

INSIGHTS INFORMING THE CONCERNS OF POST- 9/11 VETERANS AND FAMILIES

*Case Study:
Give an Hour*



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY'S INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES (IVMF) HAS BEEN CONTRACTED TO SUPPORT THE GEORGE W. BUSH INSTITUTE'S RESEARCH TO EFFECTIVELY SERVE AND EMPOWER OUR POST-9/11 VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES.



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GIVE AN HOUR CASE STUDY

1. Organizational Overview

History

Give an Hour (GAH) was founded in September 2005 by Dr. Barbara Van Dahlen, a psychologist in the Washington, D.C., area. Dr. Van Dahlen formulated the concept of harnessing the civilian mental health community to fill a need in the military and veteran community. At that time, she used Craigslist as her model for connecting providers who were willing to donate time with those who were seeking help.

Currently, GAH is dedicated to meeting the mental health needs of the troops and families affected by the ongoing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. The organization provides counseling to individuals, couples and families, and children and adolescents. Treatment is offered for anxiety, depression, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injuries, sexual health and intimacy concerns, and loss and grieving.

In addition to direct counseling services, GAH providers are working to reduce the stigma associated with mental health by participating in and leading education, training, and outreach efforts in schools, communities, and around military bases.

Mission Statement

Give an Hour's mission is to develop national networks of volunteers capable of responding to both acute and chronic conditions that arise within our society.

Organizational Structure

Give an Hour is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. In 2013, their network of licensed mental health professionals included nearly 7,000 psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists, marriage and family therapists, drug and alcohol counselors, pastoral counselors, and other professional counselors in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and Guam. During the course of 2013, the number of hours providers reported donating increased from 70,481 to 104,317, a 48% surge. These providers are doing true pro bono work, and can't subsequently bill insurance, etc., for their time. This in-kind donation is a cornerstone of GAH's operating model. GAH relayed that providers want to donate time for 2-3 core reasons:

- They are civilians looking for ways to give back
- They have a relative who served

- They are looking for a way to serve as professionals

As of August 2014, GAH's website lists ten members on its Executive Board from various sectors of industry including finance, law, marketing, human resources, and information technology. Its Advisory Board lists 13 members.

Also as of August 2014, GAH's website lists 13 staff members who hold a variety of titles including Chief Operating Officer, Director of Communications and Partnerships, Clinical Specialist, Program Specialist, and Administrative Assistant.

Programming

Mental Health Services and Consulting

Give an Hour providers are licensed mental health professionals who have agreed to provide services in their areas of expertise. As part of this agreement, they agree to provide one hour per week of mental health support at no charge. They offer help in the following areas:

- Individual Services
- Marital Services
- Family Services
- Group Counseling
- Child and Adolescent Services
- Parental Guidance
- Post-Traumatic Stress
- Alcohol/Chemical Dependency
- Pastoral Counseling
- Grief and Loss
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Anger Management
- Anxiety
- Separation/Divorce
- Sexual Abuse

The process for matching a provider to someone seeking counseling is as follows:

- Providers register through the GAH website. They share their credentials and what kind of services they provide and agree to the terms and conditions. An administrator reviews and approves the registration and a notification is generated and sent to the provider, stating that their account is active.
- Visitors to the GAH website can search providers in their area. They will select a provider and obtain their contact information from the site. They can then set up an appointment.
- The provider meets with the visitor and provides services.
- After counseling, the visitor gives feedback on the provider through the GAH website. The GAH administrative team reviews all feedback regarding provider care.
- GAH utilizes what they call a "pay-it-forward" model. The visitor also has the option of searching

for community service organizations for which to volunteer in their area as a potential way to give back for the receipt of free mental health services. This is not a condition of receiving care, but is something that GAH facilitates as a gesture of goodwill. GAH believes that providing people in need with an opportunity to give back in their communities promotes dignity and respect. The opportunity to volunteer in exchange for services is communicated through the GAH website in an explanation of GAH services. Nonprofit organizations seeking volunteers can register their opportunities through the site, and are listed in the description of the GAH service process.

