

Improving MWR Program Effectiveness: Consideration of Program Specific Outcomes as well as Military QOL, Commitment, and Retention

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Abstract

Each branch of the United States Armed Forces has Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) programs at its base locations. MWR provides a network of support and leisure services designed for soldiers, families, civilian employees, and military retirees. As these programs have existed for well over a century, the purpose of this paper is to focus on the effectiveness of the programs in terms of participation and program outcome goals. Based on limited studies, MWR programs are related to higher levels of soldier commitment, readiness, and intention to reenlist. We suggest additional research to strengthen these findings and to investigate further the impact of MWR on military families. A case example of one MWR location is presented.

Keywords: MWR; military QOL; organizational commitment; employee retention

1. Introduction

Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) programs have been improving the lives of the U.S. Armed Forces since before the start of the twentieth century. The mission statements of these programs are typified by the following statements from the Navy and Army, respectively. Similar missions are available today for MWR programs across all military branches.

The mission of the local MWR program is to provide quality, varied programs of wholesome and constructive recreation and social activities for Navy personnel and their family members. Effective MWR programs contribute to mental, physical, social, and educational enrichment of all participants. The accomplishment of this mission directly contributes to the readiness of Navy activities/units and personal readiness and retention of Navy personnel (Military OneSource, 2013).

MWR exists because the Army is committed to preserving the well-being and enhancing the lives of the soldiers who serve and defend the nation, as well as their families, civilian employees, and military retirees. Stress reduction, skill building, and maintaining the self-confidence of soldiers and their families is the focus of MWR (Military OneSource, 2013).

In order to carry out their mission, MWR implements a variety of activities and programs aimed towards this goal such as fitness centers and sports programs, recreation programs (e.g., boating, bowling, golf), youth centers, single service member programs, travel services, child care services, and entertainment (e.g., concerts and movies). MWR does an impressive job at creating programs and marketing their offerings to a wide range of personnel, however they are faced with challenges including funding, better marketing and dealing with government regulations. To be competitive and effective, MWR must create awareness and marketing promotions, keep up with changing trends, identify wants and needs of its military families, and continue to provide excellent services for military personnel and their dependents.

MWR was created to promote active living, as well as provide mental, physical, and stress relieving support for soldiers and their families. Soldiers with active lifestyles are likely to be in higher spirits, have increased self-esteem and improved health, and be stronger and more resilient. The main objectives of MWR programs are fitness, unit and community cohesion, family well-being, quality of life, and recreation outreach (Lankford and DeGraaf, 1992). Available services vary by location, but MWR is a comprehensive program including a wide range of services designed so MWR “serves soldiers everywhere they serve” (Daniel, 2011).

This paper begins with information on the history and development of MWR, its changing focus toward the military family rather than just the soldier, and funding challenges. A summary of research results about MWR program outcomes follows. As these findings are somewhat limited, we suggest research issues and better methods for the improvement of future MWR program outcomes. Finally, we focus on one naval air station to assess observations of their MWR activities. By examining a specific military base to offer practical suggestions, we can learn more about typical issues faced in any one military MWR operation.

2. History and Development of MWR

2.1 Origins

Morale, Welfare, and Recreation programs were not fully initiated until around the beginning of the twentieth century. In the 125 years following the founding of the army in 1775 there were informal posts operated by traders that provided meals, clothing, laundering, and purchasable goods. In 1895 the Headquarters, Department of the Army (HQDA) established the Army “PX” (Post Exchange). Similar to MWR programs today, the commanders’ offices operated these units, and profits were put towards recreational activities for the troops.

Throughout the twentieth century there were many enhancements in the development of MWR programs. The army began building, operating, and maintaining PXs, libraries, schools, recreation centers, and gyms for the troops in 1903. Only 15 years later the Army Morale Division was established, followed in 1920 by the Army Motion Picture Service and in 1923, the Army Library Service. In 1941 they changed the name of the Army Morale Division to “Special Services,” an all-encompassing department with its own director of recreation services, the Army Exchange, and the Army Soldier Show (MWR Overview, Department of Defense, 1984).

