

Voices Together

A Community Conversation on Veterans' Reintegration in the Syracuse Region

November, 2009

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SUMMARY

Nearly eight years after the official start of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), our servicemembers, their families, and the communities to which they return are in need of more effective support solutions.

The challenges facing the servicemen and women of our military are complex and personal. They are at high risk of experiencing a multitude of health and social issues. Even if diagnosed and treated/supported effectively (which often is not the case), this places a severe strain on veterans, families and society.¹

The face of veterans has changed significantly given the increasing reliance on the Reserve Component during these two wars. Families and communities are uniquely affected as our National Guard and Reserve units are being called away from their families and civilian jobs in record numbers, often for multiple deployments. Because members of the Reserve and Guard and their families do not have the “ready-made” support system of a military base, the local community becomes critical in reintegration.

Summit Background

As part of its commitment to community, the Syracuse Office of Harris Beach PLLC became interested in improving the support network for servicemen and women returning from duty to the Syracuse region (also referred to as Central NY or CNY). Partnering with the Veterans Outreach Center (VOC) of Rochester, Harris Beach determined a need to gather the input of local experts on reintegration in the Syracuse region.

Based on similar work with the VOC in Rochester, The Center for Governmental Research (CGR) was engaged to conduct a day-long

¹ Tanielian, T. and Jaycox, L., (2008). *Invisible Wounds of War, Psychological and Cognitive Injuries, Their Consequences and Services to Assist*. RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA.

facilitated dialogue and focus group designed to elicit input on the reintegration of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans within Central NY.

This community event, titled “Voices Together: A Summit for Improving our Veterans’ Reintegration” took place on September 18th at Le Moyne College, with just over 60 participants. Participants included veterans, family members of service members, and service providers from seven different counties—all volunteering to collaborate in this innovative way of (1) identifying priority service needs and gaps, and (2) crafting solutions for veterans’ successful reintegration in the region.

Harris Beach is committed to providing ongoing leadership to engage and support the community in mobilizing and implementing local solutions.

Clear priorities emerged

The summit provided data in the form of priorities and suggested actions that the community can use to strengthen supports for veterans’ reintegration in CNY. The data collected during the day-long facilitated activity show five clear priorities for the region:

- 1) A coordinated, accessible, comprehensive network of support**
- 2) Strengthened transition & reintegration education for stakeholders**
- 3) Heightened community awareness**
- 4) More effective outreach & engagement of veterans**
- 5) Emphasis on families**

Each of these identified priority areas of need, and the supporting data, are discussed in full in the body of this report. In response to each area of need, participants brainstormed local action steps. These priority areas, key priorities and suggested actions are categorized and summarized in the table on the following page.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: Areas of Need, Key Priorities and Suggestions for Action		
AREAS OF NEED	KEY PRIORITIES	SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTION
A Coordinated, Accessible, Comprehensive Network of Services	<p>The number one priority need for stakeholders is a coordinated, comprehensive care network for veterans and family. It must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a central source of information and referrals ("one-stop-shop" or "hub"). • Be holistic and comprehensive. • Span government and community services. • Be accessible and well-publicized. • Provide a "transition team" to each veteran and family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support local efforts to create a "one-stop-shop" or "hub" organization. • Set up local advisory board with stakeholders who are responsible for driving coordination and dissemination of local services. • Create and maintain a comprehensive local service guide. • Build an online forum and structured opportunities for networking among service providers.
Strengthened Transition & Reintegration Education	<p>Stakeholders agree that more information is needed during deployment, prior to separation and throughout reintegration. Education must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start before the veteran returns home. • Educate service members and family members. • Include a comprehensive list of local resources. • Connect families and veterans with local providers. • Include opportunities for service providers to learn more, and to meet with veterans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek grant funding or partner for the creation of a comprehensive resource guide for veterans and families to be distributed at separation of service. • Develop educational and networking forums for service providers. • Facilitate a group of veterans to work with service providers in shaping how and when resources are shared. • Engage service providers in educating each other about resources. • Increase direct outreach to families and veterans.
Heightened Community Awareness	<p>Supporting veterans and their families is a community issue:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family members and veterans feel isolated by the general public's lack of understanding and awareness. • Schools, employers, social networks and religious organizations can be supportive resources if educated. • Veterans and families should be a part of the community education campaign. Framing this as a "continuation of service" to their peers might encourage participation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wage a mass media campaign to raise awareness of these issues in the general community. • Encourage family members and service members to speak out and create innovative opportunities to do so. • Provide targeted trainings for "non-veteran" service providers such as school personnel and nurses. • Develop a unified strategy for engaging elected officials and community leaders. • Provide educational materials at local events.
More Effective Outreach & Engagement of Veterans	<p>Service providers across the board expressed a desire to engage more veterans, and are open to new ways of connecting. The group saw the need for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More veterans working as service providers (peer-to-peer support). • Increased veteran input into shaping programs and outreach. • More creative, up-to-date, relevant methods of outreach. • Access to better information about who and where veterans are when they return to region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with service providers to increase recruitment of veterans into open positions. • Develop a cadre of veteran "volunteer mentors." • Advocate for government policy changes on information sharing. • Focus on access in rural areas. • Create forums to interview and learn from veterans about what they would like to see. • Explore possibilities for using technology to allow veterans a secure anonymous space for discussing needs.
Emphasis on Families	<p>Supporting military families <i>is</i> supporting veterans. Families live in the community, making this a community concern. This means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased understanding that this is a "family affair" and development of services that reflect that reality. • Services and information need to begin at deployment and continue post-reintegration. • Community, civic and faith-based organizations need to be more engaged. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for policy changes to reflect family needs. • Educate community members such as school social workers who work with families in routine settings. • Target and increase outreach to families. • Increase both information and community role as discussed in previous sections. • Foster innovative programs for supporting children which incorporate alternative therapies and technology and reach kids where they are (e.g., schools, online).

Summit participation mobilizes stakeholders for action to come

Because the summit model brings local stakeholders together for a day-long collaborative process, it yields immediate positive outcomes in terms of networking, awareness, and momentum. This is a value over and above the data collected in the summit, and each should be used to capitalize on the other.

At the summit, providers were able to learn of the needs facing families and veterans and to link their services to others; veterans and families learned about available services, and began to inform the providers' offerings. Because these needs and resources vary depending on the community, information must be spread on the local level to address the current fragmentation of the system. The value of building structures to foster solid linkages and shared knowledge was made clear by how much participants valued the summit opportunity.

Furthermore, by the end of the summit, many individuals and organizations made public commitments to carry out proposed actions. Notable among these was a joint pledge by Cornell Cooperative Extension and Harris Beach to explore the creation of an online forum for the local reintegration community—starting with summit participants—to communicate and organize.

This energy and forward momentum was palpable at the summit and bodes well for the likelihood of tangible change around supporting veterans in the Syracuse community.

Moving forward

One of the needs expressed poignantly by family members and veterans was for the community at large to become more invested in supporting veterans. In this light, Harris Beach is to be commended for its role in facilitating this important community conversation with the ultimate goal of improving the lives of our servicemen and women and their families.

With this leadership role, Harris Beach has both the opportunity and responsibility to channel the resultant findings and momentum into tangible change for the Syracuse area. The summit is only a starting point, and if shared effectively with summit participants and the community, the data gathered and the spirit of collaboration can be capitalized on to spur actions and create meaningful solutions.

CGR outlines these opportunities for immediate steps that Harris Beach—in conjunction with logical community partners—should take. (A more detailed discussion of each is presented in the body of the report.) Harris

Beach is committed to providing leadership at the outset—particularly in executing the first three steps on the following list. Harris Beach’s commitment to take the lead and facilitate the process, especially in the early stages, is critical in keeping attention on the important issues and solutions raised through the summit. To make the change recommendations in this report, other community partners must take ownership of developing and implementing the concrete strategies and actions needed to achieve this type of community-based change for veterans and families.

1. Contact summit participants quickly and invite them to suggest their ideas for “next steps.”
2. Publicly release the report by holding a press conference.
3. Form an “Advisory Group” that will provide ownership and leadership of what could emerge as a community-wide coalition focused on reintegration.
4. Develop a group Action Plan.
5. Find an opportunity for a “quick win.”
6. Communicate, communicate, communicate.
7. Create an online inventory of available services and resources in the area.
8. Convene and charge an appropriate working group with thinking creatively, locally and at the grass-roots level about public awareness, community education, and outreach.
9. If a “one-stop-shop” or “hub organization” is determined as a key goal by the Advisory Group, it will require a thorough planning process including research, legal guidance, and fundraising.
10. Keep track of progress by ensuring appropriate attention and oversight is paid to the suggested action recommendations.

Toward a community solution

Recent research into this population’s needs resulted in a recommendation to the Department of Defense (DOD) that DOD seek to raise awareness of

and partner with local community organizations and networks as a vehicle for support.²

This summit model, and the resultant community data and momentum are completely aligned with this recommendation. The Central NY community clearly understands the needs and has the will to create local solutions to better support the noble men, women and families who serve our nation, and call this region home.

² Castaneda, L. et al. (2008). *Deployment Experiences of Guard and Reserve Families: Implications for Support and Retention*. RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA.

Acknowledgements

The staff at CGR respectfully acknowledges the servicemen, servicewomen and families who dedicate their lives to military service for our country. We also recognize the contribution of the people who support military families in the role of service provider. We are grateful for the service members, veterans, family members, and service providers who gave a full day of their valuable time to attend the summit and share their perspectives. This project simply would not have been possible without their participation.

It was a privilege to use our skills to help this august group express their needs and solutions.

CGR is appreciative of the collaboration between partners Harris Beach (Syracuse Office), the Veterans Outreach Center, and Le Moyne College—all of which made the summit a successful event.

CGR additionally thanks Wegmans Food Markets for their generous donation which supplied the food for summit participants, as well as for the role they played in promoting the event.

CGR also wishes to thank the community of supporters who assisted in outreach efforts by distributing flyers, or simply spreading the word about the summit. We thank the military and political leaders who helped to promote and support the summit and who have pledged to be part of the emerging solutions.

Staff Team

This project was directed by Donald Pryor, Director of Human Services Analysis. Senior Research Associates Kirstin Pryor and Jaime Saunders played the lead roles in planning and facilitating the Summit, analyzing the data and writing the report. Associates Katherine Bell and Michael Silva assisted with data entry and preliminary analysis.

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PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Syracuse office of law firm Harris Beach PLLC sought to improve the support network for servicemen and women returning from duty to the Syracuse region (also referred to as Central NY or CNY). They began to explore options for spurring a community-based support system that would help veterans successfully reintegrate into the area.

With this end in mind, Harris Beach turned to the Veterans Outreach Center (VOC) of Rochester, NY, which is the oldest “community-based veteran outreach effort in the nation.”³ Together, VOC and Harris Beach determined a need to gather the input of local experts on reintegration in the Syracuse region. Based on similar work with the VOC in Rochester, The Center for Governmental Research (CGR) was engaged to conduct a day-long facilitated dialogue and focus group designed to elicit input from veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, their family members, and service providers within Central NY.

This community event, titled “Voices Together: A Summit for Improving our Veterans’ Reintegration” took place on September 18th at Le Moyne College, with just over 60 participants. Participants included veterans, family members of service members, and service providers from seven different counties—all volunteering to collaborate in this innovative way of identifying priority service needs and gaps for veterans’ successful reintegration in the region. Together, these stakeholders prioritized their needs and crafted solution strategies for strengthening reintegration supports in the region.