Other Programs

In addition to matching providers with those in need of care, GAH is involved in a number of additional initiatives and special projects. The main objective for most of these projects is to mobilize the community and promote mental health awareness and access to mental health resources. Some of these initiatives include:

- Community Blueprint Demonstration Project – GAH is one of several organizations supporting this pilot program in the cities of Fayetteville, NC and Norfolk, VA. The intent was to provide a framework for community organizations to collaborate and find ways to jointly support the service members living in their area.
- Army National Guard Program – This is an outreach program supported by an MOU between GAH and Army National Guard. The intent is to raise awareness of mental health resources within Guard units, increase access to those resources, and to train mental health professionals on the issues facing service members and their families.
- Partnership with the Wounded Warrior Project – GAH supports WWP’s Project Odyssey, which are multi-day events that train service members and their families to recognize the signs of PTS in order to make intervention. GAH providers facilitate activities and conduct informal evaluations and consultations during these retreats.
- Partnership with Got Your Six – GAH was selected as the “activation partner for the health pillar of the campaign,” – one of six “pillar” organizations chosen by Got Your Six – which seeks to connect broadcast and cable networks with nonprofits to highlight veterans as valuable community resources as they reenter civilian life.

Veteran Populations Served

Give an Hour’s target population is the U.S. military community, specifically post-9/11 veterans and their families. In addition to helping returning troops and their spouses and children, GAH also offers services to parents, siblings, and unmarried partners who are not entitled to receive mental health benefits through the military or the VA. GAH’s goal is to provide easy access to skilled professionals for everyone affected by the current conflicts.

Funding Sources and Strategies

Since 2010, Give an Hour’s revenue has increased over 200% with support from grants, contributions, and donated services during 2013 for a total of nearly \$2.2 million. Donors include the Veterans United Foundation, Got Your Six, and the Wounded Warriors Project. To date, providers have reported donating around 140,000 hours. GAH’s goal is to grow from 7,000 providers to 40,000 providers. As the provider network grows, “funding” will increase in the sense that in-kind services will increase.

In 2013, GAH dedicated 87% of its budget to providing mental health services; only 2% of GAH's expenses went to management and overhead, while only 11% was spent on fundraising.

When GAH was first getting started, Dr. Van Dahlen posted an ad on Craigslist for help, and received free website development services. Since that time, GAH has been able to take advantage of various pro-bono services from distinguished corporate partners. In March 2014, GAH received a pro-bono grant from Booz Allen Hamilton (BAH) in which eight top executives were identified to help GAH with consulting. BAH assisted GAH in further developing the Community Blueprint, embedding the Blueprint into a set of strategic objectives, along with tools communities can use in mapping their own path through transition. Smaller organizations have become involved as well. For example, a local law firm gave them pro-bono legal services to make sure that the GAH description of services was presented properly on the website. These services also represent in-kind funding, and will increase as partnerships increase.

2. Measurement and Data Supporting Effectiveness & Impact

Types of Data Routinely Collected

Give an Hour actively seeks feedback from providers and asks them about the number of service hours they are donating. GAH disseminates quarterly surveys and at times they've had as much as a 20% response rate, but more recently the rate has been closer to 10%. They are now up to 140,000 hours annually, which is based strictly on responses to the survey. GAH stated that they collect the following information from the surveys:

- Has the provider given any hours?
- Have the hours been in direct service or other areas? (Direct service being therapy; other areas being education, presentations, appearing at events)
- Is the service being provided for a veteran or service member or a family member?

GAH said that there have been challenges engaging with providers in a way that doesn't burden the provider. GAH sees this as a balancing act – getting information, but not asking too much of people that are already volunteering their time.

For service members, their families, etc., GAH services are anonymous (there is no consent form or paperwork), so GAH noted that obtaining feedback from participants is a challenge. Sometimes people do come forward to give feedback, but GAH described this as “anecdotal” feedback. On some specific projects, however, GAH has used a consent form and has tried to track and look at:

- Did the service member actually contact the provider that GAH recommended?
- Did the service member see the provider?
- How many sessions?
- What was the provider's diagnosis?
- What kinds of techniques were used? How effective were they?
- How many sessions?
- When did the service end and for what reason?

GAH noted, however, that they have not received many responses when they do it this way; it is believed to be off-putting to veterans and their families that may be seeking services. GAH is reluctant to present any kind of obstacle or discouragement to seeking treatment.

Data Analysis and Reporting

GAH reports on program outcomes in the “Programs and Results” section of their annual report. However, results presented are often anecdotal, or focus on the outputs from programs (number of hours donated). GAH completes all required tax filings and compliance reporting for grants, and undergoes an annual financial statement audit. How data are used internally was not discussed in detail during the site visit.

How data are used for getting to impact

As mentioned above, it is unclear how GAH uses data to improve services and support program outcomes. This was not discussed in detail during the site visit. The primary focus of data collection appears to be tracking the volume of services provided.

