

Continuing Conversations: Serving Women Veterans

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

HOST: Today's NVTI podcast, Continuing Conversations: Serving Women Veterans. I'm your host, Hannah, and we're thrilled to have an incredible panel with us today. Now, today we're going to be talking about a lot of resources and examples to serve women veterans, but please do keep in mind that the resources and examples shared here are real-world examples and sharing does not imply endorsement by VA or DOL.

To kick things off, would each of you please take a moment to introduce yourselves, tell us where you're from, tell us a little bit about your role and how you serve women veterans? Lourdes, will you start us off, please?

Lourdes: Happy to, Hannah. Hi, everyone. I'm Lourdes Tiglao and I'm the Executive Director for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs at the Center for Women Veterans under the Office of the Secretary. Our mission is to advocate for equitable outcomes and access to VA benefits, services, and opportunities for women veterans through education, outreach, and collaboration. Empowering women veterans to achieve their life's goals through VA benefits and services in collaboration with community stakeholders. We do this through advocacy, outreach, policy changes, and building future foundations. Aligned with Secretary McDonough's principles, our goals include increasing access, decreasing barriers, improving outcomes, increasing enrollments and engagements, and advocating for increased recognition and memorialization for women veterans.

Leah: Hi, everyone. My name is Leah Carpio-Hernandez. My pronouns are she/her. I'm a program analyst with the Western Region of the Women's Bureau. I'm physically located in California, near the Los Angeles area. I've been with the Women's Bureau since December of 2021. With the Women's Bureau, I primarily work on outreach and education. My current work includes advocating for equality of women in the workforce, including shaping paths for women to attain good jobs, pay equity, and access to non-traditional careers. Promoting the need for primary care provider support, especially as women face caregiving penalties. Addressing

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various forms of workplace discrimination against women. More recently, a focus on gender-based violence and harassment.

Deborah: Greetings all, my name is Deborah Walker, and I'm currently serving in the Air Force while also serving as the Director of Strategic Programs at Operation Job Ready Veterans, headquartered in Indianapolis, Indiana. In my role, the objective is to define needs, design and implement local programming to best align our veterans, service members, and families with the supportive services and care needed for employment readiness, career development, and progression. Our organization works to identify barriers to employment and align with solution-based supportive services in the community and across the nation.

We are connecting with women veterans and service members locally, nationally, even globally now, to provide programming that promotes women in their industry, academic goals, and overall health and resiliency. We provide coursework and one-on-one services that build upon veterans' strengths to support meaningful job and career placement.

These services include translating military to civilian skills, building federal and civilian resumes, crafting professional summaries and statements, launching professional cultivated networking, social media presence, and polishing interviewing skills for success. And while these are only a snapshot of services rendered, we create lasting relationships, cultivating connection and camaraderie, and building and keeping a meaningful community.

Host: Wow, what a great panel today. Thank you so much for joining us to continue discussing how we can best support women veterans. We know that veterans may face some challenges when seeking employment. What are some employment challenges that might be unique to women veterans?

Leah: Women veterans face unique challenges in the employment sector. One challenge involves combating stereotypes and preconceptions about their military roles. These biases can potentially limit job opportunities. Limited networking opportunities may arise from the historically male-dominated military environment, impacting their ability to connect with professionals in industries where women are underrepresented.

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Also, balancing career and family responsibilities poses a distinct challenge as women veterans navigate both military service and potential childcare or other caregiving duties. Women veterans often have difficulty connecting their military skills with their job interests outside of the military. We encourage women to research the jobs they are interested in and make comparisons between the skills they have and the skills they need.

Deborah: Yes, women, especially those serving and having served in the military, meet and exceed standards of work, as is expected in military career fields. However, since gender bias is still present in the military and civilian sectors, it can present potential barriers for women veterans. What once was male-dominated is not always the case today, but the perception may still be present.

