

NVTI Podcast Series

Serving Veteran Spouses

INTRO: Welcome to the National Veterans' Training Institute Podcast Series, where we discuss pressing issues affecting today's veterans.

HOST: Welcome my name is Hannah Toney, and I will be the host for today's podcast. We have a fantastic panel joining us today for our podcast, Serving Veteran Spouses. Would you please each introduce yourself and tell us where you are from? Nathalie, let's start with you if that is okay.

Nathalie: My name is Nathalie Grogan. I am a Research Associate in the Military, Veterans, and Society Program at the Center for a New American Security, a bipartisan national security think tank in Washington, DC.

Mallory: Good morning, everybody, my name is Mallory Huerta. I am a Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program specialist at WorkSource Vancouver, Washington providing employment and training support to veterans and their spouses.

Pam: Hello, everyone. My name is Pam Langley, and I am the Operations Lead for the Transition Assistance Program at the Department of Labor, Veterans' Employment and Training Service; we call ourselves VETS. One of my primary responsibilities in that position is developing employment-related training for transitioning service members, veterans, and military spouses and caregivers.

Marcus: Well, thank you for having me today. Marcus Lane here out of the WorkSource Kitsap office in Washington state. I serve our transitioning active duty and veteran community through advocacy and representation to our business community employers as the Local Veterans' Employment Representative for Kitsap and Jefferson counties.

HOST: Thank you all for being here with us today. As we get started with the podcast, can you help us to define the term veteran spouse? Mallory, would you get us started here?

Mallory: Sure and thank you. For me, a veteran spouse is someone who is married to an individual who served in the US armed forces and who supported their veteran through all aspects of military service, that includes deployments, putting personal

NVTI Podcast Series

Serving Veteran Spouses

career interests in education and employment on hold, and who supported a family while their veteran was deployed or in training.

Nathalie: I agree, Mallory. A veteran spouse is someone who is married to someone who served in the armed forces and experienced military life alongside them.

Pam: If I could add anything to what Mallory and Nathalie have already stated, it would be that a veteran spouse is the person who takes care of everything on the home front...that includes kids, home, family, extended family, pets, and even sometimes even their own job or career, and they do all that while their service member is serving our great nation. I like to use the term military spouse, which can be either the spouse of a member serving in the military currently, or a transitioning service member, or the spouse of a veteran.

Marcus: I wouldn't say anything different myself. Reinforcing the sacrifice of time, money, and security, of course. The reason I wanted to participate in today's podcast was to represent "the other" kind of military spouse," That of a dual military family. My spouse and I were both active duty and referred to as "dual mil" couple or family. I'm sure you can see, therefore, that we would find ourselves as single parents quite often during TDY's and deployments and, in the worst case, always prepared for the possible event we both have to deploy and leave our kids behind.

HOST: Thank you all for sharing your definitions of veteran spouses. I think that's really important to get us all started off together today. Now in your experience, what are some common misconceptions about veteran spouses? Pam, would you begin this time?

Pam: Certainly. I'd have to say that the most common misconception that I've heard or experienced is that a veteran or military spouse is female; that is far from the truth. Second, I would say that a military spouse, what I've heard, does not have transferable skills because they were only a spouse, right, of a military member? Well, that is also way off base. Even if the spouse didn't hold a job or a career, which they do in some cases, while their service member served, they gained transferrable skills that

NVTI Podcast Series

Serving Veteran Spouses

employers are actively seeking to fill their openings. The military spouse doesn't always realize how to capture those skills, though.

Mallory: I agree, Pam. Often military spouses are stereotyped as being women, unemployed, or not interested in working; that military and veteran spouses have access to all the resources they need is a misconception; and then that moving gets easier, and we get used to dropping everything and then starting all over again; and that military spouses have friends everywhere because they move a lot. Those are also really common misconceptions that are not true.

Marcus: I don't know if I have ever experienced any misconceptions myself beyond what people get the impression of from TV and movies. Though our community can be split on this, what I find most evident is the lack of understanding of what a spouse and children will go through during their time on active duty and when it comes to defining them. The burden and anxiety never really go away and may remain as part of the family even years after they leave active duty service.

