

# New Options Program Reaches Out to Soldiers

As the war against terror trudges onward in Iraq and Afghanistan, growing numbers of battle-tested soldiers settle in our surrounding communities by way of Fort Riley—home of the U.S. Army’s 1st Infantry Division.

Salina Regional Health Center’s psychiatric services have expanded to meet increased area needs by adapting its New Options intensive day treatment program to meet the specialized care required for soldiers afflicted with severe anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Intensive day treatment programs are utilized for patients who are stable enough to not need inpatient hospitalization. Today, most inpatient psychiatric hospitalizations last less than a week and services like New Options allow patients a gentler transition from inpatient care.

Initially, soldiers seeking care at New Options were brought to Salina by bus. In 2009, Salina Regional began offering New Options services at a new clinic in Junction City—much closer to the base.

“With the help of New Options, we have created a firm foundation for a ‘band of brothers’ with a common tie to seek treatment for relative concerns on neutral turf,” says Col. Jeffrey Johnson, Irwin Army Community Hospital commander.

At New Options, soldiers participate in group therapy, receive individual psychotherapy, and have medications managed by professionals who have sought specialized training to care for psychologically injured warriors.

“These soldiers aren’t unlike other high-functioning people we might see in our traditional day-treatment programs,” says Susan Farmer, M.D., a Salina Regional psychiatrist. “They’re physically very healthy, but like some

highly intense businessmen or firefighters, the circumstances of their occupation have harmed them psychologically. These closed head wounds can be hard to recognize.”

## FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM

1st Sgt. Barry Flannagin has made a career serving our country. The combat engineer had been in harm’s way in Somalia, Kosovo, Iraq in 2003 and again in Iraq in 2006. The second tour in Iraq proved to be the most dangerous as his primary duty was to lead a platoon of combat engineers clearing roadways around Balad of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). His heavily armored truck had hit several IEDs while carrying out missions, but his equipment protected him from injury. Then, on one mission an IED inflicted greater damage. The 4-inch-thick glass windshield of his truck was blown out and the vehicle was disabled. He sustained minor wounds from fragments to the leg and face. It was the first time he’d been physically touched by enemy fire.

“You could taste the dirt, glass and smoke from the explosion,” Flannagin says. “All of us in the truck were momentarily stunned, but our injuries were pretty minor. It’s from that point on that the reality of my own mortality began to sink in and my fear and anxiety levels got just a little higher each day.”

While the incident earned Flannagin a Purple Heart, his missions continued and his platoon was hit at least two additional times by IEDs. Then, after returning from a mission, during

some downtime he experienced symptoms similar to a heart attack.

“I felt like I had an anvil on my chest and I had shooting pain running through my shoulders,” Flannagin says.

Tests run in field hospitals couldn’t determine the cause for Flannagin’s pain, so he was flown to Germany, where doctors found no sign of improper heart function. They eventually determined his symptoms were stress-related.

Flannagin returned stateside for treatment and eventually back to home base at Fort Riley. Once home, he continued to decline psychologically, to the point where he was almost non-verbal and he displayed many classic symptoms of PTSD.

## THERAPY PREVENTS LONG-TERM ILLNESS

Flannagin was reassigned to the Warrior Transition Battalion and began receiving treatment through New Options. Over the course of months of therapy, he made great strides and eventually began feeling more like himself again.

“This therapy is amazing,” Flannagin says. “It’s tailored to each individual’s needs. I participated in group therapy, got one-on-one care and had sessions with my family involved. I wouldn’t be where I am now without the care of the entire New Options staff. It’s been great for me and I’ve seen lots of others make a lot of improvement through this program too.”

After 20 years in the Army, Flannagin



Retired 1st Sgt. Barry Flannagin (middle) stands with Susan Farmer, M.D., and Phillip Flanders, clinical psychologist, after successful completion of the New Options intensive day treatment program.