2.2 Emphasis on the Family

Services for families were much slower in development; Army Community Services not beginning until 1965, Youth Activities Program in 1968, and Outdoor Recreation Program in 1971. Until 1981, with the institution of the Family Advocacy Program and the Army Family Symposium, family support was not entirely encouraged for the troops. As more support of families was established, it was recognized what a positive influence the support of family could have on a soldier. The importance of army families to the overall success of the army became the focus in 1984, “The Year of the Army Family,” when the Army Family Action Plan was created to actively improve both the lives of soldiers and families. Rich Gorman, executive director of the Army’s Family and MWR Command, reported to a congressional committee in 2011 that family support is now equal in importance to support for soldiers. He stated the “Army has long recognized that if we don’t retain the family, we simply won’t retain the soldier.” (Daniel, 2011).

Army Chief of Staff General John A. Wickham Jr. published a White Paper in 1983, the first to emphasize the importance of army families. He recognized the integral support role of the soldiers’ families to their well-being and his paper resulted in the creation of the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center (CFSC). All of this shifting to include families caused a corresponding shift in the MWR mission and provided services. By this time MWR had become a well-rounded program; the CFSC helped single soldiers and grew family support programs including child care, youth programs, schools, libraries, sports and athletics, financial counseling, spouse employment programs, in-theater support to deployed soldiers, Family Readiness Groups, lodging, and fitness centers. On October 24, 2006 after changes from an agency to a unit, the CFSC became the Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation Command.

2.3 MWR Funding

Funding is split between government appropriated, and non-appropriated funds depending on the type of MWR activity. The more mission-essential the activity, the more appropriated funds will be awarded. There are three types of funded activities:

Category A: Mission-Sustaining Activities. These programs are considered essential to Military Services objectives, and are almost entirely supported by appropriated funds. This is due in part to the fact that they usually have no possibility of earning revenues, so the minimum funding is 85%. This category includes professional entertainment overseas, fitness training, library services, counseling, recreation centers, unit level programs, and sports (Department of Defense, 2013).

Category B: Community Support Activities. These programs satisfy basic physiological and psychological needs of soldiers and their families. They differ, however, from Category A by their ability to generate some revenues. They are usually awarded 65% funding, and include arts and crafts, bowling centers, automotive skill development, child development services, entertainment, information and ticketing services, outdoor recreation and swimming pools, sports programs above the intramural level, youth services, and the Better Opportunity for Single Soldiers program (Department of Defense, 2013).

Category C: Revenue-Generating Activities. These activities have less impact on readiness, and are only awarded minimal funding support. These types of activities would be aero clubs, amusement machine centers, Armed Services Exchange, Armed Forces Recreation Centers, Audio/Photo and Retail Sales (overseas), bingo, large bowling centers, golf courses, military clubs, and more (Department of Defense, 2013).

3. Do MWR Programs Yield Positive Outcomes?

In an era of post-9/11 concerns, active wartime, budgets constraints, and program scrutiny, increasingly the value of MWR expenditures and appropriations come into question. It is important to review the few studies supporting the idea that MWR positively impacts the workplace. Many of these MWR studies look at the impact of MWR on troop attitudes, commitment, and readiness, but also examine relationships to family commitment and readiness.

The military have routinely collected data on soldier and spouse use of MWR and their perceived importance of these programs (Phillips, 2006), yet studies on the relationship between use of programs and positive outcome variables have been few and have often had methodological limitations (Marshall-Mies, Westhuis and Fafara, 2011). To be able to facilitate multi-program comparisons, Scherwin, Michael, Glaser, and Farrar (2002) called for a Navy program evaluation system that can be consistently used for measuring program effectiveness, not only for Navy programs but across all branches of the U.S. military.