Nathalie: I agree with my peers. The most common misconception is that military spouses are all women when actually 11 percent are men. Veteran spouses are more predominantly women at this point due to generational changes, but women veterans are the fastest-growing subpopulation of veterans and with that comes more male veteran spouses as well as LGBTQ veteran spouses. Additionally, there is an assumption that if veteran spouses work, it is for a hobby and not because they have to financially when most households in the US require two incomes to survive.

HOST: We know that the transition period can be overwhelming for veterans, their spouses, and the entire family. What recommendations do you have for the veteran spouses beginning the transition and going through the Transition Assistance Program, or TAP? What are resources available to both them and their spouses?

Nathalie: It's not always well-known, but military spouses are entitled to attend TAP if the class is not full. While transitioning service members take priority over spouses in TAP sign-ups, it is always worth enquiring as to whether there are times and dates that aren't full, even if the spouse and service member end up going to different classes.

NVTI Podcast Series

Serving Veteran Spouses

There's a lot of valuable information presented in TAP, and the more people who know it, the better.

Marcus: First, even if the spouse has a profession or employable work experience, I highly recommend for them to attend the TAP class with their spouse if it is possible. The information is applicable to both...and it's better to go through the transition together as a team if you can. If all goes well, you will know when you're leaving the service, and I recommend you begin preparing no later than a year out. Go to your installation's family readiness center for transition counseling and planning. That is your first step. If you are stateside, also begin working with a specialist at your local American Job Center. If you are overseas, ask your installations family readiness center to help you find the office in the area you will be settling into soon because once you leave active duty, it's our job to help team up with you from there. One last thing...you don't have to wait until the end of an enlistment to attend TAP. Is it time to reenlist? Make the best, informed decision you can and attend a TAP class during reenlistment as well.

Pam: And as Marcus and Nathalie just stated, spouses of transitioning service members can attend the TAP courses on a space-available basis. What most people don't know is that every TAP course that is available in a classroom is also available through the eLearning site that the DoD has set up, and you can do that after your career, after you transition, while you are still in, while your service member is still serving. I mean, those are all accessible no matter who you are. They don't require a CAC or an ID card, only a simple registration. Those are available at <https://www.tapevents.mil/courses>. And like I have said, every TAP course has a corresponding eLearning option. In addition, at the Department of Labor, VETS, we offer Transition Employment Assistance for Military Spouses and Caregivers (TEAMS) workshops. These are virtual instructor-led, and we also offer them at some installations. We also have Off-Base Transition Training, also known as OBTT, these are workshops that are offered in 5 different states right now, and they are also offered virtually instructor-led. Most of these workshops are 2 hours in length, and you can sign up for them as you are available to take them. There is no order that is required, and

NVTI Podcast Series

Serving Veteran Spouses

they are accessible throughout different times of the month, so they are very flexible. Some of the topics include Your Next Move, which is really a labor information research type of workshop which shows you how to do that, Career Credentials, and Federal Hiring; we have two different courses on LinkedIn one is the basics like how to set up your profile and use LinkedIn and then one kind of gives you an employer's view of how recruiters use LinkedIn so you can tailor your LinkedIn profile and all the information there so it will be picked up by recruiters of companies. And coming soon is a workshop on Flexible Jobs options, so this will talk about part-time, remote, and other options for spouses. You can learn more about TEAMS and OBTT workshops from our webpage www.DOL.gov/agencies/vets

Mallory: I agree with everyone. In addition to a TAP program, seek out your local WorkSource, also known as an American Job Center. Most states have a WorkSource system that includes Veteran representatives and Employment Connections staff who can provide guidance and direct veterans and their spouses to myriad resources. These can include education, training, state licensure for like healthcare providers, career changes, etc. For instance, in Washington, we have The Northwest Furniture Bank, which provides a house full of furniture for a nominal fee. This is a common need among military families who are relocating, and it is seldom thought of.

HOST: We often talk about how veterans feel after transitioning and that they may feel a loss of identity. This can also be true for veteran spouses. How might a veteran spouses' identity and support system change as they transition out of service?