THE CONTEXT

National needs call for local solutions

Nearly eight years after the official start of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), our servicemembers and their families are in need of more effective support solutions. The challenges facing the servicemen and women of our military are complex and personal. They are at high risk of experiencing a multitude of health and social issues. Nearly one in five of the close to 1.7 million veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan experience serious psychological injury including anxiety, depression, and/or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Even if diagnosed and treated effectively (which often

³ Veterans Outreach Center website, www.veteransoutreachcenter.org

is not the case), this places a severe strain on veterans, families and society.⁴

The face of veterans has changed significantly given the increasing reliance on the Reserve Component during these two wars (through October 2007, reservists and guardsmen made up 30% of total deployments). These veterans tend to be older, include more women, and be more geographically dispersed. Families and communities are uniquely affected as our National Guard and Reserve units are being called away from their families and civilian jobs in record numbers, often for multiple deployments.

Because members of the Reserve and Guard and their families do not have the “ready-made” support system of a military base, the local community becomes critical in reintegration. Despite the public’s awareness of the wars, the challenges facing veterans and their family members are often invisible to local communities, employers, and service providers, making a bad situation worse. Emotional barriers, stigma and a military culture of self-sufficiency and toughness often inhibit willingness to ask for help. A service system that is overloaded, fragmented, and inconsistent confronts those who do admit their need.

Recent research into this population’s needs resulted in recommendations to the Department of Defense (DOD) that families be a focus of support, and that the DOD seek to raise awareness of and partner with local community organizations and networks as a vehicle for support.⁵

Syracuse Harris Beach: A Local Response

Harris Beach arrived at the concept of a veterans support network that would complement existing resources and potentially culminate in a non-profit outreach center for veterans in Syracuse. Valuing the many veteran supports that already exist in the area, Harris Beach recognized the need to engage the local experts and users of the current system.

The Voices Together Summit model provided a process for gathering this information, and is in complete alignment with the recent recommendations to take a community-centric approach to supporting veterans.

⁴ Tanielian, T. and Jaycox, L., (2008). *Invisible Wounds of War, Psychological and Cognitive Injuries, Their Consequences and Services to Assist*. RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA.

⁵ Castaneda, L. et al. (2008). *Deployment Experiences of Guard and Reserve Families: Implications for Support and Retention*. RAND Corporation, Santa Monica, CA.

VOICES TOGETHER: THE MODEL

In 2008, CGR collaborated with the Veterans Outreach Center to develop a research approach that would:

- Collect information on priority needs concerning reintegration for OEF/OIF veterans in a five-county Upstate NY area; and simultaneously
- Foster increased awareness and collaboration between stakeholders.

Enthusiastic response from participants and the concrete improvements to the reintegration system spurred by the data and the process merit using this approach in other communities.

The research methodology is an adaptation of Appreciative Inquiry (AI),⁶ an organizational development practice which has been applied as a research tool. It yields quantitative data and information on the entire context of an issue, but the process of this research is intended to foster positive change, rather than function solely as objective data collection. The choice of AI as a research methodology is a choice for collaboration and partnership, and is a commitment to future change being realized through the process.

In this case, the *summit was designed to elicit the local priorities for reintegration of OEF and OIF veterans returning to the Syracuse area.* These priorities emerged through a day-long process of engaging 60 stakeholders—veterans and service members, family members, and service providers—in collaboratively envisioning an ideal system of support. Participants (1) identified and prioritized needs, and (2) created preliminary action plans.

1) Identifying priorities

- ❖ The Summit began by uncovering personal priorities and values, eliciting a wide pool of themes for the whole group to consider, and then narrowing the focus to priority themes which would be explored further.
- ❖ Each theme was written into a “theme statement,” essentially a vision statement of what reintegration would look like if this theme existed. Resulting statements were hung on the wall for all participants to respond.

⁶ See <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/intro/default.cfm> for further information.

- ❖ Each summit participant rated each statement along two continuums—importance and current existence, each on a scale of 1-5. The ratings were done with color-coded stickers, allowing CGR to determine the aggregate findings and also to disaggregate by each stakeholder group. The juxtaposition of these two rating scales immediately created a visual preliminary gap analysis, as well as showing either the consensus or disparate viewpoints in the room.
- ❖ Each person was next asked to prioritize their “top three” of the theme statements generated, again using coded stickers. This identified the group’s priorities as well as the priorities of each stakeholder group. It also provided an immediate sense of the high-energy themes around which momentum was gathering.

2) Action Planning

Each small group chose two high-priority statements and spent time planning and brainstorming what it would take to make these statements actionable. For each statement, groups were tasked with identifying:

- ❖ Resources that already exist;
- ❖ Resources that were still needed; and
- ❖ Actions that could be taken to make this theme a reality.

The direction was to focus on the locally achievable steps, as opposed to simply more money or federal policy change.

VOICES TOGETHER: DATA COLLECTION

The summit model is designed to provide multiple opportunities to collect data. These include:

- Theme statements, representing emerging priorities;
- Prioritized theme statements, tallied collectively and by stakeholder group;
- Gap analysis showing participant perspectives on the importance and existence of each theme statement;
- Action plans, including resources that exist, resources that are needed and ideas for locally actionable steps;

- Collection of all themes brainstormed during the day;
- Collection of the identified strengths and opportunities for the local reintegration system; and a
- Participant survey.

The challenge of synthesizing this type of data is to report the quantitative results, such as the number of priority votes, while not losing the nuances and priorities expressed consistently in discussions. For this reason, in addition to providing our analysis below, CGR presents the raw data in the appendices.

SUMMIT FINDINGS

Clear Priorities Emerged

CGR's synthesis of the data collected and of the day's dialogue reveals a convergence on **five priority areas of need** in the Syracuse region. These priorities represent what participants believe are the critical ingredients of a stronger veterans' reintegration system in the region. The five priority areas are:

- 1) Coordinated, accessible, comprehensive network of support**
- 2) Strengthened transition & reintegration education for stakeholders**
- 3) Heightened community awareness**
- 4) More effective outreach & engagement of veterans**
- 5) Emphasis on families**

To arrive at these five priority need areas, CGR categorized the 16 theme statements that emerged from the summit participants⁷. The groupings are shown in Table I. For some statements, the link to the priority category is immediately clear, while others are more implicit, and incorporate our observations of participant dialogue.

⁷ CGR facilitators merged duplicative theme statements during the summit with the permission of participants.

Table I: Priority Areas of Need Emerged from Theme Statements

Theme Statements	Coordinated, Accessible, Comprehensive Network of Support	Strengthened Transition & Reintegration Education	Heightened Community Awareness	More Effective Outreach & Engagement of Veterans	Emphasis on Families
CNY veterans can access a cohesive, centralized system of service delivery.	X	X		X	
Veterans/family members are aware of and educated about available service and support.	X	X		X	X
CNY has one organization where veterans and their families come to obtain info and referrals to government and community services that assist them in the reintegration and adjustment back into community.	X	X	X	X	X
If a veteran came home to Syracuse, they would have access to a transition team that helps integrate them back to society.	X	X		X	X
Veterans in CNY have access to affordable legal services.	X			X	
Veterans and his/her family have access to a powerful personal advocate.	X	X		X	X
Veteran and non-veteran service providers are aware of all resources available to veterans and their families.	X	X	X	X	X
Community leaders are fully aware of all services available to support the needs of the veterans they influence.			X		
CNY veterans have access to integrated social support groups (inclusive of ALL community members).			X	X	
Military Families in CNY have access to full range of support during pre-deployment, deployment, and post deployment.	X	X		X	X
Service providers are networking and collaborating through the use of social media.	X	X			
Veterans and their families can easily access their community educational support systems (benefits, admissions, colleges).	X	X	X	X	X
Trained and educated non-veteran service providers are available to assist veterans.	X		X	X	
Coordination between DOD/DVA facilitates a smooth transition from military to civilian life.	X			X	
The VA provides quick services to veterans.	X			X	
The general public in the Syracuse area is involved in veterans' issues.			X	X	X
Note: Theme statements are not listed in prioritized order.					

Priority Needs & Actions

Each of the five identified priority areas of need includes multiple threads or ideas—because they represent the synthesis of many perspectives. This section provides the reader with a detailed discussion of the five priority areas. For each area, CGR presents the following from participants:

- Key priorities identified;
- Preliminary suggested actions; and
- The degree of consensus.

There is a fair amount of overlap, in that actions listed under one priority area can certainly address other needs as well. Please reference the table in the introduction section (p.iii) that summarizes the priorities and suggested action for each area of need. Individual gap analysis charts, priority votes, and interview data can be found in the Appendix.

Priority Area 1) A coordinated, accessible, comprehensive network of support

What key priorities were identified by participants?

The number one need identified is a **coordinated, comprehensive network** of services. This network of services must be local, **easily accessible**, comprehensive in nature, well-publicized and connected for easy navigation.

This does not mean that all services must be provided by one agency, but that there is a cohesive, coordinated system that includes all types of services for all types of servicemembers, so that each “problem” doesn’t have to be addressed in a disparate fashion. This may require a range of solutions including benefit structure changes, creation of a one-stop-shop, funding of case managers, co-location of services, and creation of local umbrella agencies.

Summit participants were adamant that a **central organization or information source serving as the “hub” of the network is the priority need in the region**. They were equally adamant that this central organization must span government *and* community-based services.

Evaluations and discussion from the summit revealed strong sentiment that the act of participating in the summit provided a rare chance to learn about a host of resources already available in their community. A continuous theme heard at the summit was the **need for information and networking to better understand what services are available and how to access them**. The fact that service providers themselves expressed

incomplete knowledge of available services in their community underscores this need for coherence.

While the specifics and logistics of an effective coordinated and comprehensive network will require further discussion; the following were priorities identified in the summit:

KEY PRIORITIES

- There should be one organization that is *the* place to go for referrals and information. The network needs to span both government and non-VA care, so that the onus of connecting the dots is not on veterans and families.
- A central resource guide or clearinghouse needs to be created for each geographic region. This should be both in print and online to ensure that providers, veterans, and families have the complete picture of available services in their region.
- This network of services must be comprehensive in scope and take a holistic view of support. For example, mental health providers must be clued in to employment or legal resources, health care providers must address marital stress, benefits coordinators must know about services for children. There must be an expectation that all service providers will think comprehensively.
- Access to the coordinated network should be ensured through a “transition team” assigned to each veteran who returns to the area. This team would be the point of entry linking to comprehensive services and benefits, and provide a personal advocate for each veteran and his/her family.

What opportunities for action were suggested by participants?

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Organize local, grassroots advisory groups that are regional, include various stakeholders, are responsible for oversight and dissemination, and focus on increasing coordination and local control of services.
- Lay the groundwork to prepare for one-stop-shop.
- Compile a centralized database:
 - Seek grant funding for creation of a comprehensive local service guide to be sent to service providers and regularly updated (explore print and online versions, and take advantage of university, VISTA volunteers for labor);
 - Build on what already exists (such as 211, other websites).
- Ensure access to rural populations through mobile resources.

- Continue momentum begun at the summit by organizing online forum to connect providers.
 - Organize periodic venues for networking, sharing resources, staff development.

How much consensus was there among participants on this priority?

This theme of **coordination** was present in over half of the total theme statements created by groups at the summit, much more prevalent than other themes. (However it is also worth noting that this is the most comprehensive in scope, and includes a good number of other ideas generated.) Statements incorporating this issue were the top three vote recipients when participants identified their top three out of the 16 statements. When the votes were disaggregated, this theme was also rated as one of the top three priorities by service providers and veterans.