A 1997 study of Navy MWR concluded that as a sailor became more satisfied with MWR programs, their overall level of satisfaction with the Navy increased (Koopman and Goldhaber, 1997). In addition, internal and external family adaptations to military life impacted readiness and retention. Schumm, Bell, and Resnick (2001) found that soldiers deployed overseas who worried about their families back home were much more likely to report these concerns interfered with their daily tasks during their deployment. Schumm, Bell, and Resnick (2001) also reported that one's satisfaction with Army life impacts strongly on the decision to re-enlist.

Using a large sample of military personnel, Fafara and Westhuis (2007) found the use of MWR has a positive, large direct association with career intentions to stay in the Army and satisfaction with the quality of Army life. This research was limited by collecting data from samples with different scales and time frames, using self-report data, and results that are descriptive and correlational, not causal. The Scherwin, et al. study (2002) demonstrated a positive relationship between QOL programs and its impact on military personnel and their families. Their study collected data at three Naval installations, two in the U. S. and one in Japan. This cluster evaluation was modeled after an earlier study of Marines QOL programs (Kerce,1995). Specifically, results indicated that military recreation, child-care, youth, and employment assistance programs are rated most highly by program users. Limitations included inconsistent administration across the three sites, and the sample only included perceptions and attitudes of those who are program users. It would strengthen further research findings to survey a large population of military persons and military families to ascertain why they did/did not use the base programs, then measure their perceptions of programs offered.

Perceived organizational support is the overall belief of employees that the organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, Stinghamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski and Rhoades, 2002; Settoon, Bennett, and Liden, 1996; Greenhaus, Bedeian and Mossholder, 1987). If employees feel high levels of perceived organizational support, they are much more likely to show high levels of job commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1997; Tsui, Pearce, Porter and Tripoli, 1997).

Numerous studies have confirmed that if an employee feels they are supported by their employer then they are more likely to have more job satisfaction (Randall, Cropanzano, Borman and Birjulin, 1999; Witt 1994). More positive outcomes were reported by Kerce (1995) who found that MWR positively affects a Marine's decision to re-enlist (employee retention).

Koopman and Goldhaber (1997) stated that MWR not only positively impacts job commitment, but also positively impacts job performance. These are constructs that need to be examined further in future research studies.

Several studies have reported positive growth in MWR participation, especially in the areas of fitness/sports, employee assistance, child care and entertainment. Phones, computers, sports facilities and R&R leave are rated most important and used most on foreign assignments. The predominant research design has been interviews or surveys. Our call is for tightly designed analysis and methods (e.g. seeking causality rather than only correlational results) and to insure similar administration of data collection across all samples/locations. Samples should include military personnel (including active, reserve and guard), military family members, retirees, and civilian MWR staff. Care should be taken to collect MWR program results from users and non-users, persons based in the U.S. and abroad, and people across diverse demographic groups.

In times of economic stagnation and declining defense budgets, results from well-designed studies can assist the military branches in justifying and growing MWR programs in the areas that prove most beneficial. As stated by Marshall-Mies et al. (2011), at a time when the President of the United States has made "the care and support of military families a top national security policy priority," it behooves researchers to further explore, refine our research methods, and refine our findings so as to provide our military the most effective support programs possible. Additional research conducted in these key areas will make program improvements more likely. To better understand the programs of a MWR unit and provide practical perspective to the research presented here, we now examine one particular MWR location.

