America Serves: Uniting Communities for Veterans, Service Members and Their Families

By Brandon Wilson

When I returned home from Iraq and exited the Marine Corps, like most Veterans, I was unsure what to expect and where I would fit in to my community. Looking to get married, buy a home and find a job (much less a career) was in my future, but I knew nothing about the benefits for which I was eligible. As I stumbled around working to find my place I also had immediate and long-term goals. It wasn’t until another Veteran informed me about the VA Home Loan that I ‘Googled’ VA benefits and walked into a Veteran Service Office. From there I utilized the VA home loan program, received some VA disability, and healthcare at the Asheville VAMC, secured college scholarships already for my two young daughters and entered into my career field and my place in my community. I was lucky and fortunate to have a community of stakeholders at all levels to include local, non-profit, state and federal that helped me navigate all these benefits. This process continues and had lasted several years. Author and war-journalist Sebastian Junger speaks of the “tribe” that the Military community thrives in and are able to complete impossible tasks and missions that our nation asks. They do this as a team and as a close knit community that embodies the Military Culture but, more importantly, creates an environment for success for each individual and the overall mission. AmericaServes understands this importance not only for the success of community but the individual and implements this model with these exciting new markets.

Background
AmericaServes is the first community-based, coordinated network of services and care for our nation’s military-connected members and their families, with 14 Networks launched across 9 states and over 600 providers.

‘Our mission is that every service member, Veteran, and their family can easily access the full range of comprehensive services required to achieve their unique goals, and to provide first-class service experience to match service-member and Veterans’ first class military service’.

AmericaServes receives support from companies such as the Walmart Foundation, Leon Levine Foundation, Heinz Endowment, and Cannon Foundations. Allowing state of the art technology matched with uniquely skilled staff and community partners allows this model to be successful.

How It Works
The network leverages resources and providers in each local community allowing each to keep their spear sharp. This is accomplished by a web-based platform designed by Unite US in partnership with Syracuse University’s Institute of Veterans and Military Families. This platform is shared with providers in the community and is directed by a coordination center. This allows every provider who is assisting a Veteran, Service Member or family member/caregiver to see what other services have been rendered by the network, thus creating a warm handoff and breaking down lengthy discussions and unnecessary work. The coordination center’s job is to identify these needs and make an appropriate referral to a provider as quickly and efficiently as possible. When a provider accepts the referral, they have taken ownership of this particular need. Bottom line: a Veteran, Service Member, or family member/caregiver never gets told ‘No’ and gets needs met in better collaboration. In addition, the community is able to work together in parallel with different needs in order to create a better environment for success and works to empower each client to continue his/her transition. In a nutshell this type of network has changed service coordination for the better. *Note these networks assist with all human service needs regardless of discharge status as well as serves family members.

Value Proposition
By utilizing this network and the capabilities of the Unite Us platform, the community has visibility on various data. This aggregate data provides basic demographics to detailed service needs and the health of each community. The Coordination Center tracks these needs from each individual, organization and county. By using these analytics we are able to better assess gaps in services, barriers to success and create action plans to address these areas.

The Carolinas
With North Carolina having the fourth-largest veteran population in the United States, NCServes spans across the state with four markets. NCServes Coastal (Community Action Partnership), NCServes Central (USO of NC), NCServes Metrolina (Veterans Bridge Home) and NCServes Western (Asheville Buncombe Christian Community Ministry – ABCCM). In addition, South Carolina has one market, SCService (Augusta Warrior Project). Each market is unique to their population, yet works collectively to identify gaps and barriers with not only our Veteran community but with the technology as well. This is accomplished with a Community of Practice that brings together both market leads and providers.

- 2 States
- 71 out of 146 Counties
- 5 Networks
- 253 Providers
- 790 Users

Often just identifying purpose and mission can clear the way for this population to transition smoothly and become successful. These communities and networks can now work in partnership to create an environment conducive to this type of transition and support of our nation’s warriors. We all must continue to work together with and for each other in order to honor our nation’s veterans, service members and families.

For more information or to join the fight, visit AmericaServes.org or NCServes.org.

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