Mallory: Such a true statement. Loss of identity is an unexpected side effect of transitioning and is hard to recognize when it occurs. Veterans and their spouses may not realize that their depression and feelings of being lost and alone are results of the grief cycle they are experiencing, and they may not know how to manage that. Among other things, identity changes happen when cultural changes happen, and separation usually means another move, and depending on where that final destination is, there is another loss of or change in the support system. Will the move be near the veteran's or spouse's family, and who decides this? Is it agreeable between the veteran and the

NVTI Podcast Series

Serving Veteran Spouses

spouse, or was there a debate, and did someone lose that debate? So, these are all things to consider.

Pam: So true Mallory and Military spouses are a tight-knit group. They support each other through the best and worst times while their service member is laser-focused on their military service. So, just as a military member experiences a loss of community on their transition from the military, so does that military spouse. One bright spot with military spouses, though, is that they tend to keep in touch with their spouse network. They maintain their relationships throughout their time and into their transition from the military. These relationships can provide some additional stability at a time when the military spouse most needs it.

Nathalie: The loss of identity is very true and underappreciated. The transition from a military spouse to a veteran spouse needs a lot more attention and resources than it currently has, as the separation from military service affects the whole family. Military networks, benefits, and resources are nearly always unavailable to spouses' following separation, so only the veteran is plugged-in to the same extent.

Marcus: Hopefully, it's a comfort knowing there is no perfect story as far as I am concerned. The journey is what you need it to be. Especially when you intend to enter an industry that you may have the skills and abilities but no direct experience for. Initially, I went from being an aircraft mechanic to administering statewide educational programs at a local college. When I work with transitioning active duty and their families, I always encourage them to build a plan a few years out. That also means a new identity along with it. Reinventing yourself for who you will be or want to be when that time comes. That path is whatever you need it to be. Sometimes that could mean getting a degree, certifications, or even an apprenticeship. Ultimately, having that plan helps you start the work; at first, it will feel impossibly large. You may feel overwhelmed and you probably will, I did, by the scope and complexity but tell yourself that it doesn't matter whether it's possible, only that you do it. Start small and specific. Find a solution, then work on the next step. When it comes to resources. You don't need to remember everything. That is why you have your installation's family readiness centers and

NVTI Podcast Series

Serving Veteran Spouses

American Job Center specialists like us to help you connect with the right resources at the right time.

HOST: This is great information for spouses who may feel they have lost their identity. We also know that veteran spouses need to be flexible due to their spouse's career. What are some unique issues facing veteran spouses due to that flexibility while enlisted? Pam, would you begin this time?

Pam: Of course. One unique issue faced by military spouses is license and credential portability. Frequent PCS moves impact a military spouse's ability to move their license or credential from one state to another, and that is because each of these states have their own rules and regulations regarding those credentials or licenses. It is not easy to figure out what those rules are either. So, the Department of Labor provides information on license recognition by state, and how to go about finding what the rules are in that state. It is also available from our webpage. As I mentioned previously, our TEAMS classes also offer assistance on how to address some of those unique issues that faced by military spouses, such as how to address employment gaps, how to find employment opportunities, and other related employment-focused topics.

Nathalie: Veteran spouses face similar struggles to military spouses, such as spotty resumes due to frequent relocations, yet without the support network they had as a military spouse in the military community and among those who support them. Especially in recent years, there has been an increase in awareness of military spouse employment issues. Some employers are taking steps to increase the retention of military spouses, including using remote work. However, veteran spouses lack that identification and community.

Mallory: I agree with Pam and Nathalie. Veteran spouses struggle in their job searches for several reasons, and that can include inconsistent employment histories, skills gaps, and/or transferring professional licenses to other states. This is complicated for many spouses because it is even more complex when the veteran also experiences these issues. For instance, medics who want to continue to serve as emergency medical technicians may need that additional training or education depending on the state they

NVTI Podcast Series

Serving Veteran Spouses

land in after they separate. Then, in this case, now, both the veteran and the spouse are jobless and trying to conduct successful job searches.

