

# Menu of Initiatives

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## Introduction

When implementing initiatives that assist military service members, veterans, their families, and the families of our fallen, every need and opportunity needs to be looked at in a continuum. Therefore, every need and opportunity should be addressed in a holistic approach of education, meaningful employment, and access to well-being programs. The key to a holistic approach is to educate and inspire to action the more than 93 percent of Americans who have never been affiliated with the military, transforming the United States from a war-illiterate nation to one populated by citizens who understand the effects that war and the return home has on the service members, veterans and their families. The continuum of suggested actions is based on consideration of the whole military community which is comprised of more than those who have put on the uniform in service to our country. The community consists of:

- Veterans - individuals who have served in any branch of the U.S. Armed Forces in the Active, Reserve, or National Guard component, and in any period of war or peacetime
- Service members - individuals who currently serve in any branch of the U.S. Armed Forces in the Active, Reserve, or National Guard component
- Spouses, significant others, children, non-next of kin, and all extended family who form the support network for a veteran or service member

The long-term quality of life for these individuals is based on their ability and needs relative to their full reintegration into the wider community at home, and includes but is by no means limited to the triad of education, meaningful employment, and the ability to access well-being programs. As a recent RAND Study revealed the number one remedy for dealing with the effects of combat when returning home is feeling part of a community, or fitting in. Indeed, a key component in improving veterans' need for education, meaningful employment, and access to well-being programs is a public that is far better educated about veterans' lives than it is at the present time.

Additionally, in a recent survey taken in metropolitan areas, helping veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan proved to be the number one issue that engaged citizens are concerned about when compared to a list of nine other causes, including: helping seniors; healthcare for the less fortunate; protecting animals; providing affordable housing; helping children; environmental issues and advocacy; caring for the homeless; promoting culture and the arts; and medical research. This shows that it is easy to choose concern about veterans from a checklist, but that does not preclude the easy avoidance of even reading anything about them, never mind taking action to help. (Allies in Service, 2011)

This concern results in a desire to assist, known as the Sea of Goodwill. The American people know what the military is, but they don't know who they are, (Caplan, 2011, *When Johnny and Jane Come Marching Home: How All of Us Can Help Veterans*) and too often, they believe mistakenly that there is nothing they can do because they may think that veterans' anguish constitutes a mental illness with which ordinary citizens are not equipped to deal in any way. Thus, they avoid connections with veterans. That being said, the top specific issues taken from the same survey that people are concerned about regarding veterans are: providing medical care; providing mental health services; helping veterans find jobs; helping veterans find affordable housing.

These concerns address the concept of giving by the American people. Based on recent studies, the top three reasons people cited for giving are: the reputation of the organization; belief in the mission; and personal experience with the cause. These points of concern by the American people and their desire to give, lend itself to an understanding of how organizations and communities sustain the Groundswell of Support. The point is that Americans want to help; the fact that they just don't know how to help is the catalyst for a menu of initiatives that can be used to address individual needs to improve quality of life for those who have given so much. The need is to understand just who these men and women are who have served our country, and to ask the questions, when, where and how we can help them. The answer to "When?" is "always," the answer to "Where?" is "everywhere," and this menu, in part, is the answer to "How?"

## **Menu of Initiatives**

The menu of initiatives is not an all-inclusive list, but rather a point of departure to generate dialogue and more ideas.

These ideas are focused on promoting services through action, not words. Using the whole of society, advocates and mentors can draw on the myriad of support that exists and that needs to be increased but can only be synchronized within communities. Using this document in a community-based, partner-centric approach, it can become a resource for relevant advice and consultation, and a recognized catalyst for change by, first and foremost, our veterans along with those who benefitted from their sacrifice and now share a community.

### ***Partnership/Collaborative***

Fundamental to all community action is the need for civilians in the communities where veterans live to listen to veterans stories, thus increasing the civilians' understanding and impelling personal, emotional connections that convert the wish to "help veterans" into a drive to act.