4. SWOT Analysis and Recommendations for NAS Key West MWR

Naval Air Station Key West spans across four separate bases: Truman Annex, Trumbo Point, Sigsbee, and the main location, Boca Chica Field. The MWR program is well developed and includes a variety of programs for the soldiers and their families. The facilities include: Boca Chica Marina; Navigator's Bar and Grill; Air Lanes Bowling Center; Runway Grill; Boca Chica Fitness Center; Auto Skills Shop; Beach Patio Recreation Center; Beachside Grill; Beach Patio Fitness Center; Flying Conch Lounge; Trumbo Restaurant; Trumbo Point Pool; Sunset Lounge; Sigsbee Recreation Center; Information, Tickets, and Tours; RV Park; and Sigsbee Marina. There is a Navy Exchange and Commissary located on Sigsbee, as well as a youth center and child development center. Vacation rentals and a hotel are available at Trumbo Point, and the Liberty Program for single or unaccompanied soldiers is at Beach Patio. Many large annual events are thrown, as well as smaller activities offered daily through many of the different facilities. One of the authors spent time interacting with and observing MWR activities at NAS Key West for research for this paper.

4.1 Strengths

While the funding system can be a challenge for many programs, MWR remains financially sound with operations allocating significant additional revenues to improve and create new programs. Due to this additional funding, 2009 saw many improvements onboard ships, with 160,620 recreation and fitness items being distributed to 300 ships as well as brand new fitness centers being built aboard several ships, including hospital ships. In the Middle East, "Operation Sand Trap" provided golf equipment donated by corporate sponsors to the troops, and the Navy General Library Program upgraded 1,028 laptops on 195 warships for information and learning purposes (Rogers, 2011).

Onshore, progress is being made with new fitness facilities opening on various bases worldwide. A new program called SHAPE (Senior Health Assessment Program Enterprise) has been created for the Navy's over-40 population, with metrics showing very positive results. Also, an aggressive expansion plan has been put in place for Child and Youth Services to reach at least 80% of the need. In 2011 the Navy funded the opening of more than 33 new facilities, which over time will increase capacity by over 7,000 spaces. An important strength of Navy MWR is that there are many initiatives to measure the growth and needs of soldiers. A "Fit Factor" program has been implemented in Child Development Centers to battle obesity and offer nutrition and health education, and results have been positive (Rogers, 2011).

A challenge for MWR has been reaching out to 18-25 year olds, and the Liberty program for single or unaccompanied soldiers has been able to connect with this group. The programs have proven to be approachable and successful and have continued to be one of MWR's most active initiatives (Rogers, 2011). A major strength of Navy MWR is the comprehensiveness and inclusiveness of the program. Programs are offered to meet a wide variety of needs for a wide variety of soldiers no matter their age, physical abilities, stage of family life cycle, or gender. Spouses and children are also included.

An interview with a 2nd class Damage Control Man at NAS KW reveals the importance of MWR to sailors while overseas. The discounted tours and off base entertainment are incredibly beneficial and appreciated by sailors. MWR knows the local area and sailors do not always get good treatment when touring alone. MWR takes care of everything. "At sea, MWR is a must." (Refer to Appendix A for select interview transcripts with personnel at Key West).

4.2 Weaknesses

While programs have been successful in generating revenues, one weakness facing the Navy MWR program is the 10% cut in appropriated funding that will affect maintenance and custodial services, hours of operations for facilities, safety programs, and quality of life programs (Baynet.com, 2013). This and potential future cuts demonstrate the need for better measurement of and communication about positive MWR program outcomes.

Due to the fact that MWR programs and events are run through the United States Armed Forces, there are many government rules and regulations that limit the program. This provides many challenges for MWR staff. Whenever MWR throws a large event or program, they are not allowed to take donations. Instead, sponsors must be obtained and a contract must be drawn that provides equal worth to both sides. This is usually met by advertising the sponsors at event promotions, setting up tables or booths at events, putting up banners and sponsor logos, and giving sponsor credit in news releases. Only whomever the MWR director authorizes can be designated to obtain sponsorships, and this person must be thoroughly trained.