Marcus: I find terms like resiliency and flexibility don't mean much when you don't have the knowledge or support. Find your local support services and mutual spouse networks. One thing we see here in our area very often is dealing with professionals requiring some licensing. I'm sure we have all had customers who finds out after they arrive that the license they have from state X may not be acceptable here. Fortunately, here in Washington, and look into your local state requirements and programs, we have systems in place to help expedite a professional license, certification, registration, and even permits for operating. Additionally, we find that many spouses will move to our area, never knowing there are resources to help them find employment or for household sustainment. Locally we team up with our Naval Base Kitsap - Bangor Fleet and Family Readiness Center and Support to help increase awareness of our services and offer orientations and referrals as needed to other community resources as well. So definitely tap into your local networks and support organizations and utilize them to find the path for your current or next duty station.

HOST: When a veteran or their family needs services, what role does the veteran spouse often play in locating the available resources? Marcus, can you start us off?

Marcus: Yeah, absolutely. I find have seen a little of both...but it's not unusual to say that, more often than not, you will see the spouse doing the pathfinding instead of the veteran or service member...simply because they are the ones who have the time.

Mallory: In my experience, I did all of this for our family. I was trying to identify resources and conducting a job search while my husband was attending countless doctor appointments because he had a service-connected disability. This was difficult because the benefits were all his, or the majority were his, and I would call the VA or other resources only to be told they can only speak with the sponsor, or the sponsor has to provide authorization for me to speak with them. And that's when this becomes a team effort.



NVTI Podcast Series

Serving Veteran Spouses

HOST: There are so many benefits available to veterans and their families, and sometimes those systems are challenging to navigate. What are some difficulties veteran spouses face when seeking out benefits for their spouses, themselves, or their children? How can service providers help veteran spouses navigate the veteran benefits system?

Pam: Well, the VA system can definitely be a challenge to navigate. As I discussed earlier, the www.tapevents.mil/courses webpage, there are eLearning courses that talk about how to navigate VA and that system. One of those is titled VA Benefits and Services, and it just contains a lot of great information and 'how to' regarding the VA.

Nathalie: Veteran spouses face challenges because they are not the beneficiary the vast majority of the time. The veterans' system does not usually have a formal record of the spouse, unlike in the military.

Marcus: The network of service providers, private, public, and non-profit, is a big one, and I find they often overlap or reproduce the services of others as well. This creates an overwhelming feeling of choice for anyone simply trying to understand where to start. Now it would be nice if the community of service providers would all get together and cut out the fat. Since that won't happen, the best way to serve our customers is to network and create local, state, and even national partnerships. Doing so helps us find the best options for the customer and helps them cut through the noise. When I speak with transitioning services members and families, I tell them they don't need to feed at the firehose. Come to our office or whatever community resource they are comfortable with, and let us help you find and connect with the right resource at the right time.

Mallory: That's great advice, Marcus. I'm going to reiterate something I said in my previous statement, and that is the VA is a very challenging system to navigate, especially when you are a spouse and not the sponsor. I cannot count the number of times I did the legwork, and made a call, or reached out and was told they couldn't speak with me. But my veteran, my husband, was going through this transition and dealing with a significant diagnosis. So, we were both overwhelmed by the information and how it constantly changes, and then not understanding just what the benefits were.

NVTI Podcast Series

Serving Veteran Spouses

It is hard and is much harder when you are a spouse and not the veteran. That's where the team thing has to come in. That's where we had to do it together, you have to do it together.

HOST: You have all provided such great insight into the needs of veteran spouses today. In addition to what we've discussed, what are some additional valuable resources and support systems available to veteran spouses?

Mallory: Identifying the veteran service providers in the local community is paramount. If I knew then what I know now, I would have done my research before transitioning so that this could inform my decision about where to relocate. Areas with heavy veteran representation are going to have greater availability of benefits and resources. As a veteran-service provider, I would encourage all transitioning service members and their spouses to quickly identify their Veteran of Foreign War or VFW outposts, and their VA campuses, the WorkSource Centers in the area, and other potential Veteran resources in the community it is they are relocating, just try to identify those resources in that area. If nothing else, WorkSource centers tend to be one-stop shops with connections to many services and will be able to point veterans and veteran spouses in the direction of the resources that they need. I would also explore websites such as oneline.org and careeronestop.org for information on job search readiness and translating military skills into civilian language.