Formal Evaluation Activities (internal and external)

As stated in “Types of Data Routinely Collected,” Give an Hour disseminates quarterly surveys to providers to understand how many hours the provider has donated, the areas of support that have been addressed, and to whom the services were provided (e.g., service member vs. family member). As for internal tracking, GAH said that, “We’re too busy to track our own — that’s why we need — we’re about to get an HR consultant to help us develop an actual HR structure, because that’s just been me kind of learning as I go.” GAH would like to track, for example, how many trainings they’ve set up. GAH said, “I think we need a better employee management system.”

3. Strategic Themes

Community Connectedness

Give an Hour views collaboration as a philosophy that pervades the organization. They say they look for ways to capitalize on, rather than duplicate, current support, and to identify innovative new approaches within existing constructs to expand coordinated assistance to those who need it most. From the start, they have been looking for others to work with and asking, “How can we help you?”

One example of this is the Community Blueprint, an initiative that assists service members, veterans, and their families through community collaboration. They began with a grant from the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation and worked in two demonstration sites in Fayetteville and Norfolk. Since then, they’ve added a D.C. collaborative and are working with Wins for Warriors, looking at their areas of interest, which are Detroit, Norfolk, and Richmond. Contacts from the American Red Cross, America’s Promise Alliance, the Veterans Innovation Center, and Service Nation assisted with building the concept. Points of Light became the umbrella organization for the national blueprint with assistance from an advisory council consisting of leaders from GAH and many other veteran service organizations.

GAH says the Community Blueprint came from the idea of, “How do we look at all of these resources in a community, and how do we get them to know one another, get the military population to know about them, figure out where the gaps are, figure out what services need to be provided? How do we do all of that? So that’s the Community Blueprint.”

In the 2013 “Give an Hour Guide to Creating a Community Blueprint,” Dr. Van Dahlen says, “If we are truly committed to ensuring that all of those who serve – and their families – receive the care and support they need and deserve, then we must create an integrated system of care that harnesses the resources, skills, and compassion that exist in communities across our nation. We must facilitate coordination and support collaboration among the organizations and entities that provide services to our returning troops because we now know that one size doesn’t fit all and no single organization can provide all that is needed.”

The manual is intended to help communities identify and meet the needs of military service members, veterans, and their families where they live by establishing a network of engaged stakeholders from across public, private, nonprofit, government, and military sectors to improve support for our nation’s military. The manual covers: getting started, assessing the community, conducting workgroup meetings, addressing politics and overcoming challenges, and the way forward.

Transition to Civilian Life

To help reduce the mental health stigmas that some service members face when reintegrating into civilian life, Give an Hour seeks to remove the descriptor of “disorder” from post-traumatic stress, and it has been removed from their own messaging since the very beginning. They explained that most veterans return changed in some way, as anyone who experiences war would be changed, but not “damaged.” Their view is that everyone, whether they are involved in war or not, needs help adjusting to different circumstances and experiences. They said, “It’s very much about normalizing, and that’s the sort of essence of our message...Let’s not see this as some sort of damaged group returning. Let’s look at what assets this population are and help them reintegrate back into society, civilian society. That’s sort of a key — that’s just sort of a natural message for us.”

This reduction in stigma is aimed at changing public perceptions as well as increasing service member and veteran participation in seeking mental health services. By providing services to both veterans and active service members, Give an Hour hopes to affect the mental health status of the active community prior to transition, facilitating a healthy transition to civilian life and a willingness to continue to seek services post-transition.

Reintegration with Family

In addition to helping returning service members, veterans, and their spouses and children, Give an Hour also offers services to parents, siblings, and unmarried partners who are not otherwise entitled to receive mental health benefits through the military or the VA. According to GAH, “[Our population served is] broken down to sort of equal numbers of family members versus military, which has been great.” In describing family issues, GAH said, “The relationship issues are often primary, and then secondary for the families are what happens as a result of the relationship issues...depression, anxiety, and secondary trauma gets passed on then to the kids and family. So it’s like [the service member] comes back with whatever package that is. If they reintegrate successfully, everybody kind of [says], ‘Okay,’ juggles through that, gets through. If there’s some problems that can’t be easily resolved, that affects the relationship, and it’s the domino...We want them as early as possible, but often it’s not till there’s been a divorce, or there’s been domestic violence, or there’s significant substance abuse.”

Give an Hour wants every service member, veteran, and family member to be able to say, “Hey, I need a little help over here.” By providing services to family members otherwise not entitled to services through the military or the VA, Give an Hour provides a critical service in the holistic reintegration of veterans back into their families, as the families experience secondary challenges from the stresses or trauma which their servicemembers or veterans may endure.