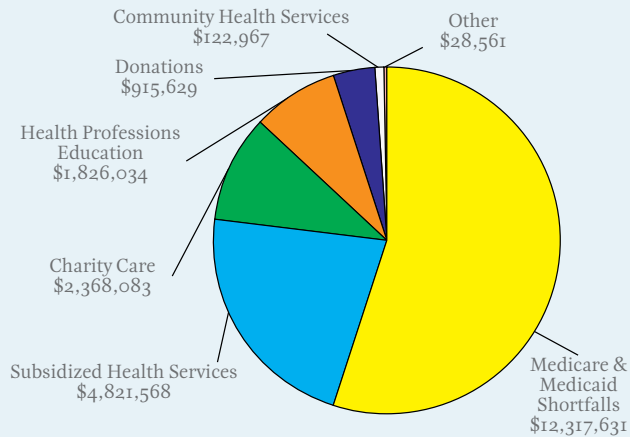
received a medical retirement in March. Now he plans to go back to his home state of Arkansas to find a civilian job and be near family.

"I didn't plan to leave the Army this way, but I'm proud of my service," Flannagin says. "I never lost a soldier from my platoon and I'm proud of that. One of my soldiers told my wife after I got home that I'd left behind a platoon of leaders. I take a lot of pride in that too."

There's strong evidence that proper treatment for PTSD, anxiety and depression can prevent long-term illness. Some who enter treatment through New Options are even able to be rejoin their units and continue their service in the Army.

"The stigmas in the Army towards mental illness are changing," says Phillip Flanders, a clinical psychologist at Salina Regional. "It used to be that if you had a psychological illness, you were out. Now, as some soldiers are able to rejoin their units after treatment, the perceptions are changing."

## 2009 Unreimbursed Community Benefit: \$22,400,473



As a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization, Salina Regional Health Center is held in trust to benefit the community. Salina Regional has an obligation to provide vital services to the north central Kansas region. Our focus is on increasing access to quality healthcare services and adding value to the area.

## CHIP SUPPORTS INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Each year Salina Regional Health Center tithes a portion of its operating margin to the Salina Regional Health Foundation's Community Health Investment Program (CHIP). The Foundation in turn offers grants to a wide range of initiatives that impact youth development.

In 2009 Salina Regional tithed 10 percent of its operating margin to CHIP, which awarded 24 grants for a total of \$1,477,982.

One major gift awarded \$60,000 to the Ashby House to develop healthy pregnancy programs to go along with its new Legacy House service for women who are homeless, pregnant or recently postpartum and require treatment for a substance abuse addiction.

"I don't think I would have made it as far as I have without this assistance," says Misty Adams, who participated in the healthy pregnancy programs with her 2-year-old and newborn sons. "I feel like I've learned a lot about being more dependent on myself and not as dependent on others."

Another grant gave \$56,000 to "The City" teen center to establish an Apple computer lab for students in the XCEL after-school program for sixth- and seventh-graders who have been identified by teachers to be at risk of dropping out of school. XCEL teaches healthy life lessons and offers additional assistance with schoolwork. Students can use the computers for their homework or sign up for a track that teaches

them to use software to record music and video to DVD.

"This computer technology allows us to provide kids a 21st-century experience with 21st-century technology," says Tina Bulleigh, XCEL director. "We just recently video chatted with a guy at Harvard and he took us on a tour of the campus. Sometimes experiences like these help kids aspire to go out and do great things."

CHIP also gave \$1 million to the capital campaign for the Donna L. Vanier Children's Center, which will become home for the Salina Child Care Association, Child Advocacy and Parenting Services (CAPS) and Salina Regional Health Center's Infant-Child Development Program.



Top left: Misty Adams gets assistance caring for her two sons at Ashby House. Bottom left: A student learns how to record music as part of The City's XCEL program. Right: Donna Vanier assists with the groundbreaking ceremony for the new Donna L. Vanier Children's Center.