The centrality of this need is further bolstered by the surveys taken at the summit. *Over 80% of the veterans and family members responded that the community could “definitely” benefit from a more coordinated approach to reintegration, and over 90% of service providers agreed. Approximately three-quarters of participants say that they need more information on what resources are available, including both governmental benefits and community services.*

The responses of service providers—those who should theoretically have the most information—highlight the need for effective coordination and communication. When asked what they needed to strengthen their ability to serve veterans, they rated these items much higher than the need for more funding or staff:

What do you need in order to strengthen your ability to serve veterans?

Selected Response Choices	Number of Service Providers Responding Yes	Percent of Service Providers Responding Yes
a centralized source of information	27	71
interagency partnerships	20	53
opportunities to network with other providers	28	74
funding and/or staff	15	39

The need for these coordinated services to be **comprehensive** in scope clearly emerged as a priority. While typical areas such as health care, employment and employer training, and mental health supports were universally cited as critical needs, participants also identified affordable legal services, a focus on families and future planning (e.g. financial and educational) as important. Close to half of respondents also said that opportunities to socialize with other veterans and Internet supports were very important.

A coordinated system will fail without an emphasis on easy **access**. *The idea of creating integrated “transition teams” which would be assigned to each veteran upon returning to the community received the second highest number of priority votes.* This sort of structural/procedural change to ensure that veterans and families are connected to available services was echoed throughout the day.

The gap analysis data for this theme is instructive as well. *Across the board, statements dealing with this theme were rated highly on importance, but low on current existence.* This shows that there is some foundation to build on, and plenty of work to be done.

Priority Area 2) Strengthened transition & reintegration education

This theme refers to **education within the main stakeholders of the reintegration system**—veterans, military families and service providers.

This priority theme is closely related to the first—because stakeholder education about transition and reintegration is both the means to create the coordinated network and an end goal of the coordinated network. CGR chose to highlight this theme separately because it was so prevalent in the summit dialogue and data. It also speaks to the military “can do” attitude because it implies that given the necessary information, people will be empowered to take care of themselves.

What key priorities were identified by participants?

Two key needs emerged in this area.

First, **veterans and family members want more, and more timely, information on all available benefits and resources.** Many feel that the information they have is not necessarily complete, or that it is not provided at the right time. There is also a concern that while the facts may be given, the comprehensive support to access the benefit or resource is lacking.

Similarly, **service providers expressed a need for more comprehensive information.** They feel they do not have a complete picture of the services that exist, leading to both under-utilized services on the one hand, and veterans' needs not being met on the other.

Furthermore, **service providers expressed a desire for opportunities to learn from each other, and to learn from veterans**—both of which would help inform programmatic planning and service delivery.

KEY PRIORITIES

- Both veterans and family members want more information about reintegration shared before, during and after deployment. The need for families to be engaged early and thoroughly was mentioned.
- A complete resource guide to the local community would be helpful to families, veterans and service providers.
- Service providers want opportunities and forums to learn and share the resources that are available.
- Service providers are seeking ways to learn from veterans about what types and venues of services they want and need.
- Basic information such as the number of various categories of veterans returning to the community would be a helpful starting point.
- A desire to “do things differently,” to use new forms of social media, or electronic forums to collect and disseminate information was expressed.

What opportunities for action were suggested by participants?

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Survey providers to compile an inventory of what currently exists. Ensure that this gets in hands of all families and veterans in the area.
- Service providers and veterans partner to create public service announcements (PSAs), and other engaging outreach.
- Develop forums for professional development and networking among service providers.
- Engage service providers in educating each other about relevant services, and the best points of contact.
- Facilitate a group of veterans to work with service providers to shape changes in how and when services and information are supplied.
- Employ new forms of social media, and electronic information.

How much consensus was there among participants on this priority?

Roughly 40% of the 16 themes generated addressed this need for education implicitly. It is also important to understand that many individuals and groups who expressed this as a need felt that this education focus was inherent in the first theme (coordinated, comprehensive network), and therefore did not label this separately as a priority theme.

Despite this, *the theme which explicitly stated “Veterans/family members are aware of and educated about available service and support.” received the fifth highest number of priority votes, and tied for second among veteran participants.* This statement also had the second largest gap between the importance and current existence ratings—underscoring the opportunity for improvement.

This is supported by the survey, on which *80% of veteran and family respondents requested more information on either VA or non-VA services.*

It also merits noting that while not designated as a top priority by the entire group, the need for families and veterans to be educated and supported in specifically accessing educational benefits was a key theme which emerged as one of the 16.

Service providers also expressed the need for more education in the form of networking and learning from other providers, and from veterans.

What do you need in order to strengthen your ability to serve veterans?

Selected Response Choices	Number of Service Providers Responding Yes	Percent of Service Providers Responding Yes
a centralized source of information	27	71
interagency partnerships	20	53
opportunities to network with other providers	28	74

Priority Area 3) Heightened community awareness

The depth of discussion and passion around this theme led CGR to include community awareness as a priority area of need. Many of the conversations around other themes overlapped here, because veterans of OIF and OEF in particular are coming home not to a military base, but to their respective civilian communities. Similarly, their families do not have the ready-made support system of a military base during deployment—

again underscoring the **need for a community-wide understanding** of veterans' issues.

What key priorities were identified by participants?

In short, supporting veterans and their families is **a community issue and needs to be prioritized and promoted as such**. There was frustration expressed by the fact that the general public (not just in Syracuse) seems “divorced from the wars.” The feeling is that unless and until it impacts someone personally, there is little in the way of awareness or appreciation of issues facing veterans and their families. **A heightened recognition and commitment from community leaders, elected officials, organizations like Harris Beach, and the media is seen as desirable and necessary.**

Specifically, participants voiced the **need for “non-veteran” service providers including school personnel, health care providers such as nurses, and employers to be aware of the challenges** facing both veterans and family members. They believe that heightened awareness will increase the level of empathy and support, but also have very practical effects such as helping to identify and treat mental health issues, and connecting people to available services.

The idea that developing supportive activities and structures that integrate veterans and military families with non-military community members was also discussed, with the idea being that part of the need is to combat isolation.

**KEY
PRIORITIES**

- Increased awareness and education on the part of the general public, particularly as it relates to understanding the veterans' issues that impact the entire family.
- A proactive commitment to veterans' concerns on the part of community leaders and elected officials. This commitment should include the opportunity for veterans and families to express their needs and desires directly.
- Targeted education for “non-veteran specific” community providers/workers such as school personnel, physicians and nurses, and employers. Trainings should encompass information on the common issues and warning signs, and on available community resources.
- Employers need to be made aware of the myriad of supports they can make available to veteran or family member employees, as well as of the legalities and benefits involved. This education needs to be done in a balanced way that does not “frighten employers off.”

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Where possible, veterans and family members should be involved in shaping community education—both to ensure accuracy and because they are the most powerful spokespeople. Framing this work as a continuation of service to their military peers, rather than a “cry for help,” may increase the odds of engagement.

What opportunities for action were suggested by participants?

- Work proactively to engage the community in a campaign to raise awareness. Work creatively to leverage:
 - Traditional and social media outlets;
 - Family members and servicemembers’ stories—create unique opportunities (e.g., radio, YouTube, high school media or oral history projects, Public Service Announcements) to empower people to use their experiences to help support others;
 - Existing community events or structures where a veteran-focus can be infused;
 - A broader swathe of the local community. Develop innovative programming that spans military and non-military families (e.g., book clubs, movie nights).
- Plan a strategy for reaching out to community leaders and elected officials, providing forums for them to become educated and talk to veterans and families, thus laying the groundwork for future advocacy.
- Develop trainings, trainers, and materials for non-veteran specific service providers. Begin to explore collaborations with community sites such as schools and healthcare providers.

How much consensus was there among participants on this priority?

This *theme was incorporated in almost half of the 16 theme statements* that emerged from the day’s dialogue, meaning that the majority of small groups recognized the need for the wider community to be more invested and educated in this area. Collectively, the theme statements (e.g., “Trained and educated non-veteran service providers are available to assist veterans.”) that touched on this theme received just under 20% of the “top priority” votes at the summit. Additionally, the importance of this idea was made clear in the content of the interviews and group discussions.

On a very practical note, *heightened awareness for employers is especially critical—over 90% of all survey respondents rated this as “very important.”*

Priority Area 4) Improved outreach & engagement of veterans

This was not stated as a standalone theme, but the need was expressed stridently and repeatedly in both small group and whole group discussions. It is also inherently related to Priority Areas 1 and 2 in that:

- 1) The coordinated, accessible comprehensive network of support will be more effective if veterans are part of shaping it;
- 2) Veterans (and family members) are the most qualified to determine what, how and when information should be provided to meet their needs;
- 3) Regardless of the availability of quality services, if veterans and families don't use them, they are not successful.

What key priorities were identified by participants?

This theme refers to the need to engage more veterans, more effectively. Service providers recognize a need to:

- Recruit more veterans to work or volunteer in peer-to-peer contexts;
- Solicit input from veterans to refine the programs and services they deliver;
- Be more effective at engaging veterans in using the existing services through:
 - Employing more veterans, recognizing the peer-to-peer culture;
 - Developing creative forms of outreach relevant to the target population;
 - Developing structures and policies to connect with veterans at more appropriate times in the transition/reintegration period.
- Have better access to information on who and where veterans are when they return to the community.

What opportunities for action were suggested by participants?

- Develop a cadre of veteran “volunteer mentors” who are recruited, screened, and trained to help support their peers.
- Work with service providers to actively recruit more recently-separated (from active duty) servicemembers into outreach or support jobs.

KEY PRIORITIES

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

- Work to change government policies on information sharing in ways which will increase veterans' access to services and balance their right to privacy.
- Create an appropriate forum for asking veterans what they need and want, and when services and information are most effectively shared. Leverage military leaders and organizations as well as local connections to do so.
- Be creative about using social media to develop more relevant ways of connecting with the target populations.
- Explore options for making resources more accessible in rural areas.
- Conduct a scan of “promising practices” in other communities.

How much consensus was there among participants on this priority?

While not readily apparent in print, the *statement*, “*If a veteran came home to Syracuse, they would have access to a transition team that helps integrate them back to society,*” was focused in part on peer-to-peer support. This theme received the second highest number of priority votes.

Echoing this, both the small group and whole group discussions elicited this common challenge—that service providers need strengthened ways of connecting with veterans.

Veterans in particular were adamant about the value of peer support and interaction, and ideas such as training a cadre of veteran volunteer mentors were emphatically endorsed.

The concept of engaging veterans in both shaping programs, community education and in peer support emerged in many of the action plans and was prevalent in much of the day's dialogue.

Priority Area 5) Emphasis on families

The idea that reintegration is a family issue, and the importance of improving the education, support and access to services they receive was incorporated into many of the themes, and was poignantly expressed by a veteran who said that often “our families are left twisting in the wind while we're gone, leaving a huge hole for us to dig out of when we come home.”

It is interesting to note that instead of isolating a focus on families, many of the groups consistently linked veterans and families in their vision statements. This argues that in this community, supporting veterans and their families are inextricably linked.

Also interesting is that the explicit theme of family support did not arise as starkly as it has in other communities. CGR cannot say whether this is explained by the fact there were relatively few family members in attendance, or if the Syracuse area has more resources already targeted at family supports. It could also be that as noted above, participants thought more holistically and did not differentiate between veterans and families.

