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## **Veterans. They Serve, They Get Out, Now What?**

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# Introduction

My name is Bre Carden and I have been in the United States Air Force for 11 years. I myself, along with many other Veterans have worked years under the command and guidance of our military. I have noticed when their service to our country is up, our veterans are put into civilian life to take on a new chapter with no clue how or where to start and build their new lives. This leads to homelessness, depression, mental health, anger, and more. With a program in place for Veterans and their families to transition from military living, to civilian would ensure they are taken care of and decrease the numbers of homelessness and even suicides due to the mental health effects of this transition.

# Emotional Intelligence

With this project I was able to visually and verbally explain this issue and how I believe it can be solved to benefit the community by conducting a briefing to military members in the Idaho Air National Guard who then completed a survey regarding this issue which resulted in emotional intelligence for not only myself, but many of the members who weren't aware that themselves and their families will possibly be affected by this when they decide to end their military service. I included photos, one on one interviews, data, and explanations in my brief to allow for that emotional connection with my stakeholders, this brought the issue to the surface and brought forth self awareness as well as awareness of the issue that many of us either face currently, or will face in the future. This research was so valuable to everyone involved and even those who weren't. These members broke down barriers and opened up as a unit. This is a common issue that has been buried under surface level issues, it's time to be realistic and help our brothers and sisters be set up for success.

# Creative Thinking

I was able to draw on my creative framework to approach this issue by creating a plan and timeline that included my military units involvement. I was able to conduct a series of interviews along with a survey and a briefing that included data, images, and examples that directly impacts my stakeholders. This is a unique approach because it is not common to have the ability to access so many military members who are the primary stakeholders in the issue that I am hoping to help. Having the approval from our leadership to brief and allow involvement for such an issue shows that it is important and needs to be talked about.

# Innovative Thinking

My project focuses on our veterans and their transition from their military careers, into civilian life after their enlistment and how some are not prepared or well equipped with resources to be successful. With the approval of my leadership, I was able to come up with a process that allowed members from my military unit to be involved in my studies. They allowed me to give a brief to the members, hand out surveys, and conduct interviews during our military drill weekend. This has demonstrated innovation for not only myself, but for my command, and the members within my military unit but bringing awareness to a big issue and taking the risk of emotional distress when bringing up major effects it has had on members and their families. I have attained the motivation to identify where there is an issue amongst our community and where it could be improved, and then act on it by getting others involved. This to me makes my solution of bringing awareness and coming up with ways to better prepare our members for this transition by providing resources, guidance, and programs very innovative. One way I could have approached this issue differently to enhance innovation would be to get more community involvement, including the service members' families and others who have been affected by this.

# Results

The benefits of providing resources, information, and programs for our military members to be able to have a smooth military transition and a successful return to civilian life has abounding benefits for not only the members themselves, but their friends, families, and the community. The benefits of my project include awareness, thinking about transferable skills, finding military friendly employers, adjusting from military to civilian way of life, connecting members with resources and recruiters. This issue has negatively impacted our members and community for too long. According to my research, members from all different branches have experienced hardships with reconnecting with family after their service, finding their role as a father or mother, entering the workforce, relating to civilians, alcohol and drug abuse, PTSD, and more. The positive impact would be huge if we could help our members with this transition and bring awareness to those who are coming close to ending their time in service so we can better mitigate these common hardships. This survey shows the results of the factors and characteristics that can predict an easy or hard re-entry into civilian life. The purpose of my qualitative study was to gain an in-depth study of the challenges and needs of our veterans and their families who are transitioning from their military service, into their civilian lives. The interview questions invited members to express their struggles, talk about their experience, identify influential psychological factors, resources utilized or needed, what it meant to transition out of the military, outside experiences with friends who were affected, and role changes and identity loss that they are feeling. This analysis revealed multiple things to me, one being that it is necessary to actively prepare for this transition, ending military service can cause loss of structure, many factors have impacted the transition process for members, and reestablishment into civilian life is required but falling short.

# Conclusion

By choosing The Service Learning Presentation I was able to break down a common issue and solve a problem in my community. This included direct interaction with people in the community and United States Military Members. I took this action approach because I felt this subject needed real stories, real experiences, and genuine connection. I learned from this that this issue has been buried and avoided. After talking with the military members I found that they have personally struggled with this or have experienced this issue with friends and family who have also served but expressed that it just doesn't get talked about. They move on with their lives. I think understanding this and bringing the issue to the surface and allowing for emotions and connection has brought awareness to the issue and will benefit these members and their families as they now find resources and programs to assist them as a group. This will allow them to better prepare so they can have a happy, and healthy life after they have served our country. I have gained the skills of courage and inventiveness by presenting this to my command and getting creative with how I approach it. My approach was very hands-on and personal. The briefing provided images and examples, along with personal stories and stories shared which enhanced that emotional connection, and one on one interviews which allowed members to open up

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