Marcus: Oh, ditto. I know that transitioning from active duty can be overwhelming for everyone in the family. Later in life, for a veteran, finding resources usually takes place during times of crisis. I don't need to repeat all the great things Mallory already illustrated for us, but when the time comes, and you need help, avoid the firehose and seek out veteran career guidance experts like us. Let us know what you need, and let us help you do the heavy lifting.

HOST: The loss of a spouse is not something we like to discuss; however, it can significantly impact a veteran spouse. Why is it critical for veteran spouses to know the resources available to them and how to navigate the system? How would this information help should they lose their spouse? Nathalie, would you begin?

NVTI Podcast Series

Serving Veteran Spouses

Nathalie: In the event of the tragedy of losing a spouse, circumstances are made more difficult if the surviving spouse is not up-to-date and aware of the benefits the veteran was eligible for and using. The veteran system is designed to support the veteran, and it can be very challenging to navigate as a widowed spouse, so proactive communication is essential.

Mallory: The spouses who have lost their veterans need to know what is available to them because the information is not always offered when it is needed. It is hard enough to deal with the loss of a loved one. But many veteran spouses who experience this do not realize the breadth of resources that may be available to them. Some spouses go years without pensions they are eligible for, and they struggle financially, not getting the medical care they need and not receiving the support they need. Some spouses never receive the benefits their family earned through their service to their country. I recently worked with a surviving spouse who knew she had some education benefits, but she didn't know how to access those. In having a conversation, we learned she was eligible for Chapter 35 Education Benefits for Survivors and Dependents. She has since enrolled in a university while working as a Veteran Service Officer for a local veteran service provider. She would not be able to support herself or pursue educational goals if she was unaware of these benefits. The information can seem overwhelming, but it is not insurmountable, and the benefits are vital when moving forward following that loss.

Marcus: Oh, this is tough. I'll look at it this way, I am lucky enough to speak to a TAP class nearly every week. I feel that the best way to convince those in TAP may work here too. Out of all the services we provide, is to let them know that they get priority of service from our team...but you're not alone in this, and when we get where we team up with you, with not just in finding a job but your professional success. We are here to team up with you during that time, whatever that might be for you.

HOST: A critical component related to our prior question is having the proper documentation and preparation to access services. This can be overwhelming! What essential documents should a veteran spouse maintain and have on hand when seeking support or services?

NVTI Podcast Series

Serving Veteran Spouses

Mallory: So, for Veteran spouses should know about and have access to their veteran's DD-214 definitely, and then also in my personal experience, a marriage certificate, I guess that is not federal, but definitely have that marriage certificate on hand, and then a certificate of birth for each child, separation orders can also be handy, and all deployment and relocation orders can be handy, there is not a lot of requests for those, but sometimes there is a request for those. These documents are accessed and requested through the [VA's DS Logon tool](#) or [Archives.gov](#). Spouses can seek assistance at their local WorkSource center or another Veteran service provider in their community for assistance in requesting those military records.

Marcus: Wow, Mallory has pretty much already covered this, but I can't help but look at it from this perspective. I seldom find anything outside of the usual documents that are needed DD214, SSN, and so on. What I recommend that you do first is to scan every one of them and keep them ready when applying for work or assistance programs. Nine times out of ten, you will be doing those things virtually or electronically, where having them at the ready will make life easy. Some odd ones I have run into are driving abstracts, for instance. You can get that from your DMV for around 25 dollars, at least in our local area. Also having a handy copy of the DD214 that has the SSN and DOB redacted from it, you can ask for help with that, or you can do it in a PowerPoint. A redacted copy can be very helpful. Finally, you have probably heard about the *I Love Me Book*; a spouse can have one of those too. The book can contain all of what we have covered but can also have letters of appreciation, training certificates, and other professional documentation that you have probably collected over the years. Having them readily available in one place is very helpful. Also, having it at hand during an interview can help you stand out as a spouse as well, like the veteran job seeker, where others may not. Pro Tip: interviewing for federal employment finds that the *I Love Me Book* is the most useful, so always have that ready.

HOST: What are some employment benefits that are available specifically for veteran spouses?