Also fundamental to increasing community care and action is the depathologizing of the effects of war and homecoming experiences. The public and veterans must be taught that to be anguished, conflicted, or otherwise upset is a deeply human reaction and should not be immediately labeled a mental illness. To classify such emotional pain as mental disorder is both inaccurate and an addition to the already heavy burdens veterans carry. Furthermore, using this medical model of suffering does not lead to real help for veterans who want to heal. Depathologizing helps everyone understand what veterans and civilians have in common, and should involve not only the dropping of the “D” for “Disorder,” but also the cessation of the automatic use of even “PTS” for “Post-traumatic Stress,” because that does not include any word for “war” and thus distances civilians even farther from veterans’ experiences. Terms such as those suggested in the VA’s *Iraq War Clinician’s Guide* and elsewhere, such as “war trauma” or the term from the Civil War, “soldier’s heart,” are easily understood by civilians and make it easier for them to relate to what veterans have been through. They make it clear that the upset many veterans feel is a deeply human response, not a bizarre reaction.

- Reaching out to the veterans, their families, and the families of the fallen
  - Building public awareness through guerilla marketing campaigns that create a buzz
  - Sharing information among community-based organizations
  - Collaborating with universities, colleges, and local affinity groups
  - Creating and promoting Public service announcements that run late at night or early morning on local and national popular television stations (SPIKE, ESPN, MTV, VH1, CMTV, etc.)
  - Sharing information with local athletic and recreation facilities and programs
  - Identifying veterans, military families, and families of the fallen within the myriad of local support departments/agencies: philanthropy, non-profits, the faith-based community, educators, employers, and health care providers
- Establishing a community action team to encourage local involvement and promote community-based services
  - Convening and coordinating a meeting with local organizations (for profit and non-profit), Department and Agency representatives, faith-based groups, and education institutions in order to discuss services and resources, as well as models for better partnership
  - Integrating an existing resource directory with a comprehensive list of local support services and activities
  - Planning a “Summit” to inspire, educate, and connect service providers, community leaders, and funders
  - Optimizing available public and private resources through state and community-wide coordination

- Sharing “Do It Yourself” Toolkits from successful models to promote community services
- Organizing volunteers to assist community-based services
- Developing a strategy to engage funding partners
  - Encouraging community foundations to be inclusive of those who have served
  - Informing donors of veterans’ and their loved ones’ needs to encouraging philanthropic organizations to be active participants
  - Maintaining a veterans-focused fund
- Educating and informing the public about issues facing veterans and their family members, and the impact this particular population has in the community
  - Conducting a study of veterans within the community
  - Offering several training modules to professional organizations and businesses throughout communities
  - Integrating a social network where veterans who do not (or do) feel ready to tell their stories in person can post their written stories, fragments of their stories, poems, or thoughts either with their names and contact information or anonymously
  - Organizing a veterans oral history project
  - Advancing awareness and laws that better serve veterans with disability
  - Ensuring deployment separation does not determine child custody
  - Implementing institutional policies within each organization addressing integration and friendships, including participation in spiritual/ faith-based organizations, protocols, ceremonies, social services, schools, and so on
  - Informing veterans of service opportunities for altruism and the selfless concern for the welfare of others given their motivation to help without reward
  - Providing resources and support for anyone who has suffered the loss of a military loved one, regardless of the relationship to the deceased or the circumstance of the death
  - Promoting emotional healing effects of simple listening sessions between veterans and civilians

### ***Well-Being***

The importance of the depathologizing, referred to earlier, should be strongly emphasized again here. Through official military and mental health organizations and professionals, public education – including public service announcements, brochures, community meetings, etc. – should be undertaken to help bring about the change from the default assumption that all anguished veterans are mentally ill to the normalizing of many such reactions. One powerful way to do this is through the one-on-one, veteran-civilian listening sessions that require only a few minutes of preparation for the listener, for nothing technical or elaborate is required. We used to call it friendship. We used to call it human connection. It

has been the casting of all suffering as mental illness that has made most people believe mistakenly that perhaps, there is no way they can help.