There are also many restrictions on which types of sponsors are allowed and the method of procurement. For example, sponsorships with tobacco companies are strictly prohibited, and while alcoholic beverage companies may be allowed after the appropriate paperwork, they must be unsolicited. Even overseas sponsors must be U.S. companies unless inadequate sources exist. The promotion of alcohol and alcohol consumption is highly restricted, which creates a weakness in serving a younger segment that might otherwise be interested.

4.3 Opportunities

Fitness programs are a primary concern for MWR, and an annual study by the American College of Sports Medicine discovered recent fitness trends that should be considered to best serve soldiers. CrossFit training combines strength training, body weight training, exercise and weight loss, functional fitness, core training, group personal training, and circuit training, and is the top fitness trend for 2013. Body weight training, such as TRX, and dance training, such as Zumba are huge trends that could be implemented at MWR fitness centers (Chung, 2012).

An interview with an MWR Event Coordinator and Head of Liberty Program identified a need for more day-to-day programming rather than a focus on a few large special events. Community centers could offer family activities on a weekly basis to bring everyone together and provide entertainment. Overseas sailors would also benefit largely from this, as off the base the landscape can be unwelcoming, so more daily activities by MWR would be a great way to provide a comfortable setting for entertainment. There is also the need for additional technology for family communication via computers and phones from overseas locations.

NAS Key West specifically could take advantage of the large number of dogs for both entertainment, and potentially revenue. Dog training classes, dog walks, and other programs at the dog park might be implemented, and having people register for a small fee could provide some additional revenue for MWR.

4.4 Threats

At NAS Key West there are many threats that prevent sailors from taking advantage of what MWR offers. The city itself is so full of life and activity, and there is always something going on in terms of entertainment. A main tourist attraction, Duval Street, is covered in bars, always bustling, and is a very popular destination for many sailors. While families with children usually are not impacted by this threat, a large number of single sailors and families with no children are lost to the festivals and tourist attractions downtown.

This is also in part due to the fact that there are very few MWR events that allow alcohol, and a large segment of sailors are looking for that type of entertainment during their time off.

4.5 Target groups on base

Single or unaccompanied active-duty sailors are targeted through many different programs and events - most prominently, the Liberty program. Those who sign up for the Liberty program are offered daily activities (usually free), further discounts from ITT (Information, Tickets, and Tours), and large events planned just for Liberty members at steep discounts (such as skydiving, sports games, and day trips). Outside of the Liberty program there are many events that are offered to active-duty, both single or with families, such as different levels of sports, runs, fitness programs, excursions, tourist activities, and tournaments. Families are targeted through many programs, but fewer daily activities. Child and Youth services are offered, and these centers do have many activities for children. Events such as toy drives, back-to-school pool parties, sports leagues or family-oriented holiday celebrations are utilized to attract and satisfy the family segment of the market. The segment of retirees living on base is not as large as the other segments, however there are still programs and activities offered that target this market. Community centers run weekly events (such as bingo), and programs such as RV parks, campgrounds, and picnic areas also target the retirees and are very popular.

Although the groups above are the main segments of MWR's target market, there are also behavioral and psychographic elements considered when designing programs to meet sailors' needs. Programs such as Auto Hobby Shops, arts and crafts, bowling centers, marinas, and many more specialized programs take into account the lifestyles and attitudes of many different sailors and their family members.

4.6 Suggested Products/Programs for NAS Key West

Due to the reduction in appropriated funding, Navy MWR needs to continue to put an emphasis on revenue-building programs in order to raise funds and continue improving facilities overseas, onboard ships, and at U.S. bases. Implementing programs such as dog training classes or CrossFit training would be one way to charge a small registration fee, while at the same time satisfying a market need.

One struggle is attracting younger sailors, so getting them involved in the Liberty program and really getting to know what they want MWR to provide is vital. NAS Key West requires new sailors to check-in with MWR at their arrival. More bases could do this and perhaps include a short survey to discover ways to improve their programs.