Social Connectedness

Give an Hour uses somewhat of a “pay-it-forward” model of volunteering to help servicemembers and their families to cultivate networks and reintegrate into the community, by helping the veterans they serve locate nearby nonprofit organizations seeking volunteer support, should the veteran or servicemember choose to donate their time as a voluntary “payment” for the free mental health services they have received. GAH believes that providing people in need with an opportunity to give back in their communities promotes dignity and respect for the servicemember or veteran.

GAH is currently partnering with a variety of federal, state, and local organizations and agencies to provide a range of community volunteer opportunities. Examples include a shelter for the homeless in need of volunteers to staff a soup kitchen, a police station looking for volunteers to help run a public service event for children, or an animal shelter in need of volunteers to work on a newsletter promoting responsible pet care. Organizations with volunteer opportunities are encouraged to register through the GAH website. Once approved, these opportunities are posted on the GAH site, and upon completion of counseling, individuals who receive services from GAH are able to choose an opportunity that best fits their own skills and interests.

This component has always been viewed as an encouragement, not a requirement. GAH said, “It’s a want-to, not a have-to...Whatever you have to give, you give when you’re ready, when you’re feeling like you can. You go do that in your community.” As previously mentioned, nonprofits seeking volunteers are highlighted in the description of the GAH service process, and service members are made aware of the opportunity to help others. They can access the “Giving Back” page of the website to search for volunteer opportunities. A challenge for GAH has been keeping up with this section of their website, but they’d like to build it up more. Additionally, Give an Hour is not currently tracking the impact of this component, but would like to do so.

As for educating the broader community, GAH providers work to reduce the stigma associated with mental health by participating in and leading education, training, and outreach efforts in schools and communities and around military bases. GAH said, “There’s a lot of public education. We work to reduce stigma, so Barbara [Van Dahlen, President] is very public, speaks a lot. We’ve had PSA campaigns. We’ve worked with the American Psychological Foundation. We do a lot of that kind of public work as well.”

As part of their vision, GAH states, “We will develop research and educational programs to further promote the value and importance of a new kind of volunteerism. We hope to encourage an increase in shared responsibility for those citizens who are suffering.”

Media

Give an Hour describes itself as having great relationships with some major news outlets including USA

Today and Time Magazine. Also, Dr. Van Dahlen posts regularly on The Huffington Post. GAH takes advantage of social media and is active on Facebook and Twitter, and participates in Google hangouts. Currently the news section of their website includes columns, recent articles on military mental health and media about or quoting GAH, press releases, announcements, newsletters, and events.

GAH recognizes that messaging is important – though challenging due to resource constraints – and has been in talks with a public relations firm that may want to help. They said, “We need to get more and more of our message out there and more and more brand and awareness building. It’s very hard to do when that’s pieces of three people’s jobs, who have so much else that they’re responsible for. So, I would like us to have a more organized structure where we actually have a strategic communications person.” Dr. Van Dahlen indicated that their message is “very consistent” – that there is no “silver bullet” for mental health issues. Rather, they are part of the “human condition,” and that mental health issues can be managed long term.

Independent Sector Involvement

Give an Hour noted that they have many partners and are involved with many projects. GAH’s partnerships have tended to be with large, national organizations, seemingly intended to expand the organization’s reach to as many people as possible. A few examples include:

- Veterans United Foundation. GAH’s national program with the Army National Guard seeks to harness the organization’s expertise in coordination and collaboration to connect Guard units with GAH providers and other community resources to create a comprehensive system of care for Guard families.
- Google Helpouts. Helpouts by Google is a way for individuals anywhere in the world to connect with experts via live video in a wide range of categories, from computers to cooking to counseling. Within Helpouts, individuals can book on-demand video sessions or schedule sessions in advance. GAH plans to bring a network of licensed mental health professionals to the platform. Veterans who live where there are no mental health providers or who are physically unable to travel from their homes would have easy access to mental health care.
- Team Rubicon. GAH funded a fulltime position to embed a clinical staff member with Team Rubicon. The staff member has been there a year and has deployed with Team Rubicon volunteers. Due to his value to Team Rubicon, Team Rubicon has decided to fund the position internally moving forward, and would like to expand the program to include multiple providers embedded within their organization.

