

Written Testimony by Mike Monroe, Vice President for Military Initiatives for Points of Light

U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Call to Action: VA Outreach and Community Partnerships

April 24, 2013

Chairman Sanders, Ranking Member Burr, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Mike Monroe, and I serve as the Vice-President of Military Initiatives at Points of Light. I came to this role in June of last year, after serving the country as both a member of the Marine Corps and as a civilian employee of several government agencies.

On behalf of Michelle Nunn, our CEO and Neil Bush, our Board Chair, I would like to thank the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee for bringing attention to the essential role that community-based organizations play in addressing the challenges faced by the men and women who have served our country in the armed forces. Thank you also for giving Points of Light the opportunity to present the Community Blueprint Initiative to the Committee.

As the Committee is well aware, more than 2.4 million men and women have served in current conflicts. Over the next four years, 1 million service men and women will transition out of the military and back into their communities. Many will face significant challenges returning to civilian life. And many will face tremendous obstacles, including unemployment, behavioral health issues, and homelessness.

There are some 40,000 nonprofits working to help, but too often these efforts are isolated and have low impact. No single organization or agency can provide a lifetime of care and support, but people across the country are asking for guidance on how to help veterans, service members and their families in a coordinated, comprehensive, and community-wide way.

This challenge led to the launch of the Community Blueprint. The initial idea came out of a retreat in 2010 where over 55 nonprofit, government and for-profit entities concluded this problem had to be resolved. From this initial group of 55, a group of 16 leaders stepped forward to help build this new effort, which they called the "Community Blueprint."

Under the leadership of these 16 (known at the 'Blueprint Advisory Council') and with the help of some American Legion Auxiliary VISTA's, the Blueprint was created. The group set out to create tools and resources that would help communities assist veterans, military members and their families at the local level. Once the content was created, the Advisory Council (now at 18

members) wanted the Blueprint to be housed and administered by an organization that had expertise and experience at the community level. After an extensive search, they found a home for it at Points of Light, an international nonprofit founded by President George H. W. Bush and the largest organization in the world dedicated to volunteer service.

This Council, still intact today, created a suite of best practices to help returning veterans in eight critical areas:

Employment

To help veterans find meaningful employment, the Council created the following seven community solutions related to employment:

- Job Fairs – hosting job fairs focused on veterans, reservists, national guardsmen, and their spouses.
- Resume Preparation Workshops – staging resume workshops for veterans and military spouses.
- Mock Interview Workshops – holding mock interview workshops for veterans and military spouses.
- Training: planning *Reverse Boot Camps* designed to introduce veterans and service members to the types of jobs available in their community, including managing their expectations regarding office culture, advancing their careers and aiding in the translation of military experience to civilian terms.
- Inducements for Military-Friendly Employer Practices – educating employers about the unique professional challenges and skills of this population.
- Annual Media Campaign - raising awareness of the benefits of hiring a veteran.
- Community Action Team – forming a Community Action Team focused on employment.

Volunteerism

The following are community solutions for leveraging volunteerism to meet the needs of service members, veterans and their families.

- Effective Volunteer Engagement – providing training for volunteers to serve with and for the military community.
- Implementing a Service Fair – holding a service fair to share the many ways in which volunteers can serve in the area of veterans services.

- Volunteerism Community Action Team - learning how to form a Volunteerism Community Action Team.

Family Strength

The following are community solutions for addressing the challenges of veterans and their families:

- Social Service Outreach – publicizing the formal military outreach efforts by local nonprofits.
- Child Care – providing child care for families during deployment and recovery from wounds.
- Respite for Caregivers and Care Recipients – providing respite care for those who are responsible for the needs of loved one.
- Annual Media Campaign – thanking families for their service and highlighting local and government services.
- Community Action Team – learning how to form a Family Strength Community Action Team.

