With 3,000 returning veterans arriving in Harris County annually, the Houston metro area has the second largest veteran population in the nation. Recognizing the unique challenges faced by returning military personnel of the post-9/11 conflicts, United Way of Greater Houston is leveraging its core competencies to serve our veterans in a meaningful way.
Veterans struggle to successfully transition to civilian life

“I served my country for eight years, and I got out finding I have lost eight years of employment history on my civilian peers.”
– Enlisted veteran

“My husband and I met in the military. We served in different branches. I ended up in Iraq and he stayed state-side. Our experience apart, and me being away, isolated us from everyone else. Most of the time, it’s the guy who went off to war, but in our case, I did.”
– Enlisted veteran

THE NUMBERS

Harris County has the second largest veterans population in the United States

44% of returning veterans say the transition to civilian life has been difficult

48% of post-9/11 veterans say their deployments have had a negative impact on their marriage

37% suffer from Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

THE CHALLENGE

The Greater Houston area is home to more than 300,000 veterans, the second largest veteran population in the United States. More than 20,000 of these servicemen and women are veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, one of the largest populations of post-9/11 conflicts in the country.

Veterans returning home from service often find the transition from a structured military regimen to a less structured civilian life extremely difficult. Many find that the skills which lead to success in the military do not translate to the civilian workforce and are, in some cases, actually barriers to reintegration. They struggle to find employment, navigate the hiring process, and re-engage in careers that give them a sense of purpose.

Many veterans also find it difficult to identify with non-veterans both in and out of the workplace. They report feelings of isolation, and strained relationships with family, friends and colleagues, who have trouble understanding their unique experiences. Often, veterans also carry the burden of service-related injuries and illnesses, and the growing stigma of instability and PTSD-related stereotypes.

Too many veterans returning to civilian life struggle to meet their most basic needs, like housing and health care. Many feel they lack adequate support, find it difficult to ask for help, and have trouble finding and accessing available benefits and resources. Among the challenges that returning military personnel face, there is a common desire to continue to serve their community and each other.

United Way reached out to the large and growing constituency of veterans in our area to assess the challenges they face, identify gaps in services, and determine how to best increase its investments to make a meaningful difference for veterans and their families. As the men and women of our military return from service, United Way of Greater Houston is here to help them return to everyday life.
**UNITED WAY 2012 SURVEY: HIGHLIGHTS**

**Transition** from structured military regimen to less structured civilian life is extremely difficult with inadequate resources available to ease that transition.

**Available services** appear uncoordinated and many find services difficult to access.

**Discharged post-9/11 veterans** feel that service was not valued and experience growing stigma.

**Military personnel** find it difficult to translate their extensive job training and experiences into the skills that employers are looking for today.

**Did you know?** Veterans centers and service providers do not have the capacity to meet the current increase in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom veterans.

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**Survey results:**

**Major challenges facing returning veterans**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finding a job</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-entry into civilian life</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health/PTSD</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial challenges</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic/family challenges</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Survey results:**

**Gaps in veterans services**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-entry to society</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment counseling</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family counseling</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial counseling</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Veterans don’t know where to go to get help**

“When I got out, I had no idea there were other services outside of the VA. I learned through others that several nonprofit groups of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans get together on a regular basis. Had I not sought out this information, I would have never known they existed.”

– Enlisted veteran
UNIVERSAL INVOLVEMENT IN VETERANS SERVICES

With a growing post-9/11 service population that is finding its return to civilian life far more difficult than anticipated, there are distinct opportunities to leverage United Way core competencies and to address some of the challenges in a very meaningful way.

United Way currently invests $3.5 million in services that can help meet the needs identified by veterans, including employment services, assistance with job readiness, financial education, coaching, and counseling. United Way has created an additional $100,000 pooled fund, through a competitive process that was initiated in the first quarter of 2013. Organizations serving veterans are able to apply for specific one-time grants that allow them to better serve the post-9/11 veteran population. Trained volunteers will serve as members of review teams, making recommendations regarding the best proposals to be funded. United Way will continue to work with community partners and veterans organizations to determine additional funding opportunities.

With the results of a multifaceted study in hand, United Way of Greater Houston has identified targeted strategies to respond to the growing needs of military personnel returning to our community. This approach is aligned with our commitment to be a leader and trusted partner in addressing critical needs and making a lasting difference in issues that affect the lives of everyone.

NEXT STEPS: UNITED WAY STRATEGIES

United Way has identified the following strategies for consideration in response to survey findings:

• Education and outreach training for service providers to enhance identification of needs and ensure access to relevant services for returning military personnel.

• Use United Way’s convening expertise and centrally located Community Resource Center to bring veterans’ service groups together on a regular basis for networking, education, and information-and-referral exchanges.

• Continuation of 2-1-1 Texas/United Way HELPLINE military specialists and targeted outreach activities.

• Use of diverse communication strategies to expand the awareness of services available to returning service members.

• Coaching and counseling throughout the job search continuum to encourage persistence, and provide a support system throughout an often tedious process.

• Guidance to employers regarding expectations and capabilities to highlight opportunities, and establish a positive relationship with returning military personnel.

• Reshape and broaden our services to help with job readiness, financial education, coaching and counseling.

Did you know? One in four military families has outstanding loans from predatory lenders that carry interest rates of 400% or higher.