



## AMERICA'S HEROES AT WORK

SUPPORTING THE EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS OF  
RETURNING SERVICE MEMBERS WITH TBI & PTSD

## Employment Pilot Recommendations... At a Glance

★☆☆ The U.S. Department of Labor's **America's Heroes at Work** Employment Pilot was created to provide direct assistance to employers in the recruitment, hiring, accommodation and retention of Veterans experiencing Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and/or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The main goal of the Pilot's first year was to examine, validate and disseminate promising practices related to helping employers succeed in hiring, accommodating and retaining Veterans with TBI and/or PTSD. Year One required direct outreach and assistance for all phases of employment-related services to both Veterans and employers.

Using job matching and job accommodation resources, Veterans were matched with employers for work experience or full-time and part-time employment based on the skills and abilities of the Veteran and the needs of the employer. Communication and ongoing supports were provided to both the Veterans and employers throughout the first year of the Pilot. Findings were gathered and categorized into the areas of Education/Awareness, Recruitment and Employment/Retention from both the Veteran and the employer perspectives. While major findings can be found in the Pilot's full Year One report, highlights include the following:

### Education & Awareness

Employers demonstrated an overall willingness to hire returning Service Members, but at the same time revealed a genuine "fear" when TBI or PTSD was discussed and/or disclosed. Additional education is necessary to break the stigma associated with these invisible injuries in order to improve the civilian employment rate of Veterans with TBI and/or PTSD. Employers and Veterans cited a lack of information and resources related to effective workplace accommodations for the most common functional limitations associated with TBI and/or PTSD. Lastly, transitioning Service Members and Veterans continue to have difficulty understanding how to tap into the civilian workforce, and have particular struggles translating their military experience into an effective civilian resume.

*"This has been a powerful learning experience for us. We should have been your slam-dunk employer. But we weren't. What we discovered is that labels are labels. As soon as someone walks in labeled, it's different. Normalizing is key. Supporting America's Heroes was a point of pride with the company."*

- Employer Participant

#### Additional "anti-stigma" materials and technical assistance are needed.

- Create and disseminate Web-based training tools, e.g., demystifying TBI and PTSD in the workplace.
- Consider TBI/PTSD anti-stigma public service announcements to include resources from the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) for assistance and additional information.
- Publish additional educational articles in business journals and Veteran-specific media.

#### Improved and expanded advocacy and educational opportunities are necessary to improve the positive employment outcomes for Veterans with TBI and/or PTSD.

- Create tailored coursework and make it available when the Veteran is physically and psychologically ready to absorb the information, which may be different for each Veteran; include higher education, community, faith-based and One-Stop Career Center partners.
- Promote advocacy partnerships for Veterans with non service-connected disability (NSCD) ratings.

### Recruitment

Pilot findings indicated a clear disconnect between employers knowing how and where to locate Veterans, and transitioning Service Members and Veterans knowing how to make appropriate and effective connections to the civilian workforce. Both employers and Veterans alike indicated that internship experiences/work trials (preferably subsidized) were very effective in building confidence and trust on both the supply- and demand-side. Additionally, potential benefits for hiring Veterans, specifically disabled Veterans, are not widely known by both employers and Veterans. Furthermore, employers have requested step-by-step guides to provide further assistance and support in the hiring of Veterans with TBI and/or PTSD.

### **Create and disseminate additional Employer Recruitment Resources, including “Toolkits.”**

- “How to Implement a Veterans Hiring Initiative.”
- “Work-Based Mentoring Opportunities for Veterans Returning to the Civilian Workplace.”
- “How to Use Business Tax Incentives to Hire Veterans.”

*“What I liked...was that the job counselors were willing to advocate for the Veterans directly with employers, not just refer them to job advertisements.”*

**-Veteran Participant**

### **Expand work experience/internship opportunities for transitioning Service Members, Veterans and employers.**

- Consider expanding the Operation Warfighter Program to allow for work experiences in the private sector, particularly to include Veteran-Owned Small Businesses.
- Investigate the blending and/or braiding of funding sources to create a nationally recognized Veteran-specific subsidized work experience for Veterans with TBI and/or PTSD.

### **Provide federal partners with ongoing opportunities for dialogue/networking.**

- Prepare and present policy recommendations for the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to help facilitate and implement redesigned processes to enable Veterans with disabilities to access Federal Government positions.

## **Employment & Retention**

Since there is no clear “window” for signs, symptoms and issues related to TBI and/or PTSD to appear, workplace accommodations and mental health counseling, etc. may often be needed after the hire. Better resources are needed for employers to provide the most appropriate connections and information sources for Veterans experiencing difficulties on the job. Additionally, many Veteran participants indicated a desire to talk to those with similar experiences, thus a Veteran peer mentoring program may fill a need – and could provide a missing link to higher retention rates for Veterans with disabilities.

*“Without this experience, I wouldn’t be where I am today. It allowed me to take the ‘baby steps’ I needed.”*

**-Veteran Participant**

### **Expand “traditional” partnerships.**

- Connect employee assistance professionals with Veteran-specific resources, such as the VA Medical Centers and Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs).
- Work with the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) to advertise/promote workplace accommodations for Veterans with TBI and/or PTSD; and with the Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program (CAP) for Veterans in federal employment.

### **Create and disseminate additional Employer Resources, such as fact sheets, reference guides and “Toolkits.”**

#### **Examples, include:**

- “How to Develop HR Policies for Diverse Populations.”
- “How to Set Up Job Coaching, Job Matching, Job Customization, Flextime and Other Successful Human Resource Practices.”

Interestingly, but not surprisingly, many of the recommendations gleaned from the **America’s Heroes at Work** Employment Pilot are indistinguishable from those that have been documented and recommended in the past. For example, the Congressional Commission on Service Members and Veterans Transition Assistance offered similar suggestions in its 1999 report to Congress with relation to Employment & Training and Education & Awareness (<http://www.vetbiz.gov/library/Transition%20Commission%20Report.pdf>). It is our sincere hope that some of the strategies presented in this document, as well as the comprehensive report, offer fresh solutions to persistent, relevant issues – ones that have the potential to provide substantive impact before the next decade has passed.

Responsible for fostering and promoting the welfare of job seekers of the United States by improving their working conditions, advancing their opportunities for profitable employment, protecting their retirement and health care benefits and helping employers find workers, it is the Department of Labor’s responsibility to support the employment efforts of our nation’s Veterans – who, in their own words over the course of this Pilot, believe employment is critically important to moving forward, regaining confidence and obtaining the skills necessary to be successful in the civilian workforce.