What key priorities were identified by participants?

**KEY
PRIORITIES**

- Increased understanding that both deployment and reintegration are a “family affair.” Supports that the military and the local community put into place need to recognize this, as well as the complex “ripple effect” which means that every aspect of family life will be affected.
- Family support needs to occur throughout deployment, not just at the time of transition and reintegration.
- Family members need access to more timely and more extensive information regarding entitlements such as educational benefits, as well as other available supports.
- Family members are often more likely and more able to seek support for their veteran, and outreach efforts need to reflect this.

The idea of the community’s role in recognizing and supporting the family unit is factored into priority area 3 of raising community awareness.

What opportunities for action were suggested by participants?

**SUGGESTED
ACTIONS**

Many of the suggested actions in previous categories apply to supporting families, especially in regards to a centralized, comprehensive source of information and resources.

These additional ideas were suggested:

- Link existing services, form new inter-agency partnerships to address child and spouse issues.
- Be proactive in seeking greater involvement and support from civic, community, faith-based organizations.
- Work for policy change allowing families to access home state benefits during deployment.
- Conduct targeted education to community members (such as school social workers) who work with children and spouses.
- Target outreach to families around relevant services such as financial literacy, affordable legal services, and educational benefits.

How much consensus was there among participants on this priority?

The statement, “Military Families in CNY have access to full range of support during pre-deployment, deployment, and post deployment,” received the third highest number of priority votes. Two of the top five priorities explicitly mentioned families. Roughly 40% of the 16 statements incorporate a family focus and it is tangentially related to a few more.

On the survey, approximately three-quarters of respondents stated that “support or activities for families” were “very important.”

As noted above, the notion of supports for families and supports for veterans were very closely linked throughout many theme statements.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

Harris Beach is to be commended for its role in facilitating this important community conversation with the ultimate goal of improving the lives of our servicemen and women and their families. Harris Beach has been entrusted by the summit participants to take their voices and drive toward real solutions. With this leadership role, Harris Beach has both the opportunity and responsibility to channel the resultant findings and momentum into tangible change for the Syracuse area. The summit is only a starting point, and if shared effectively with participants and the community, the data gathered and the spirit of collaboration can be capitalized on to spur actions and create meaningful solutions.

Within each priority area of need, CGR synthesized participants’ broad “suggested actions,” and the preliminary action plans created by participants are compiled in Appendix C.

What follows are CGR’s recommendations for next steps in *using* the summit findings to continue the community dialogue for action and implementation.

1. **Contact summit participants quickly and invite them to suggest their ideas for “next steps.”** As daily lives become consumed with obligations and other concerns compete for our attention, it is imperative to move ahead quickly and reengage participants in order to retain the enthusiasm and interest initiated at the summit. A key request at the end of the summit was to establish an immediate online forum to facilitate communication and maintain the new relationships fostered at the event. Such free services could be initiated with Yahoo Groups or Google Groups, which would require a group monitor to maintain and notify

participants via email to use this new forum. CGR strongly urges this step is implemented as soon as possible.

2. **Publicly release the report by holding a press conference.** This press conference should be designed to promote community engagement in next steps including promoting the online forum and seeking volunteers to participate on the advisory committee and action planning. Raising awareness of the report and more importantly, the issues and opportunities raised, fulfills the promise made to participants that their voices were heard and provides Harris Beach with an opportunity to make its public commitment to taking the findings to the next level. Summit participants should each receive an electronic copy of the report. Harris Beach may also wish to send the report findings to area community leaders and political representatives.
3. **Form an “Advisory Group” that will provide ownership and leadership of what could emerge as a community-wide coalition focused on reintegration.** This group should have the key stakeholders represented, but should be kept small enough to ensure action.
 - a. The Advisory Group should be charged with developing an operating structure which may entail clarification of the advisory group’s role and goals, and component committees working in various priority areas.
 - b. Convene sub working groups of participants and other stakeholders to continue the action planning work begun at the summit. The idea is to “continue the conversation” from the summits in order to delve deeper into the priority areas of need, and develop appropriate action in response.
4. **Develop a group Action Plan.** To avoid the potentially overwhelming task of digesting and acting on this preliminary needs assessment, the group should develop a concise action plan that limits and focuses the group effort. The group should look at the summit findings and other available data, set their own priorities and identify a list of manageable targets (e.g. three). The Advisory Group may be structured to reflect these key areas and perhaps involve members not part of the main group.
5. **Find an opportunity for a “quick win.”** Within any group setting, it is important to have small successes along the way to keep the energy up and sustain momentum. With the advisory group, define a series of short and long-term goals with achievable

successes along the way. An initial “quick win” could be the online forum discussed in #1 above.

6. **Communicate, communicate, communicate.** There must be a concerted effort to engage Summit participants and the wider stakeholder community, and to keep them apprised of progress. Using social media tools and email alerts, and the newly developed online group described in #1, it is important to task someone to find opportunities to engage the broader group to maintain momentum and group buy-in of activities.
7. **Create an online inventory of available services and resources in the area.**
 - a. It may be helpful to start by exploring another community’s online resource guide, which was an outcome of the Rochester area summits. Help Base Greater Rochester (found at www.hbrochester.org) is designed to provide a centralized and relevant source of information. It would be valuable to learn about the process involved from someone in that collaboration.
 - b. It is clear that an inventory of local services is required. This is a large task, involving surveying and building on current resources such as www.lawhelp.org/Ny/, 2-1-1, www.myhealthyvet.com, the Veterans Administration, and the County’s website. At the Summit, Cornell Cooperative Extension also volunteered to partner with Harris Beach in driving this effort.
 - c. Other communities have had success in obtaining grant funding for a VISTA or AmeriCorps position to support this inventorying, web design and content production, and ultimate launch of the website.
8. **Convene and charge an appropriate working group with thinking creatively, locally and at the grass-roots level about public awareness, community education, and outreach.** This group needs to be selected carefully and fully understand the issues of veterans, but also needs to leverage community assets such as local school media, history, or service-learning projects. This group could naturally be a sub-working group of the Advisory Committee.
9. If a “one-stop-shop” or “hub organization” is determined as a **key goal from the advisory group**—the planning process must include:

- a. Exploring various organizational models including separate incorporation as a 501 (c) 3, establishing a chapter of an existing veterans' service agency, or serving under the umbrella of an existing agency with a broader scope of services. Engage legal advice to inform the various organizational options.
 - b. Learning from similar organizations such as the Veterans Outreach Center in Rochester.
 - c. An organized approach to “laying the groundwork” by interviewing and networking with local experts. This exploratory phase should include ideas for what the center would offer, as well as explore opportunities for funding and collaborations.
 - d. A coordinated fundraising strategy—including grants, philanthropic donations, and governmental funding sources.
10. **Keep track of progress.** Engage a consultant or designate a staff person at an appropriate organization to:
- a. Ensure action occurs on some of the immediate next steps, and
 - b. Manage the planning and implementation of this endeavor long term.

CONCLUSION

Armed with this knowledge of shared needs, priorities and suggested actions, Harris Beach, and logical community partners, can begin to craft a broad strategy to more effectively deliver support to veterans and their families. It is strikingly clear from the summit that there is heartfelt commitment among all stakeholders to improve the quality of life for veterans and families after military service.

Using the information and suggested next steps, this commitment can be channeled into an extended coordinated effort. The priorities identified in this report provide focus areas for policy and local change. CGR is honored to have facilitated such a critical conversation and is confident that the results will be used to drive real improvements for veterans and families who call Greater Syracuse home.

APPENDIX A – GAP ANALYSIS

Participants were asked to rate each of the 16 themes for both importance and existence. For *importance*, each theme was rated on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing “not important” and 5 representing “very important.” For *existence*, each theme was rated on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 representing “exists to a little extent (currently)” and 5 representing “exists to a very great extent (currently).”

When viewed together, this presents a visual gap analysis between what participants believe the need to be and the perceived reality in the area. Participants each rated from their own experience, meaning that the existence ratings cannot necessarily be taken as fact. However, in this case perceptions provide a measure of the reality, particularly when it comes to gauging awareness and coordination.

For the purpose of communicating this information graphically, the weighted-average rating for both importance and existence were calculated for each theme. The weighted-average rating was calculated by weighting each rating by the number of participants that selected it, summing across the weighted ratings, and dividing by the number of participants that voted in each theme.

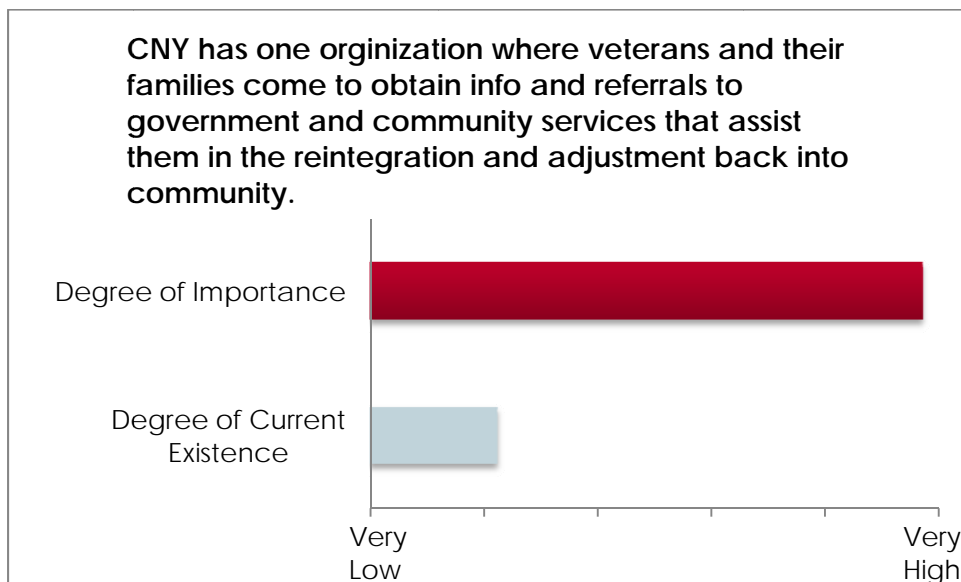
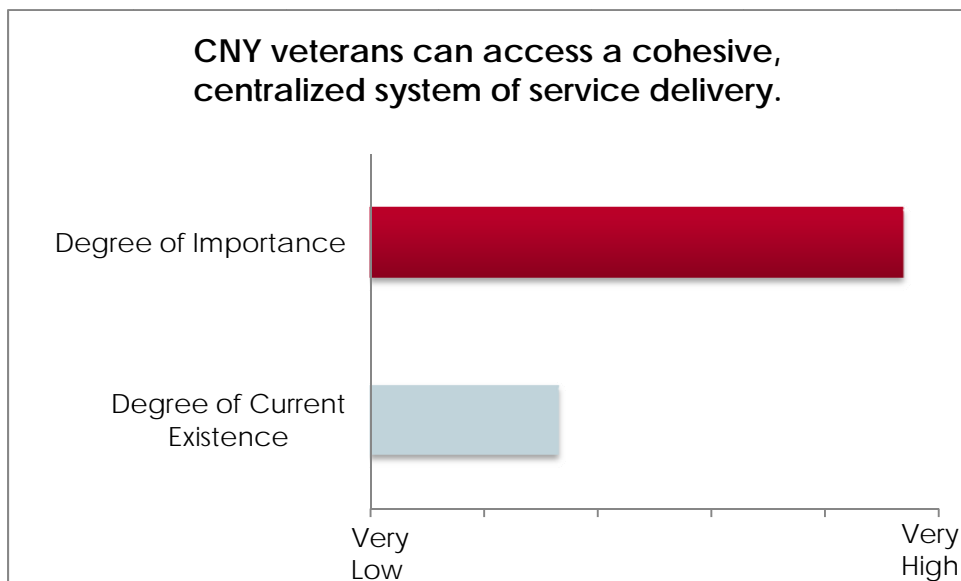
In each graph, the theme being rated is displayed in the title. Since the graph for each theme combines the ratings for importance and existence, the rating description on the x-axis was slightly modified in order to accommodate both. On the graph, a “very low” degree of importance and existence corresponds to a rating of “1” and a “very high” degree of importance and existence corresponds to a rating of “5” as described above.