Since fitness and command readiness is a main concern of MWR, yearly trends should be considered and the programs offered should be adjusted depending on the wants and needs of sailors. While fitness and recreation centers are core strengths and a focus of Navy MWR already, these programs are most utilized by sailors and, especially due to budget cuts, resources should be allocated to best serve and benefit the market. Rather than wasting money on offering programs that have minimal attendance, paying attention to fitness trends can maximize the use of resources and offer the most desirable programs to the market.

Pricing for MWR offerings is not entirely relevant, as many of the programs and activities are free to soldiers. Use of fitness, recreation, and picnic facilities are at no cost, many small activities and large events are thrown at no cost, and library and information services are also free. For facilities such as bowling centers, golf courses, and recreation programs (including movies, concerts, tourist activities, etc.), soldiers can utilize these at a very low cost. The exceptionally low prices are a great way to encourage soldiers to take advantage of all that MWR offers, so it is not recommended that the pricing strategy be changed. One way to generate further revenues would be to create new activities and programs that can include a small fee, however it is important that all MWR offerings are accessible to soldiers in order to fulfill their mission of spreading wellness, increasing morale, and improving health, fitness, and readiness.

4.7 Better Promotion

After spending time at NAS KW, it became clear that communication and promotion was difficult for MWR. Many strategies were in place to spread the word of MWR programs and activities, yet it seemed that at least half the population on all four bases was still unaware. While every sailor is mindful of MWR, it is important to make them aware of the existing programs and facilities so they can benefit from everything that MWR offers.

One strategy that is used at NAS Key West is a weekly activity sheet that is posted on the Facebook page and various boards in the barracks and other high-traffic areas. This sheet announces any big annual events that are coming up, Liberty program events, various NAS KW events/workshops/offerings, announcements from the Fleet and Family Support Center, Grill Menu, and fitness center events. While this is a great way to compile a large amount of upcoming information and spread it to a large number of people, many sailors do not take the time to read through the sheet. Some do not use Facebook or live on base. More strategies could include the weekly base newspaper, digital announcement boards at the entrance to each base, and monthly calendars or door hangers distributed to on-base housing. These sources usually mention only the larger, base-wide events.

Navy bases are their own small communities, so word-of-mouth can be the best source of promotion. This is a widely used strategy of MWR employees at NAS Key West. Since there is a security stop at the entrance of each base, this provides a good opportunity to spread any news to the security command at the gate. They can then spread the word on to anyone coming on to the gate as they check ID's. Anytime employees went to the gym, grills, marina, or bowling alley, they would also talk to people and make sure to get the word out there. Incentives are a major way to drive sailors to events. No matter the age, free prizes or food are always appealing and a great way to increase attendance. Once at the activities or events, MWR staff always makes sure to use flags and loud music to draw attention and attract people who have not yet heard about the various events. Booths and vendors as well as programmed games and activities are important factors in entertaining event attendees.

One type of promotions that is increasingly popular with MWR is the use of social media. This is prominently used for the Liberty program, however many other programs/events should take advantage of this popular media vehicle. Many MWR programs run their own Facebook pages, and Liberty programs often have their own as well. In this technology-centered age a large percentage of sailors are on Facebook, and almost all use cell phones, so social media has a large impact on marketing plans. Cellit text is a program that NAS Key West uses to send out mass alerts on occasion reminding those who sign up for upcoming event information.

While many of the promotional strategies currently utilized are successful, it still seems there is low awareness of many programs and events. When incoming sailors arrive on base they are presented with a briefing of MWR offerings and are provided with an opportunity to sign up for the Liberty program. In this week-long orientation, sailors should be prompted to sign up for email and text announcements providing them with upcoming MWR information. These announcements supplement activity flyers, making them more likely to be noticed and read, thereby improving attendance and utilization of MWR facilities.

