

zero8hundred Testimony to House Armed Services Military Personnel Subcommittee

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Introduction

Chairman Heck, Ranking member Davis, distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to speak about this important topic. I'd like to share my experience with a community initiative and partnership with military bases in San Diego that provides a community handoff from on-base transition classes to support service members and their families.

Background

Every year, approximately 20,000 service members stationed in San Diego County leave military service, and approximately 30% of them are expected to stay in the local community. Studies show that the post 9/11 transitioning population is one of great promise. Individuals are well trained, team oriented, and hardworking, but also in need of support. At a national level, we know that half of these veterans experience difficulty transitioning to civilian life. Challenges with transition affect not only the service members, but spouses and families as well, perhaps for many years to come. This points to the value of prevention and early intervention initiatives to support military transition.

San Diego community leaders realized that many organizations were available to assist transitioning families, but the gap between them and transitioning members who are often unaware of community resources was a significant challenge. These leaders developed a comprehensive community plan to close this gap without duplicating existing support services. The overarching goal of the plan was to link active duty military families to comprehensive wraparound services in the community during transition. This plan was called the Military Transition Support Project (MTSP), and implemented as **zero8hundred**. This name illustrates the promise that comes with a new day, and captures San Diego's resolve that it is time for a new approach to improve the transition experience.

zero8hundred was designed to coordinate the efforts of San Diego's sectors, including military, social services, public officials, businesses and philanthropy, and has been guided by our Operations Committee:

- San Diego Veterans Coalition *
- San Diego Military Family Collaborative *
- 2-1-1 San Diego *
- Congressman Scott Peters' Office
- San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce *
- San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation (EDC) *
- San Diego Military Advisory Council (SDMAC) *
- U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs

County of San Diego Health and Human Services
City of San Diego
University of Southern California (USC) School of Social Work *
Navy Region Southwest (CNRSW)
Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD)
Ronne Froman (Rear Admiral, USN, ret) *
San Diego Grantmakers
WebMD Health Foundation *
Rancho Santa Fe Foundation
* Denotes voting member of Governance Council

zero8hundred was implemented in January of 2015. Key elements of the design include:

1. **Use of a holistic Veterans Wellness Model** to ensure all aspects of wellness are addressed. This is done through **zero8hundred**'s four pillars: employment and education, physical and mental health, basic needs, and personal/social connections.
2. **Linkage to community based support prior to leaving the military.** A key aspect of the program is that **zero8hundred** is presented to service members on base at Navy and Coast Guard transition classes, and service members who are remaining in San Diego County have the opportunity to "opt into" the program by providing basic information about their background and concerns, and their consent to be contacted by a "peer Navigator" (case worker) who will offer one-on-one support and proactive check-ins from 9 months prior to 12 months after separation from the service. Members who opt-into the program become **zero8hundred** "VIPs" (Veterans and spouses in Process) and receive a call from a peer Navigator the week after their transition class, and then periodically until a year after separation to connect them to resources and opportunities to support a successful transition.

The partnership with local military bases began in 2013 with inclusion of Navy and Marine Corps representatives on the Operations Committee. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was established with Navy Region Southwest in late 2014 that allows the program to be presented by Navy-contracted instructors during the Transition Goals Plans Success (TGPS) classes. The MOU indicates MTSP's **zero8hundred** program will be presented on the first day of the course (with reminders throughout the rest of the week), and that **zero8hundred** will provide a central organizing point for regional community-based resources.

3. **Connection to veteran peer navigators.** The **zero8hundred** peer Navigators are at the heart of the model as they proactively check in with transitioning military families to help them navigate through systems, services, and benefits, providing needed support. Navigators are veterans or military spouses or dependents with a Master's of Social Work (MSW) Degree, or who are in a graduate-level MSW program. This criteria, along with their on-site training

ensures a high level of support. Navigators utilize case management software to track interaction and progress.

4. **Access to a comprehensive resource directory of social services and employment opportunities.** This project leverages the existing 211 San Diego database (the most comprehensive referral source for social services in the region). This is done through the **zero8hundred** web portal, a one-stop online platform for those transitioning into the San Diego community. Anyone can access this tool, and those who self-Navigate on the site have access to the same 6000 vetted resources that are available to the peer Navigators. Over 250 of these vetted organizations provide veteran-specific services (many of which are members of the San Diego Veteran's Coalition).
5. **Access through community based organizations: zero8hundred** enrollment is also available to transitioning service members who attend the Veteran's Association of North County's Career Transition Assistance Program (CTAP). The majority of these students are transitioning from Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton. **zero8hundred** is also committed to offering the program to military spouses, and we have been working closely with the San Diego Military Family Collaborative (SDMFC) to achieve this goal. The program is regularly presented at the collaborative's *Military Transition: The Spouse Edition* classes.

Implementation

Pilot Phase: the first 2 years of the program are considered the pilot phase. The goal of this phase was to enroll 300 VIPs (clients), and to serve others who choose to self-Navigate to resources through the Portal (of course, support will be provided to VIPs who enroll after the initial 300).