Behavioral Health

Behavioral health struggles, such as post-traumatic stress (PTS), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), major depressive disorder (MDD) or traumatic brain injuries (TBI), can lead to malaise, unemployment, problematic family relations and – in an increasing number of cases – suicide. To serve our service members and veterans in a manner commensurate with their needs, we must understand and provide for the unique stressors they face on a day-to-day basis.

The following are community solutions for addressing the behavioral health challenges of veterans and their families.

- Annual Anti-Stigma Campaign – encouraging veterans and their families to defy stigmas and seek help.
- Provider Training – training local health providers on special issues such as PTSD/TBI and other veteran issues and resources.
- First Responder Training – training police, fire rescue, school personnel and ERs about issues and resources that affect members of the military community.
- Ease of Access to Care – making it easier for veterans, service members and their families to access mental health care.

- Community Action Team – learning how to form a Behavioral Health Community Action Team.

Financial and Legal

Financial and legal challenges can be a distraction from the mission of current service members and an additional burden to veterans and military families struggling to re-integrate into civilian society. Often when these challenges emerge, many veterans may hesitate to reach out for help, given their training in self-reliance.

The following are community solutions for addressing the financial and legal challenges of veterans and their families:

- Financial and Legal Training – educating the community about common financial/legal issues and available resources.
- Veterans Court – publicizing steps to utilize special court systems that are sensitive to military issues.
- Community Action Team – learning how to form a financial and legal Community Action Team.

Education

Education changes lives in unimaginable ways, and in the modern world nothing is so great a predictor of a person's future employment, salary or standard of living. America's military veterans and children face unique challenges in education. We owe it to them to help them overcome these hurdles and attain the education they need to be successful.

The following are community solutions for addressing challenges related to education and the military community:

K-12 Education

- School Transfers – adopting systems to ensure easy acceptance of transcripts and credits of a relocating military child.
- School Training – training schools to identify military children and inform schools on the pertinent issues and available resources.
- Community Resources – implementing programs that welcome and support military children.

- Annual Media Campaign – celebrating the contributions and sacrifices of the military child.
- Guide to Impact Aid – learning about Impact Aid, a Department of Education program that compensates schools with significant military child attendance.
- Community Action Team – learning how to form a K-12 Education Community Action Team.

Higher Education

- Career Counselor Training – training counselors about special military issues and resources.
- Mentoring – offering mentors to student veterans, service members and their families.
- Scholarships – offering special financial programs for student veterans, service members and their families.
- Campus Welcome and Reintegration – developing and implementing strategies to identify and support military-connected students and families.

Housing

Homelessness in a developed nation is inexcusable, but homelessness among the military community is even more shameful. Veterans have sacrificed for their country, often risking their lives to protect American freedoms.

In the United States, 200,000 veterans will be homeless at some point over the course of a year, with approximately 107,000 veterans homeless each night. Nearly one fifth of the homeless population is veterans, though only 8 percent of the general population can claim veteran status. The following are community solutions for addressing housing stability and homelessness among veterans:

- Homelessness Training – providing shelters, veteran service organizations, nonprofits, and community members with the knowledge required to effectively combat veteran homelessness.
- Supportive Housing Awareness – raising awareness of veteran homelessness and the availability of supportive housing opportunities; raising awareness among housing developers and funders of the importance of supportive housing as a solution to homelessness.

Reintegration

Service members, whether returning from deployment or permanently separating from the military, come home to a time of celebration with family and friends. However, when the excitement wears off, the reality and challenges of reintegration begin.

The following are community solutions for addressing the reintegration challenges of veterans and their families:

- Welcome Program – providing outreach to veterans, service members and their families entering into the community.

- Mentoring Program – establishing a mentoring program for veterans moving into the community.
- Annual Media Campaign – thanking local veterans for their service and highlighting resources.
- Coordination with Yellow Ribbon Program – expanding this DoD Program for supporting reserve and national guard families into outreach to veterans.
- Community Action Team – learning how to form a Reintegration Community Action Team.

This set of tools and practices provides a framework for communities to produce positive, measurable outcomes for veterans, military members and their families. Our goal is to have hundreds of communities (200 by 2014) touching veterans, military and their families through the Blueprint framework.