- Encouraging community outreach to provide information and options for those in need
  - Seeking opportunities to educate the public about deployment- and combat-related stress and traumatic brain injury
  - Collaborating with other organizations to overcome any barriers to connecting veterans and their families with the right services
  - Reduce the stigma associated with deployment- and combat-related stress both locally and nationally through information and encouragement
  - Encouraging healthcare providers to accept the TRICARE Uniform Healthcare Program
  - Filling gaps in mental health care for veterans by including medical centers and clinics in communities
  - Increasing onsite behavioral health support as part of existing athletic and recreation programs and facilities
  - Reaching out to rural and isolated areas through mobile service centers and in-home visits
  - Educating and encouraging counselors to treat military sexual trauma survivors
  - Promoting discounted or pro-bono legal services that can assist veterans with submitting VA claims and benefits
- Increasing veteran enrollment into the Department of Veteran Affairs
  - Outreaching to veterans through universities, colleges, student veteran organizations and veteran resource centers
  - Assisting veterans through the enrollment process
  - Promoting awareness of local Vet Centers within communities
  - Collaborating with local Veteran Service Officers
- Assisting with behavioral health support – war trauma, depression, behavior modification regarding the use of alcohol, prescription drugs, nonprescription drugs, dealing with the effects of sexual trauma, and providing marriage enrichment
  - Providing peer-to-peer workshops and networks
  - Promoting existing community-based services through web-portals, public service announcements, etc.
  - Increasing awareness through non-traditional media outlets such as airline media, professional sports, social media, etc.
  - Helping veterans with follow-up and accountability through a mentorship program with community leaders
  - Building upon existing research in the area of war trauma, moral anguish, existential or spiritual crises, TBI, etc.
- Providing a “no wrong door” approach

- Creating awareness and referral pathways to community health service providers
- Increasing resources to physical therapy and rehabilitation programs
- Integrating non-traditional alternatives such as athletics and recreations
- Establishing peer-to-peer, mentorship, and protégé programs
- Augmenting treatment through healthy, active lifestyle programs that incorporate teamwork
- Incorporating the family as part of the healing and transition process
- Assimilating faith-based organizations and local non-profits that provide opportunities for altruism
- Helping medical centers in communities, including family clinics, fill the gap in mental health care by providing family-focused, compassionate, and comprehensive outreach, screening, treatment, and follow-up for mental health. \*These approaches may not be considered the first-line, but rather one option after connections with non-therapist civilians have been established
- Educate the public and veterans about non-pathologizing, low-risk approaches to helping veterans heal emotionally
- Encouraging community health providers and medical centers provide pro-bono services to veterans in transition without healthcare benefits
- Supporting Paralympics events
- Encouraging marriage enrichment programs to assist families during transition and post-war behavioral health issues
- Enable organizations that host family retreats
- Encouraging local, state, and federal organizations to acknowledge, treat, and compensate for environmental injuries of war (burn pits, toxic exposure, etc.)
  - Raising public awareness of environmental injuries of war such as burn pits, toxic exposure, etc.
  - Registering veterans exposed to environmental injuries
  - Building awareness on the symptoms of environmental injuries that encourage veterans to ask for help
  - Promoting research and studies to drive awareness and influence future programs to assist environmental injury victims
- Increasing access to quality, affordable childcare
  - Providing philanthropic support or reducing costs for those in transition by providing military in transition discounts
  - Helping with local tax incentives or subsidies
  - Encouraging existing childcare programs to provide a sliding fee schedule during a veteran's transition



## ***Employment***

- Encouraging businesses to focus on recruiting, integrating, training and retaining
  - Creating job opportunities through personalized employment training and corporate engagement
  - Educating business leaders and human resource managers in workplaces on the needs and benefits available to veterans and families that improves their quality of life and retention through forums including webinars, seminars, and avatar training
  - Partnering with veteran employment assistance programs to assist in recruitment
  - Establishing a cadre of mentors from the organization's leadership to assist veterans with transition into the new workplace as role models and counselors
  - Initiating a veteran workplace support group that can assist each other and educate the business leadership on the military
  - Offering childcare services in order to ease transition
  - Building public awareness of military service competencies and values
- Recognizing military experience and training by translating skills and reducing State licenses and national certifications barriers to civilian occupations
  - Identifying skills and training that can be converted into civilian licenses and certification
  - Waiving fees and expediting transactions of licensing and certification to quickly give veterans the opportunity to be employed
  - Support labor unions that assist veterans in building upon existing skill and provides a job upon completion
- Counseling and helping with application processes
  - Identifying career interests, qualifications and transferable skills of veterans with the needs of hiring companies to fill open jobs through a local collaborative
  - Developing mentor relationships to promote opportunities for job placement and career advancement
  - Integrating veterans into human resource departments, and not the Office of Diversity
  - Counseling veterans on how to translate their skills and fill out an application/resume
  - Educating veterans and their families on what to expect in a new workplace
- Assisting spouses during a service members relocation or separation
  - Waiving fees and expediting transactions of licensing and certification to quickly give spouses the opportunity to be employed
  - Providing spouses preferences to obtain a meaningful job commensurate with their previous job/experience

- Allowing eligibility for unemployment compensation to military spouses because of military duty moves
- Encouraging internship programs to increase opportunities for veterans to find meaningful employment
  - Helping veterans with a paid internship that allows them to sustain their quality of life
- Launching a sustained veteran employment program
  - Enabling homeless programs by providing employment opportunities
  - Creating a homeless voicemail to assist in job search
  - Establishing veteran representation within the Chamber of Commerce to provide feedback to businesses in recruiting and retaining veterans and their families
  - Encouraging businesses/corporations and trades to train low-income veterans as technicians and specialists
  - Communicating and collaborating with the community economic development agency
- Helping veterans pursue business ownership
  - Maximizing availability, applicability, and usability of Small Business Association loans for veterans, their families, and families of the fallen
  - Assisting new small-business owners with programs that increases veteran opportunities to sustain and grow job opportunities such as entrepreneurship boot camps
  - Providing successful entrepreneurs to mentor veteran small business owners to assist in start-up
  - Helping veteran-owned small businesses by providing small business loans, jobs and advisory services
- Caring for the caregivers
  - Expanding employer compensation/leave for caregivers during times of need
  - Providing preferences for employing caregivers that have a break in employment history due to being a caregiver
- Recognizing the families of the fallen and wounded (FoF/W)
  - Educating the employers on the needs of our FoF/W

### ***Education***

- Encouraging academic institutions to assist veterans in finding the right school
  - Educating the counselors and faculty to understand the needs of the veterans and their values, skills, and experience
  - Developing a counseling program focused on matching the veteran to the appropriate academic institution or trade school
- Identifying and making veterans aware of veteran coordinators, veteran resource centers, and veteran support groups on campuses

- Developing a list of veterans by asking “who has served?,” and connecting them to veteran programs and mentors during orientation
- Enabling the establishment of veteran support groups by assisting with space and resources
- Establishing Veteran Resource Centers at all colleges and universities
- Allowing veterans and their families, regardless of their home of record, to attend schools at the in-state tuition rate
- Minimizing school disruption for military children during transition and deployment
  - Adopting the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children
  - Making graduation requirements more in concert across the nation so that military children are able to transfer easily during frequent moves without falling behind
  - Waiving fees and expenses accrued during the enrollment process
- Increasing veteran educational attainment rate
  - Offering childcare services for student veterans while attending school
  - Assisting working student veterans to balance work and school
  - Establishing a cadre of mentors from the faculty that can assist in veteran transition and assistance
  - Encouraging successfully transitioned veterans to connect with transitioning veterans as part of a peer-to-peer program
- Increasing financial assistance that fills the gaps not covered by the Post 9-11 GI Bill
  - Providing easy access to low-interest rate student loans
  - Assisting veterans in applying for financial aid such as Yellow Ribbon Program, FAFSA, state veteran educational benefits, etc.
  - Encouraging scholarship boards to recognize the experience of the veterans during their review process
- Recognizing the military skills and experience of our veterans
  - Translating military training as academic credits
- Recognizing the families of the fallen and wounded
  - Establishing scholarships
  - Providing lower student rate loans
  - Educating the educators on the needs

### ***Transition***

- Improving the financial health of veterans
  - Providing seminars, webinars, web portals, etc., that educate veterans on budgeting, saving, investing, paying bills, etc.
  - Improving veteran credit scores after completion of credit counseling in order to expand opportunities to borrow money
  - Offering lower-rate loans to veterans that have completed financial education and credit counseling