Implementation Milestones:

- Completed Memorandum of Understanding with Navy Region SW in November 2014.
- Built staff of Executive Director, Lead Navigator, peer Navigators (originally three, now ten), Office Assistant, and Resource Development Consultant.
- Established Office at Point Loma Nazarene University.
- Developed web Portal in January 2015 (with assistance from 211 San Diego) that includes a case management system for Navigators.
- Developed TGPS presentation materials including a 7.5 minute video to explain the program. This video includes comments by San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer, Congressman Scott Peters, and **zero8hundred** Navigators. The TGPS materials also include a slide presentation to explain more details and how to opt-in online. This entire presentation and voluntary enrollment process was designed to take less than 30 minutes.
- Trained the 15 Navy-contracted TGPS instructors who make the **zero8hundred** presentations at TGPS classes to ensure consistency.
- Trained **zero8hundred** Navigators in resources available to transitioning members, and in aspects related to client interaction.
- Began in TGPS classes at Naval Base San Diego on January 26th 2015.

- Expanded to Naval Base Coronado on February 23rd 2015.
- Expanded to Coast Guard Sector San Diego on March 16th 2015.

Participation: this community handoff from TGPS has been very well received by service members. We achieved our pilot phase enrollment goal of 300 VIPs just over 8 months after implementation (nearly 16 months ahead of schedule). The following are participation numbers since the program began in late January 2015: 3681 service members and spouses have been briefed about the program at 89 on-base transition classes and 4 additional venues. 31% of these transitioning personnel planned to remain in San Diego. 345 members opted-into this voluntary program (over 30% of eligible personnel). Many also choose to self-Navigate to resources, and our transition portal has recorded 9427 sessions.

Transition Support: zero8hundred peer Navigators have been assisting the rapidly growing number of VIPs and linking them to community resources. Calls begin with an “Intake Call” immediately after the service member or spouse attends Transition GPS class to welcome them to the program. Subsequent “Assessment Calls” are scheduled as requested to determine what challenges the member or spouse are facing, and to offer options to help them overcome obstacles. VIPs are given warm referrals to organizations that can assist them, and the Navigator follows up with the VIP to determine whether their concerns were addressed. Primary transition concerns stated by VIPs are:

- Jobs 54%
- Education 27%
- Basic Needs (financial, housing, legal, food) 14%
- Health 3%
- Personal and Social Connections 2%

Secondary areas of concern:

- Education 30%
- Basic Needs (financial, housing, legal, food) 28%
- Jobs 22%
- Health 12%
- Personal and Social Connections 8%

The majority of our VIPs are considered Tier 1 or Tier 2, meaning they have routine challenges that can be addressed through self-navigation or by Navigators. Those with significant or recurring issues (i.e. mental or physical health, financial stressors, etc) are Tier 3 and may be referred to the Lead Navigator for assistance, case management, and referrals. Approximately 6-10% of our clients are Tier-3. Standard Operating Procedures and training are provided for working with VIPs under significant stress.

We have found that our VIPs respond very positively to the calls from their peer Navigator, and typically request much more frequent interaction than originally envisioned during the program’s planning phase. Client narratives are being recorded. Two of our VIPs recently offered compelling perspectives:

- A Lieutenant Commander likened transition from the service to standing on a steep cliff and not being able to see the bottom. She said after she was contacted and assisted by a **zero8hundred** Navigator, she could see the bottom, then after several calls she could see steps and a way forward.
- Another VIP, a Second Class Petty Officer, stated that he was completely overwhelmed by transition and found himself dealing with the challenge by sitting in the dark. He was very concerned about the future and his small child. One day he was sitting in the dark at his home and received a call from a **zero8hundred** Navigator, who said he was there to help him transition. This completely changed his perspective. Working together, they found resources and opportunities to help this VIP succeed.

Evaluation: University of San Diego's Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research is conducting a third party evaluation to measure program outcomes. The evaluation design includes individual and programmatic data tracking to measure increased resiliency, reduced risk factors, improved connection to community resources, and achievement of transition goals. This evaluation is focused on the first 300 participants, and is being done through surveys given to VIPs after their first call with their Navigator, during terminal leave, and 12 months after separation. The Caster Center also developed monthly process reports that are provided by each **zero8hundred** staff member to document program development and allow replication. The Caster Center will periodically present their findings and will provide a final (two year) evaluation report.

Although it is too early to quantify results, anecdotal evidence from Navigator interaction with clients shows many have found the program to be very helpful in addressing their challenges and building confidence as they transition into the community.

Funding: **zero8hundred** is a fiscally-sponsored non-profit organization, and support is offered at no cost to the VIPs. This has been possible through the generous funding of many local and national foundations and corporations (please see our website for a list at zero8hundred.org).

Scaling: **zero8hundred** plans to expand access to the program through multiple venues at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton later this year. We have been growing to meet the high demand for the program in San Diego County. **zero8hundred** could be further expanded or replicated with adequate funding.

Closing

We are pleased with the progress of the program and the support it offers to transitioning military members and families. We value our positive partnership with the military bases in the San Diego area that has helped make this community support possible.

Thank you for inviting me and I look forward to your questions.