To do this we are putting some “boots on the ground.” Points of Light’s Veteran Leader Corps is a new AmeriCorps program. The program has 75 members (half of whom are veterans) spread out around in 15 to 20 communities, focusing on employment and volunteerism.

Veterans Leader Corps (VLC) members work out of host sites within communities. These host sites are local nonprofits focusing on veterans’ issues. The first group of VLC members launched in Oct 2012 (30 members in 11 communities). The remaining VLC members (45 in eight additional communities) launched at the end of March 2013. There are now 44 Blueprint Communities.

The building and expansion of the Blueprint is made possible by a grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) as well as funding from ITT Exelis and UPS. Exelis has created the Exelis Action Corps (EAC) to offer their employees opportunities to lead and participate in volunteer service projects that focus on veterans, military members and their families. We are working to ensure that the EAC is integrated with local Blueprint Communities as well as VLC efforts.

At Points of Light, we think the best way for government, the private sector and the nonprofit sector to help the over 1 million transitioning veterans reintegrate into society is to define what works and implement these proven strategies through local cooperation and coordination. We know that no one organization can provide a lifetime of continued support. Points of Light and its partners are working, alongside government agencies, to help fill the gaps and connect veterans to critical services.

Veterans like David Scott, a third-generation Navy veteran who served – and was disabled – in Desert Storm and Operation Deny Flight. On his own, David couldn't get the health care he needed. Thanks to an intervention by the local Red Cross – a part of the Blueprint Community in Atlanta – David finally got an appointment with the VA Clinic in Oakwood, GA, to get help with his long-term care needs.

We also think many veterans want to continue to serve here at home. Retired Chief Petty Officer Robert Rotkosky, a former Navy SEAL, dedicated his career to protecting our way of life. After 20 years of faithful service to our country and a second career as a contractor helping the military, "Ski" (as he is known) had more to give. He chose to support his fellow sailors, marines, soldiers, airmen, and guardians by enlisting in the Veterans Leader Corp in Huntsville, Alabama. "Ski" now works with "Still Serving Veterans" Huntsville, AL, where he and his colleagues have helped 41 veterans find jobs and 100 veterans get proper benefits in just three months.

At Points of Light, we value the commitment that service men and women have given to our country. We believe that helping returning veterans successfully reenter society is not only the right thing to do but the smart thing to do. These veterans have much yet to give and they are hungry for the opportunity to provide for their families and to be of continued service to their communities.

Community Blueprint FAQ

More than 2.4 million men and women have served in current conflicts. Over the next four years, 1 million service men and women will transition out of the military and back into their communities. Many will face significant challenges returning to civilian life. And many will face tremendous obstacles, including unemployment, behavioral health issues, and homelessness. There are some 40,000 nonprofits working to help, but too often these efforts are isolated and have low impact. No single organization or agency can provide a lifetime of care and support, but people across the country are asking for guidance on how to help veterans, service members and their families in a coordinated, comprehensive, and community-wide way.

What is the Community Blueprint?

The Community Blueprint is a set of tools and resources that individuals and community organizations can use to help veterans, service members and their families succeed.

When and how did it start?

The Blueprint got its start at the 2010 White Oak Summit, where representatives from more than 55 nonprofit, corporate and government organizations gathered to discuss the thousands of nonprofits engaged in efforts to help returning veterans – and the problems caused by a complete lack of coordination of their efforts. Those at the summit were determined to create a way for community organizations to work together to offer better, more comprehensive, more accessible services to the hundreds of thousands of veterans returning home. Members of this original group stepped forward and created the Community Blueprint Advisory Council. The Community Blueprint was officially launched in October of 2012.

What issues areas does the Community Blueprint address?

The Advisory Council, still intact today, collected proven best practices to help returning veterans in eight critical areas -- employment, housing, education, reintegration, behavioral health, volunteerism, family strength, and family & legal matters – and made them available for free.

