



# Wisconsin Operation Immersion

September 18<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> 2012 Fort McCoy, Wisconsin

For three days and two nights, attendees of the first ever Wisconsin Operation Immersion experienced military culture and deployment in a hands-on environment.

Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division, DryHootch, and the Wisconsin National Guard collaborated to organize and host the event. The curriculum focused on military culture and issues unique to service members.

The program launched in June of 2009, as an effort to submerge civilian clinicians into the life of the National Guard so they could serve veterans and current service members in their communities. By completing WO:I (Wisconsin Operation Immersion), participants improved their understanding of the military culture of National Guardsmen and family members by participating in various activities, such as living in a Barracks, D&C (Drill and Ceremony), PT (Physical Training), dining in a chow hall and consuming MRE (Meals Ready to Eat), touring the Fort McCoy FOB (Forward Operating Base), Commemorative area, inspection of military vehicles. Attendees heard stories and participated in discussions about military culture, military medical procedure in combat, personal accounts from soldiers, and PTSD control.

Participants gained skills and knowledge that will be used to help serve current military service members and veterans in the Milwaukee community who are in need of mental health, behavioral health and substance abuse services.

"The ultimate goal of this experience is to help remove stigma and other barriers,"

-SAMHSA's

H. Westley Clark,  
M.D., J.D., M.P.H.,  
Director of the  
Agency's Center for  
Substance Abuse  
Treatment.

"Stigma is a serious problem for soldiers who are thinking about seeking help for mental health or substance use disorders."



## Day 1

Day one consisted of group introductions and settling into the barracks. Educational speeches on a variety of military topics were given at the Wisconsin Military Academy (WMA) by Dr. McBride, Mr. Robert Evans, SSG Glen Mercier II and Janet Fleege. Meals were enjoyed at the chow hall or DFAC, followed by the first night stay in the barracks after a bed making class by SSG Mercier II.



## Day 2

Day two was extremely busy starting with an early rise at 0530 in the morning where PT was conducted at a brisk 34°F. SGT Strittmater and SSG Mercier II lead the group through circuit-relay exercises consisting of push-ups, sit-ups, overhead arm claps and the steam engine, to name a few. The day continued on with a tour through the Commemorative Area by Linda Fournier, detailing the history of Ft. McCoy. This was followed by a static display of numerous modern military vehicles including a M1114 "up- armored" HMMWV and a UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter. Later, willing participants tried on body armor, rucksack, helmet and a "Rubber Duck M16" (a faux M16), for a relay race.



A much needed break was given to experience another U.S. military staple: the famous MRE. After a brief class on the heater component, the WO:I participants were allowed to dive into lunch. Excited by the day's activities, attendees were then transported just outside Ft. McCoy to FOB Freedom for a tour by facility manager, Jeffrey Paulson. Mr. Paulson was extremely knowledgeable and gave in-depth information on what life was like in a FOB in hostile territories. The FOB tour even simulated a surprise mortar attack, where participants took cover in cement bunkers.



Afterwards, this busy day was rewarded with a grill-out complete with games and tasty food with all the fixings. Before lights-out, some individuals received Basic Rifle Marksmanship (BRM) training via the electronic rifle system set up in the barracks.





### Day 3

Day three saw the WO:I participants at WMA conducting next-step and breakout sessions followed by a personal story related to the National Guard by Tracy Fleck. Much was learned through the brainstorming sessions and an After Action Review (AAR) was conducted to capture this information.

The first Wisconsin Operation: Immersion was a sound success, from initial planning through the final execution. The WO:I participants asked many excellent questions and learned much throughout the event and activities. The next-step sessions and AAR conducted at the conclusion of WO:I ensures that progress is made as Wisconsin moves forward in its commitment and determination to ever provide better mental health, behavioral health and substance abuse services to its U.S. military service members.

### Testimonials:

"It strengthened my understanding of military culture and provided me with ways to tailor services to better meet the needs of this population. WO:I also strengthened my relationships with colleagues and I left feeling connected to my team members." - Pam H

"It will give you a completely new perspective and level of respect for everything these people do." -Justin H

"Then I walked up to Miller Park. There in front of me was a man holding a bucket with "Dry Hootch" written on the side. I smiled. I'm one of you now. I proudly walked over introduced myself and told him of my experience at Fort McCoy. I plunked some money into the bucket and received a camouflage bracelet that read, "Support Our Troops." You bet I will! Hooah!" -Lynn S

"We were afforded experiences that non-military people would never in their wildest dreams imagine." - Charlesetta (Lady) J

"My message for clinicians/providers who do or will work with our National Guard, Reservists or Veterans is that this is a very rewarding and informative adventure." -Darrel P

### WO:I Planning Committee:

- SSG Glen Mercier II
- SGT Jeffrey Strittmater
- Mark Flowers
- Darrel Pagel
- Janet Fleege

### Our Partnership:

