



## ***From Deployment to Employment***

### **Goodwill's Call to Action on Supporting Military Service Members, Veterans and Their Families**

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The white paper, *From Deployment to Employment*, addresses the myriad and often co-existing challenges faced by veterans, military personnel and their families, particularly post-deployment when the transition to civilian life can be daunting.

It explores a variety of resources offered by Goodwill<sup>®</sup> and other stakeholders that are dedicated to making sure service members' contributions are valued long after their military service ends.

While a variety of supports are already available, there remains a clear need for agencies to improve and increase services for this unique population. Goodwill Industries<sup>®</sup> outlines its recommendations for Goodwill member agencies, other veteran-serving organizations and U.S. policymakers.

#### **This executive summary is divided into the following sections:**

- The Problem
- Goodwill as a Resource
- Existing Legal Protections
- Existing Supports
- Recommendations for Goodwill Member Agencies
- Recommendations for U.S. Policymakers
- Conclusion

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## The Problem

As the United States works to withdraw troops from Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) — two conflicts that represent the longest-running military engagements in U.S. history — the need for a continuum of coordinated services for military service members, veterans and their families is at an all-time high.

On bumper stickers and signage across the country, the familiar phrase “Support Our Troops” is a call to action for individual Americans as well as the federal government and those organizations that provide services to veterans and active duty military.

In 2010, more than 20 million men and women in the United States over the age of 18 were veterans. This population is particularly vulnerable to a variety of challenges that keep them from fully participating in the civilian workforce and providing for themselves and their families. These challenges include physical disabilities such as traumatic brain injury, psychological disabilities such as post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, homelessness, long waits for benefits and other supports, lack of access to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities and declining federal dollars set aside for those supports.

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### Special Needs of Homeless Veterans

Homelessness among veterans is all too common. These individuals face a variety of challenges that may lead to homelessness: physical disabilities, mental illness, substance abuse disorders and skill sets that do not readily transfer to the civilian labor market. The difficulties of managing one or more of these issues can become so overwhelming that individuals literally lose the walls around them. Veteran homelessness is often the result of problems that an individual cannot resolve without assistance. Currently, one of the highest-rated unmet needs among veterans in every region of the country is access to safe, affordable housing. Since limited public assistance resources are available, access to public housing is usually subject to a priority system that favors single parents with dependent children, the elderly and persons with disabilities, over veterans without an obvious substance abuse condition, mental illness or other disability.



In addition, military spouses and families face challenges of their own. Managing their households and caring for their children are major stressors for them. Because military families tend to move more frequently than non-military families, they may find it difficult to pursue long-term employment and career-advancing opportunities.



#### Special Needs of Military Families

Past or present military service can affect family dynamics, generating feelings of resentment, abandonment, loneliness, depression and anger. Because military families tend to move frequently, spouses may find it difficult to pursue long-term employment and career-advancing opportunities. Professional licenses or certificates obtained in one state are often not recognized in other states, limiting job opportunities. Meanwhile, military children must cope with the stress of changing schools and making new friends with each relocation. When one or both of their parents are deployed, children face long parental absences and the fear that their parent(s) may be wounded or killed. More dedicated resources, such as youth or teen centers and enhanced partnerships with national youth-serving organizations, would be help meet the needs of older youth and teens during deployment.”

A stubbornly bleak job market translates to high unemployment for veterans — especially those ages 18–24, who face an unemployment rate of 20.9 percent, which is more than twice the national average.

Studies show that recently separated service members have more difficulty finding civilian jobs within the first two years after separation when compared to their peers with the same educational attainment and demographic characteristics. They are also more likely to earn lower wages, especially among those who are college educated.<sup>1</sup> Mechanisms are needed to translate skills obtained during military service into certification and/or college credit to make veterans more job-ready.

<sup>1</sup> Employment Histories Report (Final Compilation Report). Prepared for U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs by Abt Associates. March 24, 2008. Accessed October 7, 2009, from

For veterans with service-related disabilities, the job outlook is even worse. Despite advances made since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), employment of people with significant disabilities has declined over the past decade. In April 2011, this population's unemployment rate was 15.6 percent, compared with 8.9 percent for those without disabilities.<sup>2</sup>

#### Special Needs of Veterans with Disabilities

Individuals often suffer service-connected injuries or illnesses that can deteriorate over their lifetimes and have a range of long-term implications, including unemployment. Many people with disabilities have the skills needed to qualify for employment opportunities and advance in their careers. While many veterans are guaranteed VA benefits because they acquired their disabilities while serving in the military, others acquire their disabilities outside of military service and therefore may not be eligible for VA benefits. A number of challenges create work disincentives or limit employment opportunities for veterans with disabilities. Unless these challenges are addressed, many veterans will be prevented from reintegrating into the workforce and contributing to their communities.



**A stubbornly bleak job market translates to high unemployment for veterans, especially those with disabilities.**

**The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that among veterans who served OEF and OIF, about one in four (530,000) reported having a service-connected disability in July 2010, compared with about 13 percent of all veterans.**

Existing supports and infrastructure are ill-equipped to provide adequate resources that many returning service members may need and have earned. For example, the sheer number of pending VA compensation claims has increased by more than 65 percent (from 207,000 in 1999 to 343,000 in 2008), and it takes an average of 123 days to process a claim. Concern over the national debt and deficit will likely deter policymakers from allocating further federal dollars for veteran support. Although additional investments are needed, they are not a panacea nor can they be expected when federal spending is being scrutinized.

A range of stakeholders including federal agencies, veterans' service organizations and community-based organizations like Goodwill already work to support not only veterans but active-duty service members and their families as they seek jobs and other resources that lead to successful futures.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Economic News Release. Table A-6. Employment status of the civilian population by sex, age and disability status, not seasonally adjusted. Accessed April 21, 2011, from [www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.t06.htm](http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.t06.htm).

Goodwill Industries International is calling upon its 158 member agencies in the United States, as well as U.S. policymakers and other veteran-serving organizations, to work toward a continuum of coordinated services that more deliberately promotes collaboration and integration among all stakeholders.

A more coordinated system of services would:

- Be easy for service members, veterans and family members to access, understand and navigate.
- Ensure collaboration and information sharing between the VA, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD), the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) and other federal agencies.
- Facilitate collaboration between veterans' service organizations and community-based organizations to leverage local resources and supports.

#### **Special Needs of Veterans with Criminal Histories**

With a new wave of service members returning home after experiencing combat, history tells us to prepare for an increase in the number of veterans in the criminal justice system. For example, 34 percent of new admissions into 11 U.S. prisons between 1946 and 1949 were World War II combat veterans. Although veterans who are incarcerated tend to be better educated than their civilian counterparts, states have many so-called "collateral consequences" laws that prevent people with criminal records — particularly those whose crimes are drug related, violent or sexual in nature — from working in many jobs or accessing public supports. As a result, veterans who re-enter their communities after serving time in prison are affected by the collateral consequences of their crimes. For more information about Goodwill Industries International's positions on the challenges faced by people with criminal backgrounds, see *The Road to Reintegration: Ensuring Successful Community Re-Entry for People Who Are Former Offenders*.



## Goodwill as a Resource

Goodwill is a long-time advocate for and provider of services to veterans. In 2010, Goodwill provided job training, employment services and other supports to more than 2.4 million people,<sup>3</sup> including 25,766 veterans. Of that number, 4,449 had documented disabilities, 1,363 of which were service connected. The majority of veterans who seek services from Goodwill served during the Vietnam era, and many are homeless.<sup>4</sup>

While the number of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan requesting Goodwill services is relatively low and is increasing more slowly than expected, Goodwill anticipates more will turn to the nonprofit when commonly accessed veteran services and resources are stretched thin.



Because Goodwill is a business enterprise, the organization is often able to employ many of the people who turn to it for help. In fact, of the 98,000 people employed at Goodwill in 2010, more than 23,000 were people who came to Goodwill for help and were placed in jobs within Goodwill. An additional 140,669 individuals were placed in jobs in their communities.<sup>5</sup>

Many of those who approach Goodwill for employment help need additional supportive services — such as child care, reliable transportation, stable housing, counseling, workplace adjustments and assistive technology — to ensure their success. Goodwill has made a national commitment to provide face-to-face career and family strengthening services to more than 15,000 military spouses, veterans and their families by December 31, 2011. In addition, the social service enterprise will expand virtual career services, linked from military websites, to tens of thousands more people.

**More returning service members will likely turn to Goodwill when commonly accessed veteran services and resources are stretched thin.**

<sup>3</sup> Annual Statistical Report, 2010. Goodwill Industries International, Inc. Rockville, MD. June 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Annual Statistical Report, 2008. Goodwill Industries International, Inc. Rockville, MD. June 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Annual Statistical Report, 2010. Goodwill Industries International, Inc. Rockville, MD. June 2011.

## My Story: Ashley Call



I joined the Army National Guard in June 2006 while attending high school. After graduation, I worked various low-paying jobs until I was called to active duty. I was deployed to Iraq from 2009 to 2010, working as an emergency medic at a camp 20 miles south of Baghdad.

After completing my tour of duty, I returned to Virginia, where I began looking for suitable employment while maintaining my status in the Army National Guard. Unable to find employment, I signed up for unemployment with the VA Employment Commission. I found myself in a position of being a live-in housekeeper. It was not a good living arrangement.

Even though I had experience as an emergency medic, no one would offer me employment because I didn't have a civilian certificate.

During a visit to the VA Employment Commission, I discussed my situation with my counselor. She informed me about the dislocated workers program operated by Goodwill Industries of the Valleys.

I enrolled in medical assisting training that taught me to work in a doctors' office, provide assistance during patient examinations, keep patient and related electronic health records information, and perform clinical, administrative and laboratory duties.

The opportunity provided to me by Goodwill will enable me to work in a field I find exciting and rewarding.

While some of the challenges faced by veterans are unique to their experiences, many disadvantaging conditions — from homelessness and poverty to severe physical disabilities — are obstacles that Goodwill has helped millions of individuals overcome for more than a century. In response to a call to action from First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden, Goodwill Industries International was one of the first organizations to respond, launching a new initiative: Goodwill for America's Heroes and Their Families. The program aims to expand Goodwill's job training, placement and employment services to thousands of American veterans, as well as their spouses and families.

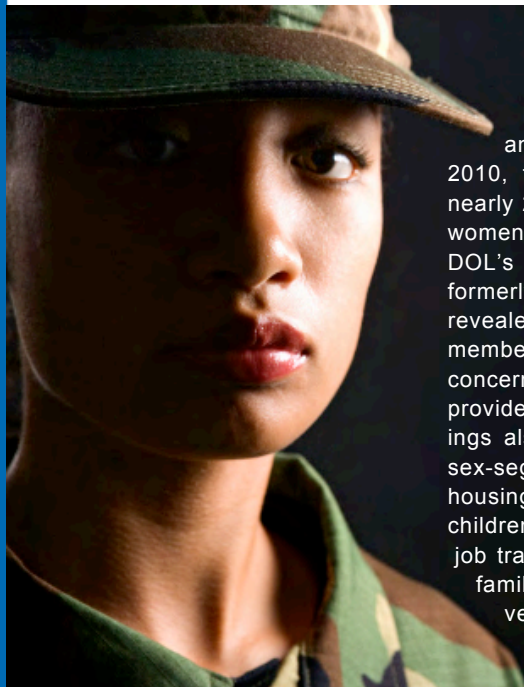
## *Existing Legal Protections for Transitioning Service Members and Veterans*

Legal protections and public and private supports have long existed to help transitioning and recently separated service members who may struggle to make the transition from the military to civilian life, including into the workforce.

Several federal agencies administer programs that aim to support military service members, veterans and their families. Some programs seek to prepare separating service members to successfully make the transition to the civilian workforce; others aim to provide services to help these populations find jobs or overcome employment barriers such as disabilities and homelessness. Private stakeholders including veterans' service organizations and community-based organizations also seek to provide a range of services.

### **Special Needs of Female Veterans**

More women are veterans today than in any other time in our nation's history. As of 2010, the veteran population was estimated at nearly 22 million, and 1.8 million (8 percent) were women. In 2009, listening sessions between the DOL's Women's Bureau, service providers, and formerly and currently homeless female veterans revealed a number of reasons that female service members don't seek help. The women expressed concern that the level and types of assistance provided to men and women weren't equal. Findings also suggest that programs should include: sex-segregated residential centers; child care, housing and programs for female veterans with children; career counseling, skills assessment, job training and placement assistance; personal, family and financial counseling; and women veterans resource professionals.



The tapestry of existing protections, supports, and stakeholders is complex and can be difficult to navigate for individuals who seek benefits, organizations that provide services, and advocates and policymakers.

The following list is a snapshot of existing protections and supports. Details about these programs can be found in the full white paper, *From Deployment to Employment: Goodwill's Call to Action on Supporting Military Service Members, Veterans and Their Families*. The complete listing in the paper is intended to inform readers about the protections and supports that exist as well as to demonstrate the complexity of the system.