Who is behind the Community Blueprint's public-private partnership?

With the generous support from lead sponsor ITT Exelis, along with UPS and the Corporation for National and Community Service, the Community Blueprint is a strong public-private partnership, bringing on-the-ground organizations and people together, driven by local needs, and using proven tools and resources to make the transition to civilian life easier for tens of thousands of returning veterans.

What is the Veteran Leader Corps (VLC)?

The Community Blueprint engages veterans as part of the solution. With backing from AmeriCorps, the Blueprint has created a Veteran Leader Corps, consisting of 75 members – half of whom are veterans – in 19 Blueprint Communities. These 75 men and women add to our “boots on the ground” as AmeriCorps members who are in the field providing direct service to



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veterans every day. VLC members use Blueprint tools and resources to help veterans and military families in all areas of need, but most specifically in job readiness and volunteerism.

How can Community Blueprint resources help communities solve problems?

Four things make the Community Blueprint uniquely useful, powerful and sustainable: 1) It is a public-private partnership. 2) It can be customized to a community's needs and scaled to fit a community's size. 3) It is completely volunteer powered. 4) It engages veterans as part of the solution.

How many communities are now part of the Community Blueprint and where are they?

There are currently 44 Blueprint Communities (19 of which have VLC members), spread throughout 22 states and Washington, D.C. See below for a full list of sites and a map.

How can an individual get involved with the Community Blueprint?

Anyone can join in this effort by visiting www.the-communityblueprint.org. There is a full list of 'Do It Yourself' tools for individuals interested in supporting local veterans. Small groups of individuals can also choose to become a Pick1 site, implementing one Community Solution listed in the Toolbox.

How can an organization get involved?

To become a Community Blueprint Community, an organization must partner with two other local organizations, agree to implement at least two Community Solutions in one Impact Area, and submit our basic Needs Assessment, New Member Survey and Agreement.

Where can I find more information?

All of our resources and information on how to get involved are available on our website, www.the-communityblueprint.org.

Who can I talk to if I have questions?

For more information, contact Mike Monroe, vice president of military initiatives at Points of Light, mmonroe@pointsoflight.org.

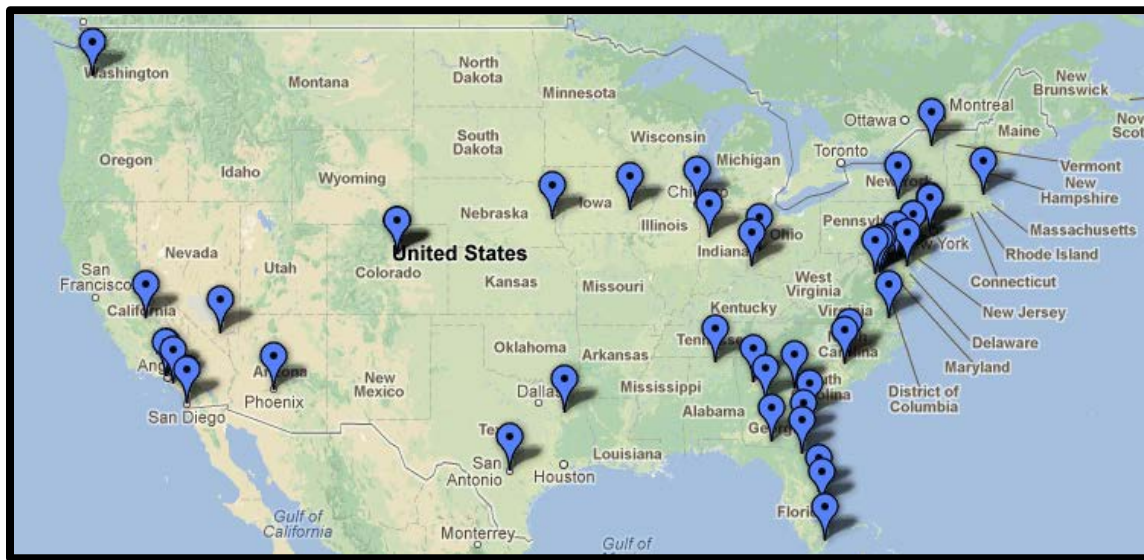
The Community Blueprint is an initiative housed and managed by Points of Light, the largest organization in the world dedicated to volunteer service. Points of Light mobilizes millions of people to take action that is changing the world. Through affiliates in 250 cities and partnerships with thousands of nonprofits and corporations, Points of Light engages 4 million volunteers in 30 million hours of service each year. We bring the power of people to bear where it's needed most. For more information, visit www.pointsoflight.org.