Veteran Program Differentiation

While the focus of the organization is heavily skewed toward post-9/11 veterans, GAH will accept veterans of any generation, though use of services by older generations is sparse. Additionally, Give an Hour serves a broad array of types of family members, from grandparents to unmarried partners. Among this broad population, Give an Hour does not differentiate its process for its various audiences, but as with all mental or physical health care, treatment is tailored to individual needs. GAH noted that needs are consistent across the service member population. Specifically, GAH noted that, “You have the understandable and expected issues coming home on the service member side — substance abuse, post-traumatic stress, depression, anxiety, traumatic brain injury, complications of all that. When it

shows up, those are kind of, okay, relationship issues. That goes into then — if it's the family member reporting it, they talk about, 'He's not who I sent over there.'"

Women Veteran Efforts

Give an Hour does not differentiate its process or services for women, but notes that women veterans have been an emerging group who have sought services more regularly over the past several years, and this has generated greater demand for attention to women's issues. Noting a difference in style of communicating need, GAH said, "Women tend to — we know this from health in general — have different ways of reporting what's concerning them or what's happening, just like men and women talking to a doctor. Women are much more likely to sort of be self-revealing in, 'I'm anxious, depressed.' A guy is more likely to say, 'I'm having trouble concentrating at work,' or, 'I can't sleep,' or something like that." Additionally, parallel to most veterans services providers' experiences, Give an Hour has noted the high prevalence of military sexual trauma among their female veteran population, along with the associated mental health challenges.

Employment and Education

Give an Hour is identified as a "wellness organization" as opposed to an "employment organization," and employment was not specifically addressed by the interviewees. Education for the service members was also not specifically addressed, however, GAH does try to educate the broader community. Specifically, GAH providers work to reduce the stigma associated with mental health by participating in and leading education, training, and outreach efforts in schools and communities and around military bases. GAH states, "There's a lot of public education. We work to reduce stigma, so Barbara [Van Dahlen, President] is very public, speaks a lot. We've had PSA campaigns. We've worked with the American Psychological Foundation. We do a lot of that kind of public work as well." It is logical to assume that the extensive work to reduce the stigma surrounding combat-related mental health concerns could potentially lead to positive employment outcomes for post-9/11 veterans, though this was not explicitly stated as a goal during the case study interview process.

4. Key Learnings and Reflections

Catalysts of Impact

One of the first strengths of the organization which facilitated growth was early infrastructure built by Dr. Van Dahlen as she relentlessly pursued her vision to grow Give an Hour into what it is today. With her first small grant, Dr. Van Dahlen hired an administrative assistant. She said she'd do it that way again, because it was critical that she could unload tasks and give herself time to follow leads, share her vision, and network. She said that, from the beginning, it was all about "connecting, connecting, connecting." Nine years later, GAH has nearly 7,000 providers supporting the mission, and they continue to grow.

Second, collaboration and partnerships are key components of GAH. The organization strives to capitalize on, rather than duplicate, current support, and to identify innovative new approaches within existing constructs to expand coordinated assistance to those who need it most. Dr. Van Dahlen said, "To be a good leader...I believe that you look to others, and you partner, and you build something stronger, that they're not getting when they're just the lone wolf."

Finally, Give an Hour's support of families facilitates the health of the "whole veteran" by caring for his/her

entire family unit, rather than neglecting those who matter most to him/her. GAH extends its services not only to service members, but also to their families, including spouses, children, parents, siblings, and unmarried partners.

Barriers to Impact

Tracking is a challenge for Give an Hour, as they attempt to balance their desire for data collection with a wish to avoid burdening providers with cumbersome data collection requests – the providers are already volunteering an hour of their time. Additionally, for service members and their families, GAH services are anonymous, with no consent forms. GAH does not want to present any kind of obstacle or discouragement that data collection may create, thus making data collection on their population served – and those serving them – more difficult.

Another barrier is messaging. GAH is trying to build brand awareness, but with a small staff, each with multiple responsibilities, this can be difficult to focus on. Fundraising for day-to-day operations is a challenge, which affects this particular area. Of note, “Nobody gives you a grant for PR. That’s hard, because messaging is important, especially when you have a platform and a voice in the space you want the messaging. So that’s sort of been our challenge.”

Ongoing Efforts to Enhance Impact

Give an Hour plans to continue recruiting, and their goal is to have 40,000 providers be part of the organization. They are also passionate about continuing the community collaborative work. On the business side, GAH would like to develop an organizational structure that includes a strategic communications position, a development position, and more program specialists that can help with personal matching between providers and service members and their families.

Overall, GAH wants to help create an environment in which people can talk openly about mental health and seek help without feeling ashamed. They said, “That’s what we have not yet accomplished, but that’s our end state, because we cannot do away with mental health issues in our world, but people should be able to talk about them openly, not feel stigmatized or embarrassed or ashamed, and know where to get help and optimize, optimize, optimize. That’s our goal.”