



# To Honor and Serve



## *Empowering Youth and Young Adults from Military Families*

### **TO HONOR AND SERVE OVERVIEW:**

To Honor and Serve aims to identify and address the specific needs of children and youth in military families (“military youth”) that are involved in or at risk for involvement in the child welfare and/or juvenile justice systems in Washington State. CCYJ initiated work with this population through Military Youth Roundtables in 2009 and 2010. The initiative was revived in July 2017 and is anticipated to continue for three years, through research, planning, and the implementation of a demonstration project.

### **THE NEED:**

Washington is home to more than 65,000 Active Duty, Reserve, and National Guard personnel from all branches of the armed forces, many of whom have families. The military lifestyle creates unique challenges for these military families and their nearly 30,000 school-aged and estimated 15,000 preschool-aged children. Frequent moves, regular and prolonged absence of one or both parents, and family dynamics shaped by the health and experiences of military parents’ all result in exceptional familial, educational, economic, and social hardships for children. Anecdotally, these children have been especially burdened by the recent wars in Iraq in Afghanistan.

While information regarding the exposure of youth in military families to risk factors is limited, recent research on school-age military youth in Washington State confirms that military youth exhibit risk factors for systems involvement. Research shows that, in comparison to their civilian counterparts, a greater percentage of school-age military youth exhibit risk factors that are known precursors for juvenile justice and child welfare systems involvement: alcohol use, attempted suicide, poor academic performance, episodes of physical violence, and carrying a weapon to school. This data is informative, but we still know very little about how these risk factors play out in terms of formal juvenile justice and/or child welfare involvement or about how military youth and their families engage with these State systems.

### **OUR CURRENT WORK:**

To Honor and Serve responds to the exceptional challenges faced by children and youth in military families as well as to the need to know more about this populations’ interactions with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Our current three-year project includes a one-year research phase in which a needs assessment will be conducted and a two-year demonstration phase in which a new program or practice will be piloted in response to the findings from the needs assessment phase. At present, To Honor and Serve is in its first phase – which includes a comprehensive literature review, key informant interviews with military and civilian stakeholders, surveys conducted with military children and parents, a series of focus groups held at military installations across the state, and a final research report presenting findings, which will be shared at a statewide summit for the project in the fall of 2018. These findings, together with the outcome of the summit discussion, will inform the demonstration phase of To Honor and Serve.