- **The Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 (USERRA)**
- **Titles I and II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**
- **Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act**
- **The Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974 (VEVRA)**
- **The Jobs for Veterans Act of 2002 (JVA)**

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### Veterans and Unemployment

BLS data suggests that younger veterans, those who are between 18 and 24 years old, may be less prepared to make the transition. Without services in place to support veterans — particularly those who are younger — the path to employment and adaptation back into a civilian life is often very difficult. Employers' perceptions of veterans may also affect the population's employment prospects. For example, some employers may be reluctant to hire veterans due to concerns that they may have returned from OEF/OIF with a physical or mental condition that could complicate their employment. Research also suggests that some employers have not hired recently returned service members because those they interviewed did not seem prepared for the jobs being offered in the civilian labor market. In addition, many of these individuals are returning home to find that their jobs have been eliminated due to downsizing. Media reports also suggest that some employers may be reluctant to hire members of the Military Reserves or the National Guard due to concerns that their units could soon be called to active duty and deployed with little notice to the employer.



## ***Supports for Transitioning Service Members and Veterans***

Numerous private and public supports exist for military service members, veterans and their families. While other supports are available in addition to those listed in this section, stakeholders are likely to heavily use those featured here. Please refer to the full paper for additional information on each support.



- **The Transition Assistance Program (TAP)**
- **The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)**
  - National Cemetery Administration (NCA)
  - Veterans Health Administration (VHA)
  - Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)
    - *Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) VetSuccess*
    - *Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA)*
    - *VA's Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program*
- **The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD)**
  - TurboTAP
  - Licensure and Certification Assistance
  - Operation Warfighter (OWF)
  - The Veterans Employment Initiative (VEI)
  - Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education Support (DANTES)
  - Military Spouse Employment Partnership
  - TRICARE
- **The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL)**
  - Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program
  - The Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP)
  - The Veterans Workforce Investment Program (VWIP)
  - The Recovery and Employment Assistance Lifelines (REALifelines)
- **The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)**
  - The HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program
- **The U.S. Department of Education**
  - Vocational rehabilitation, administered by the RSA, is available to all people with disabilities, including veterans.
- **The United Services Military Apprenticeship Program**
- **The AbilityOne Program**
- **Social Security Work Incentives Programs**
- **The Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC)**

- **Veterans' Service Organizations (VSOs)**
- **Hiring Preferences for Federal Employment**
- **The National Resource Directory (NRD)**
- **Yellow Ribbon GI Education Enhancement Program**
- **Credit for Life Experience Programs**
- **Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC)**

### **Veterans and Mental Health Issues and Substance Abuse**

Veterans from all eras have sustained often long-lasting psychological effects as a result of strain and trauma endured while serving. Once veterans return home, although they are physically away from the traumatic events, they have recurring memories of their experience. Without substance abuse treatment and/or mental health services, people who have mental health disorders and substance abuse problems are at an increased risk of overdose, homelessness or incarceration. In addition, their chances of finding jobs and advancing in careers are compromised.

#### ***Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)***

According to the VA, 20 percent of newly returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan are diagnosed with PTSD. Both PTSD and TBI have become the signature injuries of the recent conflicts. Given that the symptoms of severe trauma put the individual at risk for aggression, hyper-vigilance and mood swings, these invisible and complex injuries not only affect military service members and veterans themselves, but their parents, spouses, children and friendships. Brain injuries clearly act as a barrier to a successful transition into the community, primarily because they may be undetected and the individuals may be unable

to pinpoint why they have difficulty at home or work.

The result of this strain manifests in a variety of negative coping behaviors, including substance abuse, anger and aggression, domestic violence, child abuse and suicide.

#### ***Substance Abuse***

According to VA estimates, 19 percent of returning service members from Iraq and Afghanistan are known to have substance abuse disorders. Faced with fear, stress, loneliness, separation from their families and PTSD, service members and veterans often use drugs (most commonly alcohol) to cope. The DOD finds that the misuse of prescription drugs has increased from 2 percent in 2002 to 11 percent in 2008. While the percentage of service members who report using prescription drugs is twice that of civilians, the problem appears to be more serious among women service members who report using prescription drugs compared to civilian women.