For organizational purposes, the charts have been loosely grouped with the five priority areas of need:

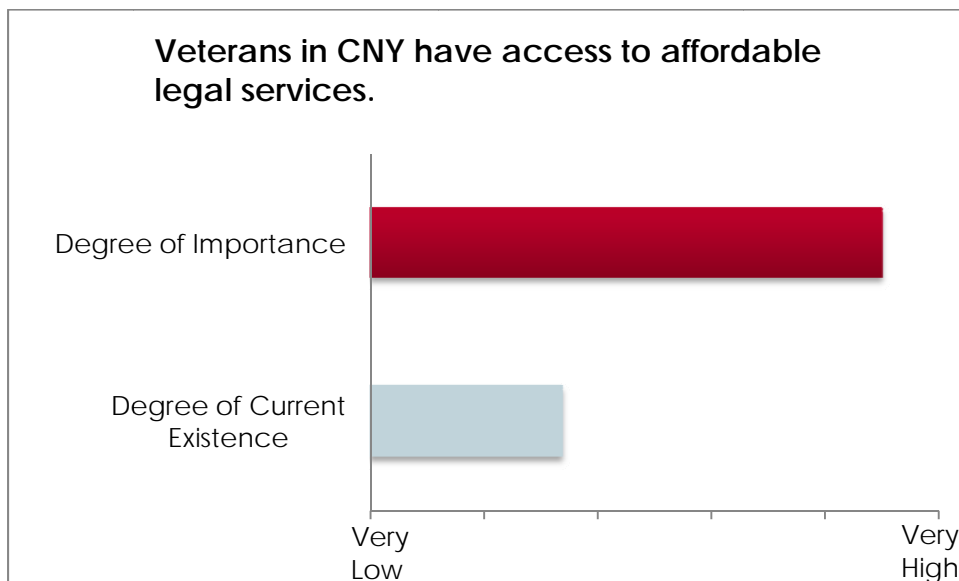
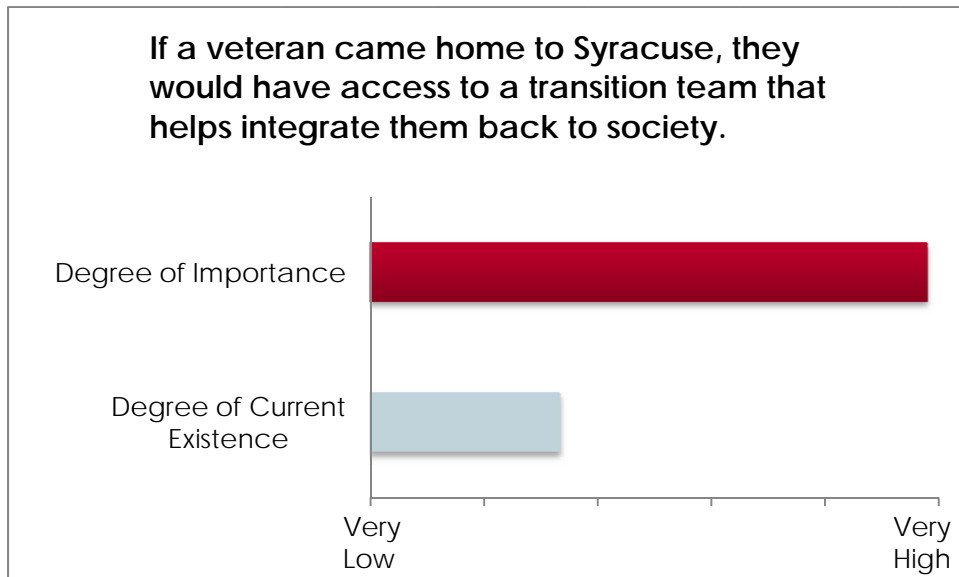
- 1) A Coordinated, Accessible, Comprehensive Network of Services
- 2) Strengthened Transition & Reintegration Education
- 3) Heightened Community Awareness
- 4) More Effective Outreach & Engagement of Veterans
- 5) Emphasis on Families

There is no significance in the order of charts within categories.

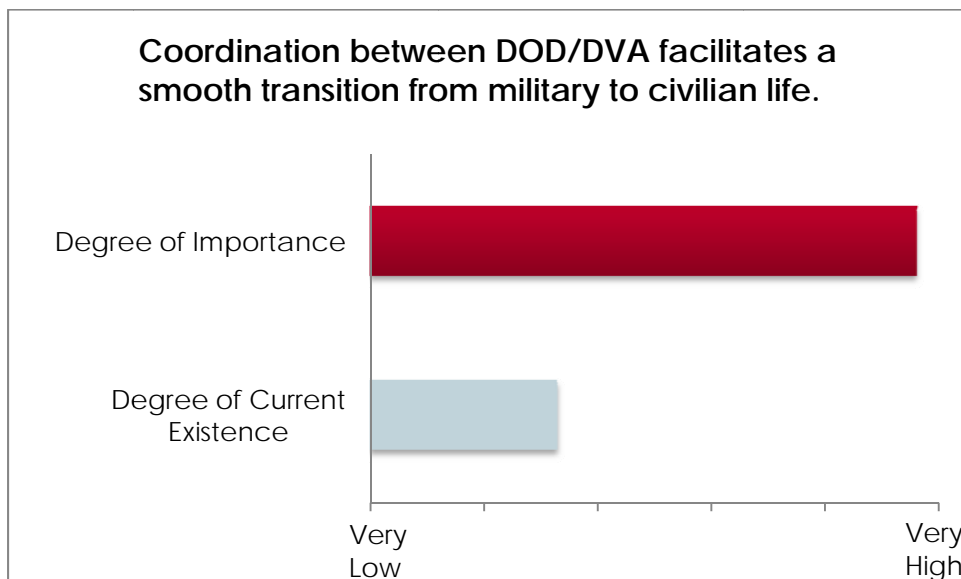
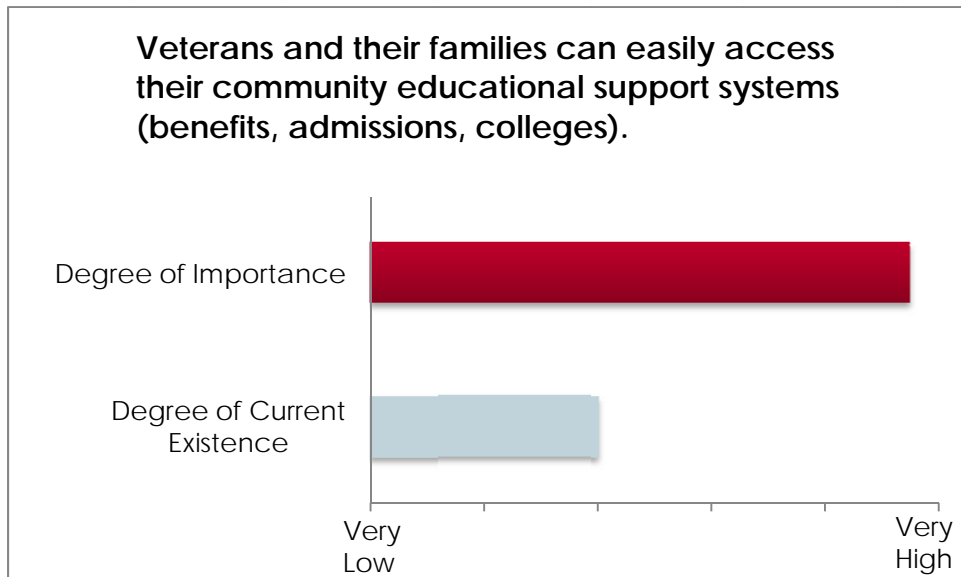
Priority Area 1) Coordinated, accessible, comprehensive network of support



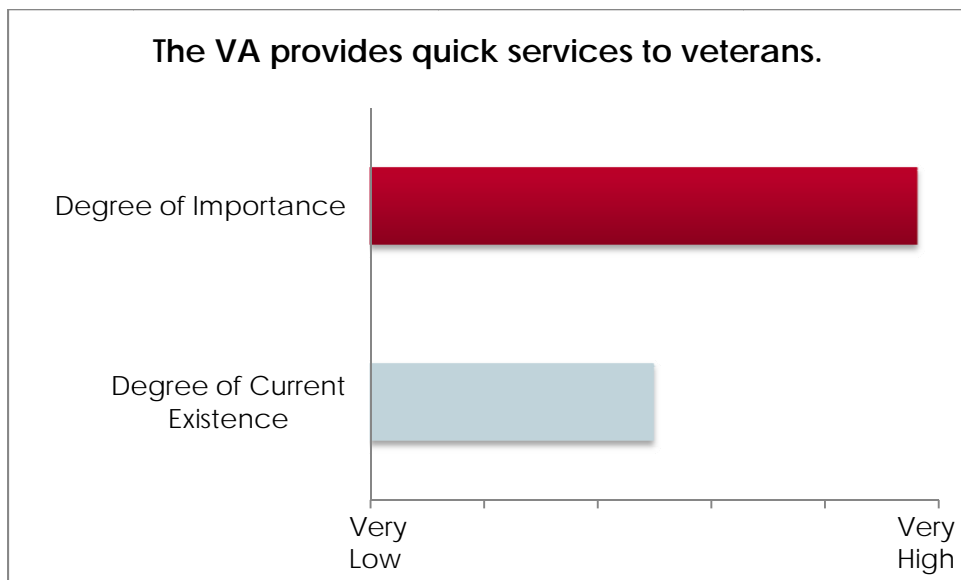
Coordinated, accessible, comprehensive network of support (continued)



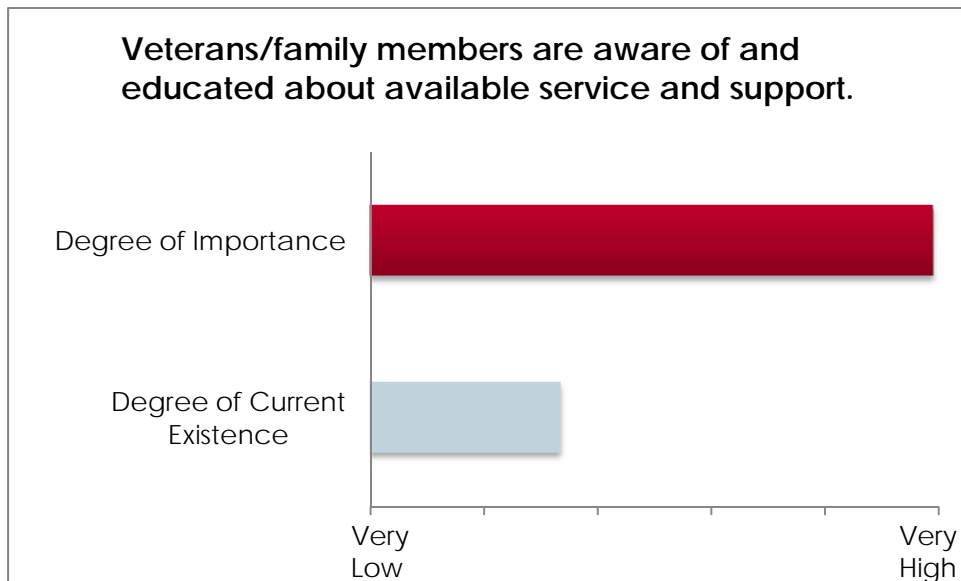
Coordinated, accessible, comprehensive network of support (continued)