NVTI Podcast Series

Serving Veteran Spouses

Marcus: Oh, I am happy to start this one off. Here in Washington state, we have a lot of state agencies, hiring agencies, and businesses surrounding several military facilities that focus on job placement and employee fulfillment for short-term and temporary positions that will often look to the local military community to help find spouses to fill those positions.

Nathalie: I would also like to add that Veterans Preference in federal hiring applies to veteran spouses in some circumstances. For example, the spouse of a veteran with a service-connected disability who is unable to qualify for an appointment to the federal civil service is eligible for 10 points of federal hiring preference, boosting their application and eligibility. Additionally, some widowed spouses whose veterans served during a time of war are also eligible for a federal hiring preference.

Mallory: There are some great employment and educational programs designed for military spouses. For education, these include the DOD's Spouse Education and Career Opportunities at [DOD SkillBridge - Spouses \(osd.mil\)](https://www.osd.mil/skillbridge/spouses). Syracuse University's Veteran and Military Family's program has [Onward to Opportunity](#), which offers free training and certifications to the Veteran and the Military Spouse, and Military OneSource for Spouses, which provides information and links for various services, grants, and opportunities for military spouses. A great employment resource is [Salesforce](#), in partnership with [Hiring our Heroes](#). This program offers on-the-job training to Military Spouses in high-paying careers.

Pam: Military spouses might not realize that they are potentially eligible for Dislocated Worker Grant funding for training, along with unemployment insurance, each time they have to leave their job to PCS with their military service member. The local American Job Center has information and assistance on these and other programs for military spouses, and Marcus and Mallory have talked a lot about the American Job Centers. And if you are curious about where your closest American Job Center might be, you can go to www.CareerOneStop.org. That website also contains a wealth of information on all the programs and assistance available for military spouses in their employment

NVTI Podcast Series

Serving Veteran Spouses

search. In addition, a veteran spouse can find a good deal of information on federal hiring at www.FedsHireVets.gov, but a lot of that federal hiring information also includes information on spouse hiring flexibilities, which have gone through a lot of changes in the last year or two.

HOST: As we close out this podcast, we would love to hear the most critical piece of information you would share with any veteran spouse.

Mallory: When the Veteran serves, the Spouse serves too. It is a partnership that makes your service and your veteran member's service to the nation a success. Please do not underestimate the very critical role that you play in this. Identify your support system wherever you go. This is your team. You will learn to share resources if you are not already, and you will learn to rely on one another with your similar stories, sacrifices, successes, and future dreams, so that spouse network follows you everywhere you go.

Marcus: Absolutely right, Mallory. I just want to say that what you do and have done matters. I have worked with spouses who all they did was full-time parenting, managing the household, and, more often than not, a good deal of volunteer work in their military community. With that in mind, the resume is very much a creative writing process that can translate, and truly translate, all of what you have done into a resume. I have worked with customers doing just that, and they have found work with living wages. It is hard to translate intangible skills from active duty, and the spouse is no different. I have found the most rewarding intangibles are: coherent multi-level leadership, harnessing the power of teams, and project and program management and leadership for problem-solving. So, think about what in your background makes you agile and gives you all the technically intensive skills.

Nathalie: Open communication regarding veteran benefits is key for peace of mind and long-term security.

Pam: And I can't emphasize it any more. Every one of the speakers during this podcast has provided resources. Information and resources are out there for you. It's time to do something for you. You've earned it, so now is the time to take advantage of it!

NVTI Podcast Series

Serving Veteran Spouses

HOST: Nathalie, Marcus, Mallory, and Pam, thank you so much for sharing these last words and for joining us today for this podcast. To our listeners, if you would like more information about serving veterans or serving veteran spouses, please visit NVTI.org to access resources such as this podcast. We are constantly adding new material at NVTI.org so check back often. We also invite you to continue the conversation at the Making Careers Happen for Veterans: Community of Practice. Thank you so much.

Outro: This podcast is brought to you by the National Veterans' Training Institute, whose mission is to further develop and enhance the professional skills of veterans, employment, and training service providers throughout the United States. This program is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans Employment & Training Service and administered by Management Concepts. For more episodes, visit the NVTI website at www.nvti.org.