5. Conclusion

MWR Departments have been successful in allocating funds and resources to troops both domestically and overseas, and have many program strengths. Military personnel feel appreciative toward the programs offered to them, and believe that MWR meets its mission of boosting morale, commitment and cohesion. More attention needs to be placed on raising awareness of programs and activities available on each base to improve the individual programs. Family members need to be encouraged to take advantage of the services offered through MWR.

Morale, Welfare, and Recreation programs have flourished in recent years and will continue to improve the lives of troops for years to come. It is imperative that military installations of all the U.S. branches continue to offer needed and wanted programs, market and encourage participation, and then take the necessary steps to collect information and research outcomes for continually improving effectiveness of MWR programming.

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7. Appendix A: Select Excerpts from Interviews with NAS KW Personnel

****Interview, Damage Control Man 2nd Class****

What MWR programs do you take advantage of at NAS KW?

“I have 3 jobs and school in between that, I have to run and work out, and then just go to bed. I do use the gym...auto hobby probably once a year. Haven't been to runway grille or anywhere lately. I could make time for it but I choose not to. I've been to a couple of the big events at beach patio, but I'm trying to use my time wisely right now because when I go back to my rotation I won't have as much time as I have now, so I'm trying to take advantage of that. I work custodial work on Sigsbee on the weekends.”

Do you feel that MWR has an impact on your level of overall morale?

“Yes MWR has an impact. Especially since I'm not one to go out, that is, off base.”

Do you have experience with MWR overseas?

“Been in Navy 9 years now in Japan and San Diego. They do it differently there; they do tours but the tours here in Key West...they even do stuff in Miami... but when you're on a ship and the MWR goes there and they do discounted tours and you're overseas so its so much better to go with MWR cause they know the local area so you have to take advantage of that. You won't get the same treatment if you went outside MWR, and they take care of everything. At sea, MWR is a must, I'm happy that they have that.”

****Interview, Watch Commander****

Describe a positive MWR experience that you had.

“I went on a Fury Adventure, hung out with some awesome MWR employees and interns, and went jet skiing. It was an amazing experience.”

Describe how participation in MWR has impacted your commitment to the US Navy.

“I wouldn't say it's impacted my commitment because I enjoy serving our country and I love what I do. It has, however, made it a more enjoyable experience.”

Having been actively involved in MWR did you find yourself encouraging others to do the same? Did you make MWR activities available to soldiers under your command?

“MWR activities are always available and recommended, especially to junior troops. My section has a MWR rep responsible for letting everyone in the section know about upcoming events.”

Explain how you felt while participating in an MWR event or using MWR facilities.

“For me the free gym is the best. I checked out a few of the gym membership fees out in town and they were pretty expensive. MWR events are also pretty cool. I enjoy playing football as well so having a flag football league is amazing for me. Brings back memories of my glory days in high school minus the tackling.Ha-ha!”

Describe how participating in an MWR event/utilizing MWR facilities improved cohesion within your unit.

“Anytime you do something fun as a group it raises morale. For a while our section would play volleyball on our weekends off and having the MWR personnel provide the grills and food to BBQ was great. We also have Armed Forces Day every year, which is pretty cool. It's a lot of team-based events so it forces you to come together to win.”

Do you feel that MWR had a positive impact on your level of overall morale?

“I do feel it's had a positive impact on my morale because of the magnitude of things that are available to you on a regular basis from discounted movie tickets, sports tickets, MWR sponsored events, and a host of other things.”

How does NAS KW MWR compare with the MWR programs in your past?

“I'd say Key West has the best MWR program I've seen since I've been in the Navy. They even make it a part of the check-in process so you know what they have available within the first few weeks of getting to the command.”

*****Interview, Event Coordinator and Head of Liberty Program*****

What are some of your marketing strategies for MWR events/facilities?

“Free food always gets people to go, programmed games and activities as well as just having booths and vendors for them to visit, having music to attract attention...having high up flags to attract people up to the event, if they haven't heard of it yet hopefully if they're driving by they'll see. From the marketing standpoint definitely social media, everybody's on Facebook these days and on their phones so Cellit text and Facebook are two big ones. Also word of mouth if you're going anywhere...going to the bowling alley for lunch or going to the gym, anytime you coming across anyone just mention it and have them tell people they know.”

