upon.

- **Learn more about the Risk and Liability**
  - Define the population of care-receivers to be served. If the group is properly defined, your program can be prepared to care for them in a way that is safe. There are two ways to define the population: cognitive level and medical issues. It is important to be clear when defining what your program can handle in order to keep everyone involved safe.
  - Cognitive levels: Make sure your caregivers are skilled and comfortable caring for the group that you admit in to your program.
  - Medical issues: Allow only the types of medical issues your program will be able to
care for, keeping in mind not only caregiver knowledge but also medical equipment that could be required.

- **Identify a Partner**
  - To help bridge the gap between your knowledge and what your care-recipient requires, consider partnering with an organization that has expertise in respite care. Partners can also spread the word about your program to the military and caregivers community.
  - Service providers such as Goodwill, The Arc, NAMI, and Easter seals have programs that serve persons with disabilities and may be great partners for this type of project or program as they have specific expertise in this area. Consider partnering with them to create or increase awareness of a veteran-specific program. Also approach veteran service organizations to educate them about what respite care is and how they can partner with other organizations that have experience with respite care to assuage any concerns they may have.

- **Decide on a Project**
  - Using your defined population to be cared for, choose a target audience for your search. This could be a general target such as the military community, or a more specific audience such as Veterans of a certain age or ability.
  - Number of People: What is your capacity?

**Conduct a Site Visit** (if necessary)

**Step 3: Map Your Project**

- Create a Task List: Determine the tasks involved and create a comprehensive list of the assignments and prioritize your project’s goals.
- Project Mapping: An important part of the project development process is determining the resources you need to complete the project, including human, material, financial, and educational.
- Planning for Reflection and Evaluation: Reflection and evaluation are important parts of any project. Reflection is a process through which volunteers and coordinators think about their personal experiences, and evaluation is intended to assess the project. You should take time before the project to plan how you will incorporate these steps into the overall project.

**Volunteer Opportunities**

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<tr>
<th>Title:</th>
<th>Respite Caregiver Project Liaison</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task:</td>
<td>Develop a list of types of respite care programs within the community; research and compile information on respite caregiver services and/or other related community programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributes:</td>
<td>Enthusiastic, research skills, and interested in the military community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who:</td>
<td>Volunteers should be well-organized and have experience conducting basic research; members of the military community are encouraged to apply.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hours:</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
</tr>
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**Step 4: Secure Resources**

- **Recruit Volunteers**: Reach out to your local paper, local radio or TV station, blogs, and social media to spread the word about your program.
- **Acquire Materials**: Depending on what your program looks like, different materials will be
needed. Start acquiring these materials through fundraising, donations, or by creating them yourself.

5: Finalize Your Plan
- Complete the project plan
- Communicate with volunteers
- Register volunteers
- Plan for safety
- Create contingency plans
- On-site logistics
- Plan for fun
- Prepare the project day checklist

Step 6: Implement Your Respite Project
- Time management: Using your plans, manage your time wisely and delegate tasks to volunteers as needed.
- People management: Make sure all the volunteers have the information they need for a successful project.
- Setting the tone for a safe day: Emphasize safety over everything else. Make sure that volunteers know where to go when they have a question regarding safety.

Step 7: Wrap up your Project
- Necessary post-project clean up steps
- Recognizing Volunteers: Take the time to thank your volunteers. Give them cards, certificates, or even showcase them on your social media. Make them feel appreciated so that they are more likely to help out again and to spread the word about how great your program is!
- Reflection: At the end of a project, is it helpful to think back about what went well and what could use work. This way, next time you will be even more prepared.
- Evaluation: Surveying your volunteers, caregivers and care-recipients can give you valuable information on how your project was received.

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<th>Title:</th>
<th>Respite Caregiver Providers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Task:</td>
<td>Assist project coordinator in implementing program to alleviate respite caregivers of time responsible for respite recipients.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attributes:</td>
<td>Motivated, interested in providing care to wounded warriors, supportive of the military community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Who:</td>
<td>Community organizers, local veteran service organization members, or a member of the military community.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hours:</td>
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Measures of Success

- A successful respite project is one where both parties benefit
- Both had their personal goals met
- A viable community service was created.