

Statement of Support for Virtual Health and Wellness Resource Guide for Military Spouses

Wichita State University, WSU Ventures has selected the Virtual Health and Wellness Resource Guide for Military Spouses as the winner of the Kansas InnovateHER competition and recommends their advancement to the final round of the Challenge in Washington, D.C. The Virtual Health and Wellness Resource Guide for Military Spouses stood out to the judges of the Kansas InnovateHER Challenge because of vast impact this service has on the lives of women and children, the proven potential for commercialization, and the need in the marketplace of the individuals it serves.

The InDependent | Fort Riley Resource Guide is a social support network that helps military spouses explore their local health and wellness options while making their assigned duty station feel like home. Funding from InnovateHER would enable InDependent to develop and pilot test the electronic resource guide with military spouses located in the Fort Riley, Kansas area. InDependent will then duplicate the template and expand the service to spouses at other duty stations, representing all branches of the U.S. military.

This innovative idea will help military spouses, new to an area, find resources like the best gyms, local markets, healthy restaurants, public parks, doctors, dentists, and community supported agriculture before or upon arrival. The community-based platform will encourage members to focus on their individual health while also motivating their peers to find lasting health and wellness solutions.

InDependent has an established community at Fort Riley with approximately 90 military spouse members. The community ambassador will work with members and local businesses to gather data and compile a list of helpful resources. Using this information, the team will build a local directory, solicit peer reviews, and offer personal testimonials about the area.

The goal is to establish a reliable referral system that is sustainable and ongoing despite the transient nature of the military population. Because the project is entirely web-based, it has the potential to reach and benefit military spouses stationed throughout the country and internationally.

Although a variety of health promotion programs targeting military families have been developed since the early 1980s, none have specifically targeted the unique needs and circumstances of military spouses. Unfortunately, emerging evidence suggests a majority of military spouses are not engaging in health-promoting behavior. This is a problem that warrants attention because their behavior is likely to have a direct impact on the entire family, including military service members and their children. Therefore, there is a need for new, cost-effective and accessible programs via an online platform designed to motivate and empower military spouses to make their own health and wellness a priority.

There is evidence that suggests having a strong social support network and the "sisterhood" among military wives is of paramount importance to the well-being of today's military spouses. This need, though not studied, extends to male spouses. For example, several hundred private, volunteer Facebook groups have formed at military installations by spouses looking to provide a secure platform to ask questions, offer advice, and share resources with each other as they transition in and out of the area. While convenient, the Facebook platform is not static. Therefore, questions are often missed or repeated because the feed is continually being pushed down as new conversations spark. The popularity of these groups re-affirm that military spouses turn to each other for advice and support.

A customized platform will provide the same type of social support to military spouses, but will offer a more user-friendly experience. A one-stop virtual guide will offer a compilation of local health and wellness resources recommended by peers who currently live, or have lived, in the area. This resource will save military spouses time as well as reduce stress of the unknown. View prototype here: <http://in-dependent.org/resourceguide>.

InDependent represents military spouses from all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces, including Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard and the attached reserve units. There are approximately one million registered military spouses; 93% are female with an average age of 25, 44% have children mostly between the ages of zero and five, and more than half are unemployed. Spouses often face unique barriers to maintaining a healthy lifestyle due to the stressful nature of military life. One major obstacle is frequent transitions, including family relocations and spouse deployments. On average, military families move every 2.5 years, often to places outside of their control and where they know little about the new area. This can lead to decreased engagement in physical activity and healthful eating, in addition to increased feelings of stress, isolation, and depression.

The proposed project is a pilot test website that will initially target 384 military spouses who represent various ages, ethnicities, and incomes stationed in and around the Fort Riley, Kansas area. The target demographic will be spouses new to the area and those transitioning in from other duty stations. Key constituents include likeminded spouses looking for a local support group and healthy resources.

InDependent was co-founded in 2013 by six military spouses. Within two years of operation, they experienced tremendous success in pulling together a supportive community through a blog, social media applications, and peer-to-peer groups. They currently use free social media applications to host the virtual and in-person communities. Going forward, they want to power these communities with a more robust and interactive program, but will only be able to achieve this goal through the support of generous donors to help get them started.

The team has the professional skills to build and manage an innovative platform. Together they have approximately 50 years combined time served as military spouses, more than 10 years of work experience for the U.S. Army in a public affairs and marketing capacity, and five plus years certified military community fitness instruction. In addition, Michele Bradfield, InDependent's program manager, is stationed at Fort Riley, Kansas. In less than one year, she has recruited approximately 90 military spouses eager to help her champion this idea to fruition. She also successfully coordinated the first-ever online Military Spouse Wellness Summit that attracted more than 2,000 participants.

InDependent has set intermediate and long term outcomes for this project. Intermediate and long term outcomes including; 1.) Customized Website —hire a web designer to build a customized website that is populated with peer reviews and recommendations. Once the website is launched, the team will recruit a minimum of 200 military spouses to join and pilot test the platform. Evaluation of the website's success over a two-month period via observation, focus groups, and surveys. 2.) Feasibility Study — feasibility and effectiveness will be measured based on a.) Attitudes toward the website platform and understanding of the content, b.) Participant expectations and usability, and c.) User engagement/retention. If the website template is found to be successful — in terms of positive impact, financial feasibility, and long-term sustainability — this pilot project will continue to support the Fort Riley area and will be duplicated to serve spouses representing all branches of the U.S. military stationed nationally and internationally.

Services will be expanded in a four-phase marketing strategy. In year one they will target nine U.S. states and three foreign countries. Target states include Washington D.C., Colorado, Georgia, New York, Texas, Tennessee, and Washington. Target countries include Germany, Korea, and Japan. Selections are based on dependent population organized by state with large military installations representing all branches of service. The resource guide will initially be marketed to InDependent's established network of military spouses that continues to grow weekly.

The web-based guide will offer a business directory, calendar of events, and crowd-sourced peer reviews in a private platform. Confirmation of military status via id.me, and an annual membership fee of \$15 will be required to access the page.

InDependent is currently a volunteer organization. The goal is to acquire funding through grants and investments from individuals, organizations and companies. Funding for the virtual resource guide will require an initial investment of \$10,000 to build the customized platform. Funding will be sustained by annual membership fees, per state and instillation.

YEAR 1	YEAR 2
385 participants x \$15.00 fee = \$5,575	770 participants x \$15.00 fee = \$11,550
\$5,575 per instillation x 15 instillations = \$83,625.00 gross income, year one	\$11,550 x 30 = \$346,500 gross income, year two

Successful implementation will result in funding for at least three military spouse jobs and 45 military spouse volunteer positions over the next three years.

Please accept our nomination of the Virtual Health and Wellness Resource Guide for Military Spouses to the final round of the InnovateHER 2016 Challenge.


Debra Franklin, Wichita State University, WSU Ventures

11/23/2015
Date