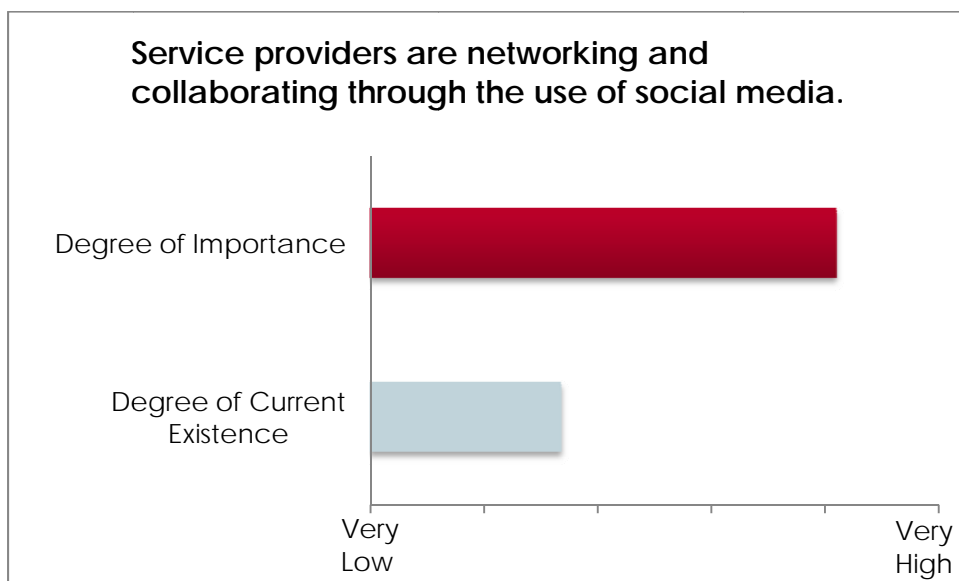
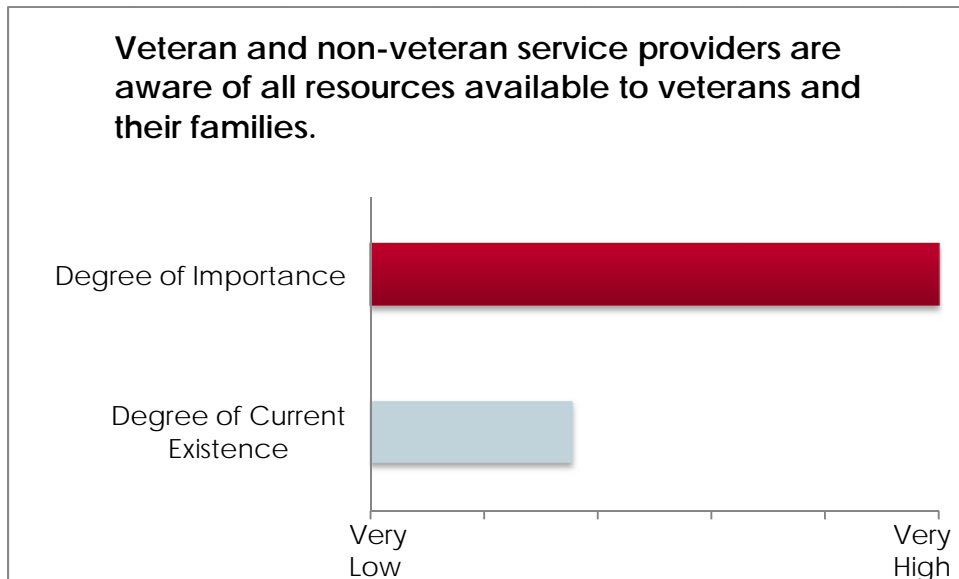
Coordinated, accessible, comprehensive network of support (continued)



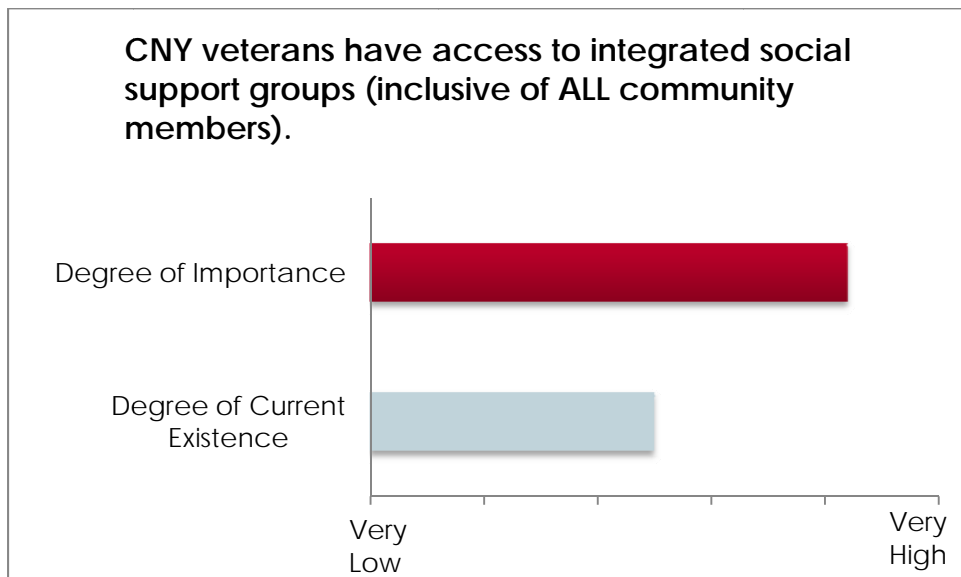
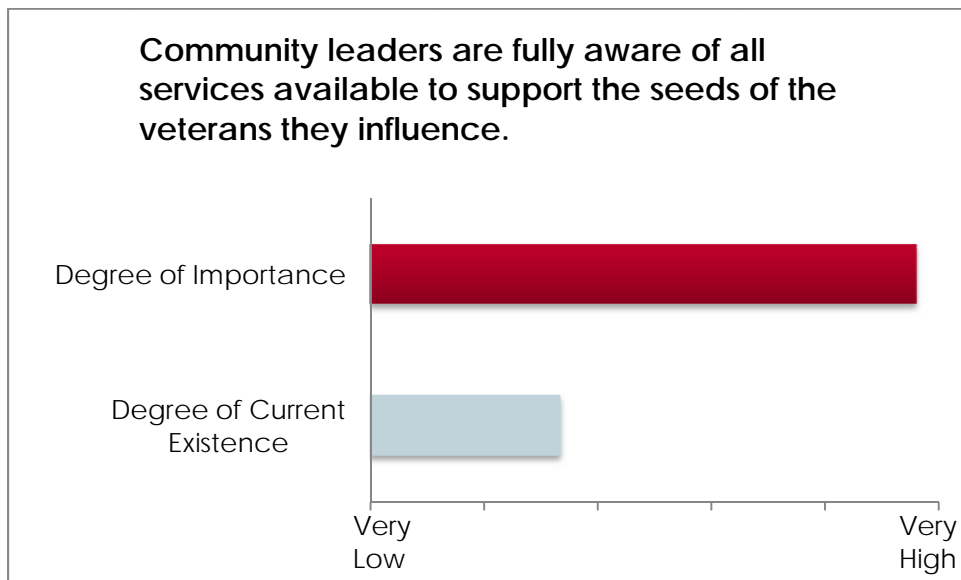
Priority Area 2) Strengthened transition & reintegration education



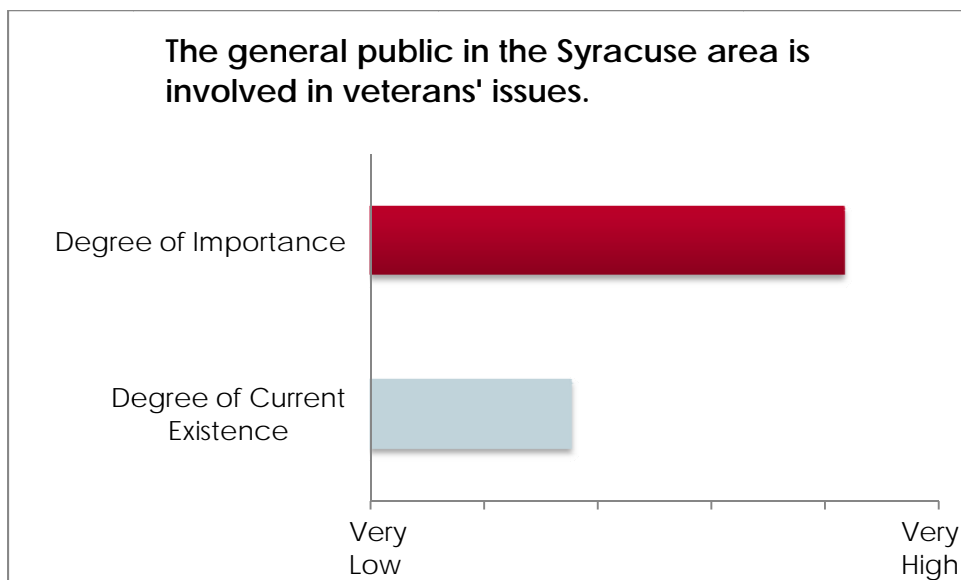
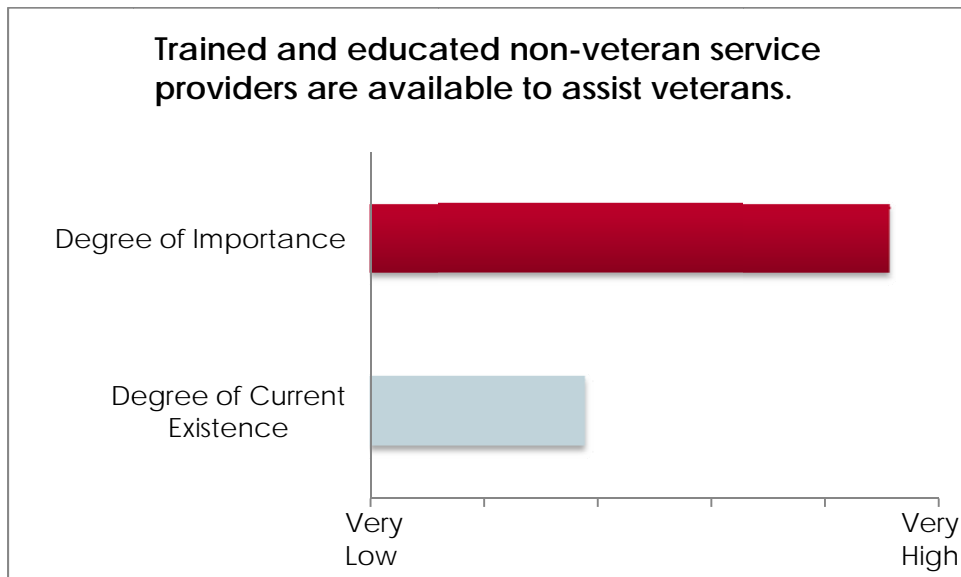
Strengthened transition & reintegration education (continued)



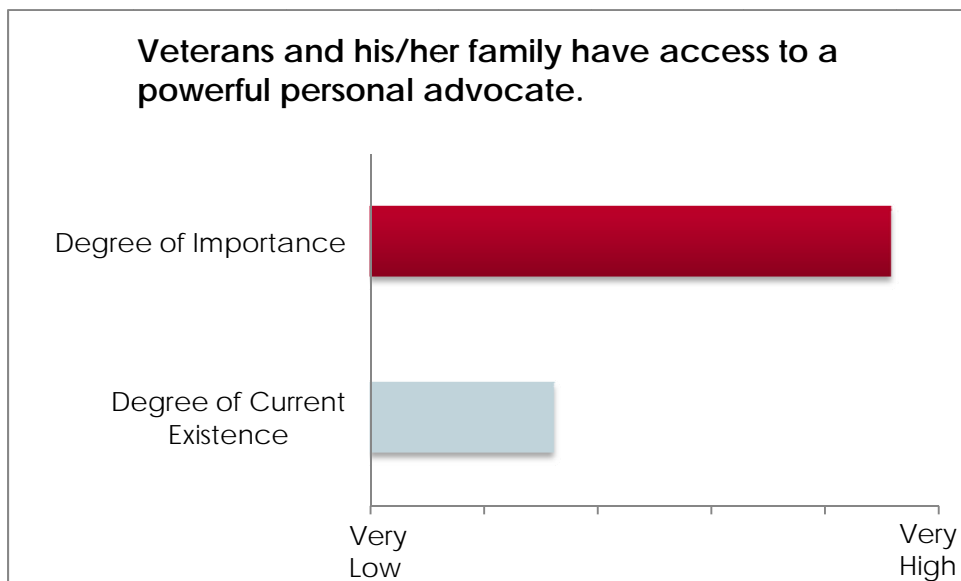
Priority Area 3) Heightened community awareness



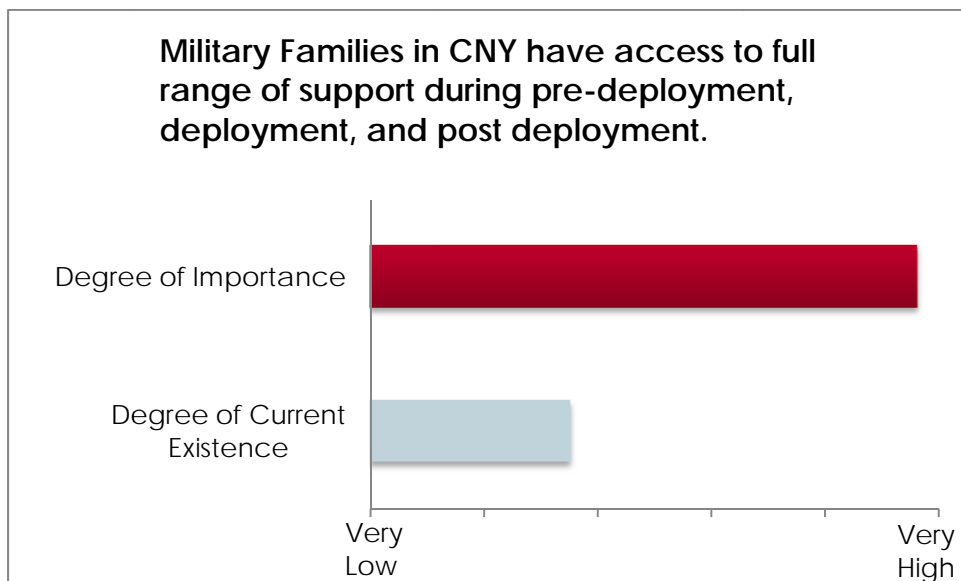
Heightened community awareness (continued)



Priority Area 4) More effective outreach & engagement of veterans



Priority Area 5) Emphasis on families



APPENDIX B – PRIORITY VOTES

Themes	Service Provider	Veteran	Family	Total
CNY has one org. where veterans and their families come to obtain info and referrals to government and community services that assist them in the reintegration and adjustment back into community.	24	4	1	29
If a veteran came home to Syracuse, they would have access to a transition team that helps integrate them back to society.	16	3	3	22
Military Families in CNY have access to full range of support during pre-deployment, deployment, and post deployment.	11	4	1	16
Coordination between DOD/DVA facilitates a smooth transition from military to civilian life.	11	3	1	15
Veterans/family members are aware of and educated about available service and support.	8	3		11
Trained and educated non-veteran service providers are available to assist veterans.	10			10
The VA provides quick services to veterans.	6	2		8
Veteran and non-veteran service providers are aware of all resources available to veterans and their families.	5	2	1	8
Veterans in CNY have access to affordable legal services.	4	2		6
Community leaders are fully aware of all services available to support the needs of the veterans they influence.	3	1	1	5
Veterans and their families can easily access their community educational support systems (benefits, admissions, colleges).	4	1		5
Veterans and his/her family have access to a powerful personal advocate.	3		1	4
CNY veterans can access a cohesive, centralized system of service delivery.	2	1		3
The general public in the Syracuse area is involved in veterans' issues.	2			2
Service providers are networking and collaborating through the use of social media.	1	1		2
CNY veterans have access to integrated social support groups (inclusive of ALL community members).				0

APPENDIX C – ACTION PLANS

During the summit each small group selected two themes for action planning. For each, they aimed to brainstorm solutions which would move that theme farther along the “existence” continuum— i.e., that would make that theme a local reality. For each, they listed:

- Existing resources
- Resources needed
- Action steps to be taken, and where appropriate, by whom that action should be taken.

Because participants chose which themes to work on, not all 16 themes have action plans. If more than one group worked on the same theme, their work has been combined as is presented as one. If themes were very similar in content the action plans were also combined.

Note that plans have been transcribed verbatim with no editing or attempt to clarify.

Pages are formatted for ease in reading related tables which may cause inconsistent spacing.

Theme: CNY veterans can access a cohesive, centralized system of service delivery.

Theme: CNY has one org. where veterans and their families come to obtain info and referrals to government and community services that assist them in the reintegration and adjustment back into community.

What Already Exists	What we Need
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None exists • VA.gov • (county).gov • Helpline (2-1-1) • Soldier On • DOD • *lots of others • Vets Outreach Center in Rochester. • Phone hotlines staffed by Vet's • Working Solutions – Employment one stop shop • Housing homeless coalition • Outreach bus/van • VA – Community Care. • DOL – Vets services. • VSA's (VFW, A.L., AV, Order of Purple Heart). • State/County vet. rep. • Community agencies. • myhealthyvet.com. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One <u>each</u>. • One website/phone # • Google type • Education. • VA pays for satellite centers in more locations across country. • Educate population. • Employment agency clearing house. • Facilities in rural areas. • Transportation – especially rural. • Additional info and services to access online. • Outreach van/bus. • Outreach libraries/schools. • Public service announcements. • Community cable. • Funding specifically for vet's legal services. • One stop center or <u>website</u> for vets to find: medical assistance, drug abuse program, alcohol abuse program, homeless issues, job searching, family support. • One set of service providers that are aware of all resources (including non-specific resource to vets).

Theme: CNY veterans can access a cohesive, centralized system of service delivery.

Theme: CNY has one org. where veterans and their families come to obtain info and referrals to government and community services that assist them in the reintegration and adjustment back into community (Continued).

Actions to be Taken	By Whom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consideration by local county vets council (grassroots). • By local non-profit agency umbrella group i.e. United Way, Community Foundation. • Online directory, clearinghouse, surveys. • Lead agency. • Open communication. • Simplify process. • Humanize process. • Train peer counselors. • Add caseworkers. • Update discharge process/benefits eligibility. • Lobby, write letters, get work out to representatives. • Bring services to rural population. • Expo – Education forum for providers • Create website for people (vets) to visit to find information for their county. • Have a store front office for vets to visit. • Have an 800 hotline for vets to call for information. • Different offices here to use message board to communicate. • A roundtable of service providers to share capabilities (make one “manual”). • Educate staff on vet. resource. • Update/expand helpline information. • Educate vets re: myhealthyvet.com 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual members • CCE • Recruiter Officers. • Legion VPW/DAV. • Service Providers Coalition. • Community providers. • Contact community services/mental health association.

Theme: Coordination between DOD/DVA facilitates a smooth transition from military to civilian life.

What Already Exists	What we Need
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10-10-EZ. • Unit briefing onsite. • Advocacy counseling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automated full information sharing. • Standardization physical disabilities ratings. • Change in policies regarding government agencies sharing veteran address & telephone numbers. • Proactive. • Training.

Actions to be Taken	By Whom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DOD/DVA need to act aggressively in sharing veteran information. 	

Theme: If a veteran came home to Syracuse, they would have access to a transition team that helps integrate them back to society.

What Already Exists	What we Need
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition team at VA in Syracuse. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More veteran employees • Peer-to-peer (vets)

Actions to be Taken	By Whom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change job descriptions. • Mandate percentage of veteran employees. 	

Theme: Veterans in CNY have access to affordable legal services.

What Already Exists	What we Need
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent lawyers doing pro-bono/sliding scale. • Hiscock L.A. • Legal Services CNY. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common list of available resources. • Common referral process.

Actions to be Taken	By Whom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact NYS Bar association (to make list)/S.U. law students (for project) • Develop an association that firms can be a "member" of (i.e. veterans legal aid society) & put insignia next to in phonebook (etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cornell cooperative ext. • Veterans service .Organizations (Elks, VFN's, etc).

Theme: Veterans/family members are aware of and educated about available service and support.

What Already Exists	What we Need
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State/County Service Reps Vet Centers/Day Treatment Centers. CBOC's. Family support centers on military inst. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better educated providers. More outreach (community) i.e. conferences, PSA's. Comprehensive database of resource/services/supports.

Actions to be Taken	By Whom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group of vets to train/educate service providers. Providers will partner with vets to do outreach via PSA's, media, expos. Survey providers of services/supports they offer. Contract with tech to set up online database/directory. 	

Theme: Veterans and his/her family have access to a powerful personal advocate.

What Already Exists	What we Need
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rehabilitation Psychologists. OIF/OEF team. VA Outreach. Arise. Options for Independence. AIDS Community Resource. RCIL (Residential Center for Independent Living). ARC. Red Cross. Legal Clinics. Others... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Simplified version. Manageable case load. More outreach workers.

Actions to be Taken	By Whom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better education. 	

Theme: Veterans and their families can easily access their community educational support systems (benefits, admissions, colleges).

What Already Exists	What we Need
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual colleges have <u>their own</u> resources to help veterans and their families (ex: post 9/11 benefit) VA has a website with some educational resource and assistance with which benefit is appropriate and available to use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A “one stop shop” for both colleges and veterans/families to access both information and services. A “place” for students and colleges to go to <u>easily</u> to learn what it is and how to use it. Connect the VA with colleges to educate the colleges about benefits.

