

Give an Hour™ Provides Free and Confidential Mental Health Care

“Nearly 2 million troops have been deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan thus far and all of them will return with some level of trauma from what they experienced,” says Dr. Barbara Van Dahlen, president and founder of Give an Hour™. “It’s estimated that their experience will also affect at least ten people within their social networks — spouses and significant others, children, mothers, fathers, and friends — which means some 20 million people right now could potentially benefit from access to mental health services.”

Accessing these services is another story. Cost is always an issue, as well as the traditional reluctance of the military culture to embrace the need for mental health services. It’s changing, but not at a pace that (at least so far) has kept up with the level of need.

Give an Hour™, founded in 2005, has created a network of volunteer mental health professionals pledging an hour a week of their services, free of charge, to members of the military—including active duty, reserve, and guard—veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq, their families, and their communities. Their services range from one-on-one counseling to substance abuse treatment, addressing the many needs of the individuals and families of the armed services. The approximately 5,600 licensed mental health professionals working with Give an Hour™ have contributed over 37,000 hours as of March 2011 to support our troops and their families. These volunteers include psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, pastoral counselors, and other mental health professionals. Providers are located across the country—in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and Guam.

Some of the men and women returning from service in Iraq and Afghanistan have visible wounds, but more commonly those directly affected endure invisible wounds, including traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress. Suicide, domestic issues, and divorce have been prevalent among veterans, and their children have statistically higher reported rates of behavioral problems.

Give an Hour™ provides resources to overcome the many obstacles service men and women and their families face upon return from deployment as they seek to recover and reintegrate into their civilian lives.

Give an Hour recognizes that the strain of deployments and the stress and horror of combat affects many more people than just the service member and his or her immediate family. Parents, siblings, unmarried partners, etc. are all often adversely affected and can benefit from the professional help that Give an Hour offers. And, there is no limit to the number of sessions one can receive – help is available for as long as it is needed.

“We are proud of the opportunity to bring the military and mental health community together as we strive to provide critical services to these deserving men, women and families,” notes Dr. Van Dahlen.

Their Web site, www.giveanhour.org, allows veterans and their families seeking support to enter their zip code and search for available providers in their area; even if there aren't mental health professionals volunteering in that region, there are services available by telephone. The Web site also makes it easy for mental health professionals to join the network and provides materials, links to articles, and resources on mental health and the military.