Advisory Council Members

- Sherri Brown - American Red Cross
- Bonnie Carroll – TAPS
- Ross Cohen - U.S. Chamber of Commerce
- Michael Dakduk- Student Veterans of America
- Geoff Deutsch - Armed Forces Services Corporation
- Mary Keller - Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC)
- Jim Knotts - Operation Homefront
- Spencer Kympton - The Mission Continues
- Chris Marvin - Got Your 6
- Joyce Raezer - National Military Family Association
- Robert Reeg - American Legion Auxiliary
- VADM Norb Ryan (USN, Ret) - MOAA
- Mark Smith - Blue Star Families
- Col. David Sutherland (USA, Ret)- Dixon Center - Easter Seals
- Kate Sylvester - America's Promise Alliance
- Susan J. Thomas- USO
- Barbara Van Dahlen - Give an Hour
- Robert Verhey - Veterans Innovation Center

Current Blueprint Communities



Community	Main Organization
Huntsville, AL	Still Serving Veterans
Phoenix, AZ	USA Cares
Los Angeles, CA	Volunteers of America
LA, CA	Goodwill of Southern CA
San Diego, CA	National Veterans Transitions Services, Inc.
Santa Ana, CA	OneOC
Temecula, CA	Inland Empire Champion Collaborative Courts
Denver, CO (VLCs)	Metro Volunteers
Denver, CO	Help Out Not Hand Outs
Delaware	Delware Commission of Veterans Affairs
Cape Canaveral, FL	MOAA, Cape Canaveral Chapter
Jacksonville, FL	HandsOn Jacksonville
Miami, FL	American Red Cross (South Florida Region)
Vero Beach, FL	Veterans Council of Indian River County
Atlanta, GA	Goodwill of North Georgia
Augusta / Harlem, GA	Georgia Serves
Brunswick/St. Mary's, GA	Georgia Serves
Savannah / Hinesville, GA	Savannah Community Foundation
Macon, GA	Volunteer Macon, Inc.

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Valdosta, GA	Valdosta Veterans First
Chicago, IL	Illinois Veteran Affairs
West Lafayette, IN	Military Family Research Institute @ Purdue
Iowa City, IA	University of Iowa Veterans Center
Lanham, MD	VOA Chesapeake
Harford County, MD	MOAA, Susquehanna Chapter
Boston, MA	VOA Massachusetts
Omaha, NE	Lutheran Family Services
Las Vegas, NV	Easter Seals Nevada
Saranac Lake, NY	Homeward Bound Adirondacks
Vestal, NY	Southern Tier Veterans Support Group
Kearny, NJ	Kearny VOICE
Newark, NJ	Gi Go Fund
Fayetteville, NC	Give an Hour
Robeson County, NC	Gateway Missional Agency
Cincinnati, OH	Easter Seals TriState
Fairborn, OH	Operation Fairborn Cares
Philadelphia, PA	Global Citizen/ Mission365
Philadelphia, PA	American Red Cross Southeastern Pennsylvania
San Antonio, TX	San Antonio Area Foundation
Tyler, TX	MOAA, Rose Capital Chapter
Fairfax, VA	Volunteer Fairfax
Norfolk / Hampton Roads, VA	Give an Hour
Washington, D.C.	Paralyzed Veterans of America
Lakewood, WA	The Unfinished Mission