Actions to be Taken	By Whom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decide what form the “one stop shop” should take. (Ex. Website, brick & mortar, etc) Create a consortium of colleges and veterans to develop this service. Create more awareness via marketing (PSA’s, events, networking) to garner more support and cohesiveness. Figuring out who the veterans are, where they are, and how to speak to them about their education/veteran’s benefits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> College leadership. Military personnel & veterans. Government (local, national, etc) leadership.

Theme: Trained and educated non-veteran service providers are available to assist veterans.

What Already Exists	What we Need
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homeless Vets program. YMCA services. Substance abuse program. Job placement assistance. Wheels for work program. Education & training for vets. Medical assistance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specific Training for Service providers to realize all the services available for vets and where to find it. Training for providers on how to deal with veterans with needs. Providers to accept vets insurance for payment.

Actions to be Taken	By Whom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compile a list of service providers. Create a webinar training for service providers to learn of the services available or/and hold another summit. Have government officials lobby for support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voices Together Staff.

Theme: Community leaders are fully aware of all services available to support the needs of the veterans they influence.

What Already Exists	What we Need
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a lot of talk! • There are <u>some</u> community leaders who are involved in these issues, but who we need to empower and give a larger voice to. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders who are familiar with and connected to veterans' issues. • More community leaders at events like this. • To involve media to "force" community leaders to take action. • To use benefits that already exists more efficiently and effectively. • To recognize who the veterans are and reach out to them (DOD already knows where they live).

Actions to be Taken	By Whom
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach out to community leaders to educate them via mailings, events, etc. • Community leaders <u>need</u> to attend outreach events. • Community leaders need to <u>talk</u> to veterans, colleges and the organizations who administer benefits- get out of their office and do something proactive instead of reactive! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DOD. • Veteran's organizations. • The media. • The community.

Theme: Military Families in CNY have access to full range of support during pre-deployment, deployment, and post deployment.

What Already Exists	What we Need
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family readiness group (unit level). • Variety of active duty resources. • Non-existent (jack squat) except 174 fighter wing NYANG. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to home state resources during Individual member deployment. • Guard/Reserve funding for family service units. • Greater involvement and support from civic, community, faith-based organizations. • Increased awareness through all media channels.

Note: No action plan was submitted for this statement.

APPENDIX D – INTERVIEW DATA

As the first activity of the summit format, participants worked in pairs to interview each other using an interview guide prepared by CGR. Interview notes were collected and compiled. In this section, the responses to the following are listed:

- One strength of the current reintegration system
- Three wishes for an improved reintegration system

Note that responses are transcribed verbatim, with no editing or attempt to clarify.

Strengths of the Current Reintegration System

Coordinated, Accessible, Comprehensive Network of Support

- All the pieces that are out there
- Collaboration VA & DOD
- Identify the need for service collaboration
- Individual pieces in place - Council, Education Benefits
- So many agencies that will provide reintegration - vets based and community agencies
- Health care is working well - Emotional and physical problems
- Initial evaluations, planning treatment, follow-up, recommendations, preventative measures
- One experience with reintegration - positive and beneficial experience - he was informed, he was treated and healed before he was sent home. He saw a lot of follow-up medically once he came home.
- We have a vet hospital in Syracuse
- Blend employers with the returning vet/handicapped to help reduce the unemployed
- TAP - Tuition assistance

Strengthened Transition & Reintegration Education

- VA Component at present - need more info
- Learning about service reintegration
- This workshop - don't see too many other things that work well

Heightened Community Awareness

- 3 day seminar
- Bringing this info into the public knowledge
- Exposure (medical) - people taking an interest, being aware - awareness
- Holding summits such as this
- Having a country that has been at war before
- Having the knowledge what needs to be done

More Effective Outreach & Engagement of Veterans

- Advocacy on the part of the system
- Ft. Drum - Resume help, job search, medical issues, home search
- Outreach Efforts are better now
- Something exists - publicity & promote it
- The fact that so many people care and are working for successful reintegration of all soldiers
- The fact that there is a RS
- VA Outreach efforts
- Wealth of resource for returning vets - wounded warriors; Independence Fund

Emphasis on Families

- Doing better with family - Readiness centers are doing great
- Family support network
- Good preparation for veteran & families – what's not there is something for the family prior to the soldier coming home with regards to benefits
- In the best interests of the vets
- Increases priority for family counseling

Miscellaneous Responses

- Does not know much about the reintegration system and would like to know more now - feels it is too narrow as it is
- Lack of recognition of a problem
- Does not really know much about current services
- Don't know...
- Lack of exposure of resources
- Not much personal experience with that - learning today
- Not sure of strengths due to lack of experience with the veteran system

3 Wishes for the Reintegration System

Coordinated, Accessible, Comprehensive Network of Support

- Better integration between the VA and DOD
- Bring the DOD & VA together
- Comprehensive list of all services available for vets & families
- Continue/expand partnering with local agencies
- Create more cohesive - one stop center
- Create more collaboration with non-military, community agencies
- Have one-stop-shops here
- More collaboration with community based resources
- Networking to find unknowns

- One stop resource
- Services providers - be readily available and accessible to all military personnel
- Single points of entry for every need
- Universal information - to make decisions & support
- Workforce Development/investment - finding the best fit for veterans with jobs
- More support to vets prior to release
- More support/follow up
- To have everyone take advantage of things that are available
- Veterans outreach centers in every county for counseling, employment training, finances, housing
- Autonomy
- Career Counseling
- Employment opportunities
- Funding for basic needs - to get to the point of where they were before
- Funding issues for vets coming back
- Grant automatic income & medical insurance
- Increased/improved education
- More services for veterans that aren't experiencing traumatic reintegration issues - financial/employment
- TAP done before release
- Tax credit info
- Universal education opportunities
- Battle wounds from military deployment was stronger, better facilities, more support
- Better [illegible] access & treatment
- Mental/Substance services along with auto transportation
- Exposure to chemicals - recognition of agent orange/experimental medications used in Kuwait
- Heal the soldiers - make whole

Strengthened Transition & Reintegration Education

- Reintegration more expansive to help more people
- Information flow to vets
- Assure that every single vet constantly informed of services
- Provide better guidance - the college to assist

Heightened Community Awareness

- Civilians - training; we need to deal with their issues and way of life to better understand their barriers
- Community awareness about what they need from us

- Continue public education on vets issues
- Increase knowledge of integration process during adjustment
- Let us tell the truth about psychological catastrophes
- More info for general public
- More significant awareness of vets issues
- Recognition of invisible wounds (MS, AIDS, Parkinson's, psychological)
- Community unity more involved in making this happen
- Nation as a whole to support military family
- Supportive Network
- System where vets are acknowledged for what they do

More Effective Outreach & Engagement of Veterans

- Easier for vets to reintegrate
- Easier to access the benefits
- More accessible to those in need
- Making sure there is a social interaction setting for veterans, that involves community members, not just other veterans (i.e. Utica Center for Independence)
- Vet oriented event - Social event
- Vet social event that doesn't involve alcohol - healthy way

Emphasis on Families

- Childcare solutions
- family integration - global view - not just focus on the vet & military, rather it's all; help the family reunite find the normal, etc
- Increase care and family counseling level
- More for families - spouse/children
- Strong family values - strong sense of self, responsibility, was educated before developing life experience

Miscellaneous Responses

- Become research study through patient treatment level of service counties
- Good sleep for combat vets
- Returning veterans didn't have to deal PTSD, rehabilitation
- Take away all of the pain and horrors that soldiers may have seen

APPENDIX E – BRAINSTORMED THEMES

One of the day's activities engaged participants in brainstorming the broad range of common themes and values heard in their small group discussion. What follows is a list of all the themes elicited.

Note that responses are transcribed verbatim, with no editing or attempt to clarify.

Brainstormed Themes

Coordinated, Accessible, Comprehensive Network of Support

- All encompassing
- Benefits/funding problems for released veterans
- Better coordination of care
- Bridging services
- Centralization of information
- Chemical, environmental, medicinal effects of war
- CNY veterans can access a cohesive, centralized system of service delivery
- Collaboration
- Collaboration/networking
- Connecting resources
- Connection
- Contact
- Counseling
- Coordinated/comprehensive community
- Duplication of services
- Easy access to services – centralization of information; better coordination of care; Solving problems, advocacy; seamless, automatic entry to service; advocacy; single point of accountability, entry
- Education/Training
- Employment assistance
- Family needs – coordinate efforts
- Family support coordination
- Filling in gaps/continued leaning
- Following veterans after discharge through each segment of treatment
- Free health care
- Homelessness
- Housings
- Increase funding to the VA for immediate wounded warriors – all categories
- Invisible effects

- Innovation/Think out box – use of technology, social media (i.e. internet, facebook); networking, partnering
- Lack of a central coordinating body/one-stop center for delivery of services/virtual system
- Legal services
- Meet the needs of all veterans
- Mental health
- Networking/partnering
- One stop resource – better coordination between DOD/DVA; better means of identifying returning veterans; action
- Open communication/overlaps vs. gaps
- Outreach/collaboration services
- Referral process
- Seamless and (nearly) automatic entry to services
- Single point of accountability, entry
- Single point of entry – case management service
- Single point of entry – need for portable services
- Social event/facilities without costs
- V.A.
- VA medical hospital/DOD – ally not enemy
- Working together
- Working together to connect resources – collaborating/networking, when done effectively identify the gaps; continues, learning
- Think locally

Strengthened Transition & Reintegration Education

- Encouragement to ask/seek services/ assistance
- Finding resource
- Knowledge of resources (ancillary services)
- Need for better delivery of information to vets, the general public, and service providers
- User friendly services/benefits (awareness of)
- Education
- Open to new ideas

Heightened Community Awareness

- As a nation America is divorced from these wars (Iraq, Afghanistan)
- Awareness
- Bringing it home
- Community
- Community unity

- Educating/awareness/community leadership – business, education, med, legal financial, clergy
- Education (community services)
- Education/Awareness – Educating via outreach in community, workshops; Awareness of vets/family issues
- Education/awareness – thinking out of box
- Family and community support to veterans
- Public ownership/awareness of wartime – bring it home
- Spreading the word
- Support

More Effective Outreach & Engagement of Veterans

- Accessibility
- Think out of the box
- Availability
- Don't be afraid to speak
- Easy access to services – services delivery (more & better)
- Honesty in recognition of wounds of war
- Outcome oriented
- Quality Care
- Service/resource centers
- Veteran review board
- Innovation/Think out box – use of technology, social media (i.e. internet, facebook); networking, partnering

Emphasis on Families

- Family
- Family – Educating/identifying/awareness; community, business, financial, medical, legal, religious leaders/services
- Family support
- Family values
- Support for family members of veterans

Characteristics and Values

- Advocacy
- Care
- Caring
- Commitment
- Compassion
- Dedication

- Devotion
- Empathy, caring, compassion
- Enthusiasm
- Finish thoughts
- Giving
- Graciousness
- Growth
- Helping others
- Honor
- Integrity
- Listening
- Love
- Loyalty
- Passion
- Passionate
- Respect
- Service
- Solving problems
- Take care of yourself
- Time
- Tradition

Miscellaneous Responses

- \$\$ How much?
- Accountability for performance by service delivery agencies

APPENDIX F – PARTICIPANT CONTACTS

Service providers who attended the summit are listed here in direct response to a request that this list be shared to further action planning. Additionally, those who registered but could not attend are listed. To preserve privacy, veterans and family members who attended are not listed.

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