How successful do you feel MWR is in fulfilling its mission to sailors at NAS KW? Do you feel that MWR successfully reaches all types of sailors (young/old, male/female, etc.)?

“I think we do because we have different departments focused towards different groups- RV park focused toward retirees, youth center for those with kids; we do single sailor programs; we do single active duty for those who don't have families here with them; fitness center does runs and intramurals; and we have special events that are more family oriented. Because we're so spread out it's hard to get the word out because there are a lot of people who live in town and once they leave work they don't want to drive back on base. There are different things we do on all the different bases so having those events and programs does help.”

Do you feel there is anything preventing military and their families from taking advantage of what MWR offers, maybe specific to Key West?

“Duval Street and being such a tourist town. Some people- not necessarily families because they have their kids- but for single sailors and families without really little kids, Duval street and the different festivals. There are always festivals and it might be the same weekend as our event. Being such a busy tourist town there's always something going on downtown.”

Is there anything you feel should be a part of MWR here that is not currently available?

“I think we need to have more, not just big special events, but day to day programming for families like a bingo night at the community center. Things that families can do on a regular basis. So yes, having those family activities on a weekly basis. Also there are so many dogs around here we need to have programs at the dog park like dog training classes and stuff like that...different dog walks. Maybe even have people register and even make some money off it.”

*****Interview, Liberty Program Associate*****

What are some of your marketing strategies for MWR events/facilities?

“Every time I drive on base I always talk to the people at the gate. I'm always trying to talk to people because that is a faster way to reach people and no one really pays attention to flyers anymore, so it's better just to talk to people. If I ever go to the gym I always talk to people. I always try to emphasize things like if there's going to be free stuff or prizes or if there's going to be food. Also I go and knock on doors in the barracks and I text people that I know in Liberty and tell them to bring all their friends. Postings on Facebook...and we also cross-market at our events. When they come to one of our events, we tell them about other events coming up.”

How successful do you feel MWR is in fulfilling its mission to sailors at NASKW? Do you feel that MWR successfully reaches all types of sailors (young/old, male/female, etc.)?

“The Liberty program obviously doesn’t reach everyone, but from talking with certain sailors, the ones that come, they say that what we’re doing is good and they really enjoy it, but it’s just hard to compete with a town that’s so *happenin’*. It’s hard to compete with Key West. I feel like we’re in the process of trying to figure out how to bring people in and I feel like this summer has been a lot of experimenting. As far as other sailors...I think there’s plenty of recreation for them. They’re all into the sports and stuff and all the intramurals and captain’s cup stuff...and I wish the girls would be more involved in things because Liberty’s not just for guys.”

Do you feel there is anything preventing military and their families from taking advantage of what MWR offers, maybe specific to Key West?

“Some of it I feel like they just don’t even know about, even though there’s flyers and stuff up. We get a lot of people who say ‘well I didn’t hear about it.’

I say we have flyers up and there’s a calendar and Cellit texts and posts on Facebook, but they haven’t heard about it. But whenever there’s a family event I feel like we have a lot of participation. But as far as Liberty events I feel like it’s a lack of knowing, or they’re just too lazy.”

Is there anything you feel should be a part of MWR here that is not currently available?

“I think there should be more staff for sure, because I feel like three individuals are carrying the world of MWR on their shoulders. I feel like there just needs to be a person who just goes everyday and talks to people and tells people what is going on, or I don’t know, not the same person...you could switch it up or something, but some marketing strategy that will get people hooked. Once people do a couple events and they’re like ‘oh that was so much fun’ and they start talking it up and they will get bigger and bigger. But it’s hard because you can’t really do an email to the whole base, you know, because people are transferring all the time.”