**“I cannot explain in words what it feels like to be deployed,” says Nicholas Riggins, vocational evaluator for Goodwill Industries of the Southern Piedmont (Charlotte, NC), who is a veteran himself. “When you return, you need to find a level of service that is equal to or better than what you had in the military.”**

## ***Recommendations for Goodwill Agencies***

- Learn more about the challenges that face military service members, veterans and their families.
- Be prepared to help veterans translate military terms into language that civilian employers value and understand.
- Consider designing programs that meet the specific needs of military service members, veterans and families in local communities.
- Make hiring veterans and military spouses a priority.
- Hire veterans to staff programs that serve veterans.
- Prepare to self-fund services for military service members, veterans and family members.
- Reach out to local military personnel, veterans’ service organizations and other community stakeholders to inquire about how they think Goodwill could help them overcome difficult challenges, and be open to unexpected responses.
- Be prepared to leverage partnerships with stakeholders that provide supportive services beyond employment.
- Educate stakeholders about legal employment protections for veterans and military family members.
- Whenever possible, provide services to female veterans in settings that aren’t in close proximity to facilities where male veterans are served.
- Develop the capacity to reach out to service members who will soon leave the military and may return to the local community.
- Proactively target outreach efforts to veterans of OEF and OIF.
- Provide mentoring opportunities and other supports for children of military service members.
- Offer to pick up unwanted items from military families who are being transferred.

## *Recommendations for Policymakers*

- Enact policies that create a more seamless service delivery system for military service members, veterans and their families.
- Give priority to federal grant applications that demonstrate partnership and coordination among local providers and stakeholders, as well as a commitment to continuous improvement.
- Enact policies that increase involvement of and collaboration with community-based organizations that have demonstrated expertise in providing services — such as mentoring and job training — that can help service members, veterans and their families succeed in the workforce.
- Make the workforce system more accessible and convenient for veterans by including provisions in the WIA that would promote the feasible co-location of One-Stop Career Centers in VA medical centers and other facilities that serve veterans.
- Require the DOL and DOD to jointly develop “crosswalks” for transferable skills from military occupational specialties to civilian jobs, and create certifications for skills acquired in the military that can be transferred for college credit or certification.
- Mandate that separating service members participate in the Transitional Assistance Program and that each service member receives an individualized assessment of civilian jobs for which they may qualify.
- Allow those military spouses who have lost attachment to the labor market due to military transfer to be eligible for services for dislocated workers.
- Require the DOD to provide official discharge certificates (Form DD-214) to homeless veterans within three weeks of request.
- Prohibit jails and prisons from releasing individuals without identification, including discharge certificates (Form DD-214), driver’s licenses, government ID cards and social security cards.
- Build and maintain a comprehensive national and state directory of employment programs for veterans and identify their purpose, the services they offer and how to find them.
- Require the VA, DOD and DOL to establish a secure and centralized database that contains information about all services for which veterans are eligible and all services that they have already received.



- For any veteran requesting services, require the VA to assign a case manager who is aware of all services for which the veteran is eligible and all services that individual has already received.
- Require the VA and DOL to collaboratively reach out to veterans to confirm their employment and/or offer services that may help them find jobs or advance in their careers.
- Provide an additional 24 months of vocational rehabilitation and employment services to veterans who have exhausted both these benefits and state-provided unemployment benefits.
- Create additional incentives for the workforce system to deliver services to and achieve positive employment outcomes for populations with disproportionately high unemployment, such as veterans who are younger than 24.

## Conclusion

Although most of the 20.1 million veterans in the United States successfully reintegrated into the civilian workforce, too many have become homeless and have experienced challenges that make it difficult to experience the dignity and power of work. There are currently 2.2 million veterans who served in the U.S. armed forces since September 11, 2001, with another 1.4 million service members still on active duty. These individuals are returning home to a stubbornly bleak job market. Although the national unemployment rate has declined slightly from the peak it reached during the recession, unemployment for the nation's youngest veterans is more than twice the national average at 20.9 percent.

Those who serve in the armed forces and their families make enormous personal sacrifices during and after their service to this nation. Existing supports and infrastructure are ill-equipped to provide all resources that many returning service members may need and have earned. Concern over the national debt and deficit will likely deter policymakers from allocating additional federal dollars for veteran support. Although additional investments are needed, they can't solve all the problems nor can they be expected with declining federal funding.

Goodwill seeks to expand its capacity to collaborate with stake-holders and contribute its resources and expertise to support efforts that help military service members, veterans and their families overcome the challenges they may face as a result of their service.