- Promoting consumer protections and enforcement of the predatory lending regulations through state and national legislation
- Decreasing number of veterans in jail due to behavioral issues
  - Establishing veteran treatment courts that connects veterans to programs that heals their wounds from war
  - Partnering with the local law enforcement agencies that can intercept veterans who committed minor infractions before going through the whole judicial process and providing them behavioral assistance
- Increasing access to legal assistance to help with transition
  - Increasing access to legal services through urban justice centers; city bar justice centers, local law schools, and similar agencies providing free legal services to veterans and families
  - Developing web-portals providing legal knowledge, forms, videos, etc., that veterans will need when transitioning back to society
- Assisting with community based online technology to help veterans screen for and enroll in multiple VA benefits.
- Helping in the adoption of faith-based beliefs and values as a form of positive coping, receiving support that draws upon those beliefs and values, and also as a form of belongingness through participation in spiritual/faith-based organizations, protocols, ceremonies, etc.
- Creating an environment of positive thinking. Information processing, applying knowledge, and changing preferences through restructuring, positive reframing, making sense out of a situation, flexibility, reappraisal, refocusing, having positive outcome expectations, a positive outlook, and psychological preparation
- Assisting in the development of emotional bonding among family members, including shared recreation and leisure time
- Developing communication opportunities that increase the exchange of thoughts, opinions, or information, including problem-solving and relationship management

### ***Housing/Basic Needs***

- Identifying homeless veterans within the community and connecting them to assistance
  - Reaching out to homeless veterans at shelters, soup kitchens, jails, bridges, and through homeless outreach programs
  - Encouraging comprehensive housing solutions that incorporate on-site vocational rehabilitation, behavioral health support, and behavior modification programs
- Providing temporary or transient apartment housing leading to a comprehensive approach for long-term stable housing
  - Outreaching to homeless veterans at shelters, streets, and connecting with philanthropic organizations that provide temporary or transient housing

- Increasing local support providing housing and transitional work for homeless veterans who have histories of addiction and incarceration
- Enabling homeless assistance programs
  - Linking the homeless to vocational rehabilitation, behavioral health support, education, credentialing and licensing, etc., to provide the assistance and “hand-up” for employment, healthcare, and education
  - Enabling homeless assistance centers with transportation for veterans to go to critical VA or community health services
  - Encouraging local volunteers to mentor transitioning homeless veterans with follow-up and encouragement
- Streamlining pathways to independent living for home ownership or leasing
  - Educating realtors, banks, and inspectors of the needs and benefits of veterans
  - Creating housing initiatives for formerly homeless veterans, helping them maintain sobriety, obtain jobs, and reunite with their families
  - Counseling veterans on the decision for home ownership or leasing a home
  - Establishing rapid re-housing opportunities to minimize gaps for homelessness of families
  - Establishing referral programs that increase veteran access to housing initiatives that leverage government and philanthropic programs
  - Increasing long-term veteran home ownership through education of finance and maintenance of a home
- Subsidizing living expenses to assist in transition such as property tax, moving expenses, waiving fees, including waiving property taxes for wounded, ill, and injured
- Encouraging adaptive housing programs within communities, to include schools, that accommodate the wounded, ill, and injured
- Educating mortgage companies and banks so they do not foreclose on homes of deployed service members
  - Erring on the side of the veteran, rather than the institution
  - Lowering interest rates for service members who are deployed

### ***Awareness***

- Creating appreciation days such as National Appreciation Day, Military Spouse Appreciation, Military Child Appreciation, Wounded Warrior Appreciation, and Veterans Appreciation to reinforce to the community that there are still men/women and families serving and deployed, as well as those who are returning in order to sustain the Groundswell of Support
  - Enabling organizations and assisting them to have parades
  - Showcasing the strength and resilience of our families
- Encouraging service campaigns that showcase veterans values as leaders of national service
  - Showcasing the values of veterans to defeat stigma

- Creating a “Did You Know?” Campaign informing and influencing the public to assist veterans
- Building awareness through public service announcements
  - Targeting captive audiences such as airline passengers, sporting event participants, etc.
  - Creating a “Did You Know?” Campaign informing and influencing the public to assist veterans
  - Focusing on awareness and connecting the veterans to philanthropic organization.

## ***Continuing the Discussion***

The Office of Warrior and Family Support consists of several officers to assist:

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