Building confidence as well as resilience to approach and attain career goals are skills that need sharpening. As Leah mentioned, as nurturers and caretakers, women are still experiencing limitations in availability for some full-time roles as childcare costs skyrocket incommensurate with wages. Women still experience a breakdown in collaborative care for children while maintaining military and civilian workforce standards.

Such challenges include lack of childcare availability, high cost of childcare exceeding salary, lack of flexibility to accommodate work hours, limited partner support, and that vicious cycle continues in a loop of needing to provide as parent and breadwinner with some unrealistic support in the community.

Lourdes: I absolutely agree. Challenges like discrimination and bias, family and caregiving responsibilities, and determining how their military duties can translate to civilian roles all make it difficult to find the right fit. Another definite challenge is transitioning and adjusting to a different work culture and environment. Fortunately, there has been an increased focus on providing support and resources specifically tailored to women veterans as they seek employment and transition to civilian life.

Host: Thank you for that. This part of the conversation just really helps us set the context for the rest of our discussion today.

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In our prior Serving Women Veterans podcast, a lack of self-identification by women veterans was mentioned as a challenge. And that's something we continue to hear. Why do you feel we continue to see some women veterans struggle or be hesitant to self-identify? Lourdes, will you share your thoughts first, please?

Lourdes: Of course, Hannah. There are several reasons, including some very personal ones, why some women who have served in the military may not self-identify as veterans. Some of these include gender specific stereotypes, the common perception that veterans are men, particularly, given the historical male dominance in the military.

Also, women who feel the service is not aligned with society's version of the traditional image of a veteran, such as, they only did four years or they didn't deploy or their husband is the veteran. Lack of recognition, a lack of recognition can stem from societal attitudes, institutional biases, and historical under representation of women in the military.

At VA, we advocate to ensure that women veterans see themselves reflected in the spaces where they seek care and assistance, as well as for other veterans and the rest of society to see and recognize their service and contribution. These are small steps to create a sense of belonging and self-worth and for women veterans to value their veteran status.

Some post service transition challenges also serve as a barrier. Some women veterans encounter significant challenges during their transition from military service to civilian life, and this can impact their willingness to self-identify as veterans. These challenges include difficulties accessing health care, employment, and other support services.

A recent Wounded Warrior Project report on women veterans showed women veterans experience more negative perceptions, such as others assuming they're not a veteran because they're women, and that they don't talk as much about their military experiences with civilian friends. All these factors and more can impact their self-perception and overshadow their veteran identity.

Other challenges include cultural and societal factors. Cultural and societal norms can lead to reluctance to self-identify as veterans. Efforts to raise awareness, provide support, and create a more inclusive understanding of the diverse veteran population can help create an environment

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where all veterans feel empowered to embrace their veteran identity and access the resources and the recognition that they've earned and deserve.

Experiences while in the military can sometimes be a challenge as well. Some women veterans, especially those who have suffered from military sexual trauma while in the military, do not trust government institutions. There is this concept of institutional betrayal, where harmful experiences and actions perpetrated by an institution or failure of the institution to prevent or respond supportively to those harmed are directly associated or attributed to that institution, and therefore women veterans don't want to be classified as a veteran or have anything to do with other government agencies.

Leah: As Lourdes mentioned, several factors contribute to the hesitation or struggle of some women veterans to self-identify. These include stereotypes about veterans combat experience and societal stereotypes and perceptions of veterans as predominantly male. This might influence hesitation, as the traditional image of veteran may not align with their own experiences.

Deborah: I agree with Leah and Lourdes in many ways. However, this question dares to ride a limited rail when humanity does not. One question we may need to ask is how women feel about their identity overall. Women may not identify as veterans, but rather see the role as a facet of the many that collectively construct her. It is better to seek where identity comes from individuals. Some understand identity as rooted in cultural traditions, values, and even faith practices. Rather than asking women to define themselves as veterans, it could be beneficial to ask, what do you value in your service, which has helped sculpt you today?

Host: That is a fascinating perspective, and I can completely see where you're coming from. So, what suggestions do you all have for veteran service providers to help women veterans self-identify so that they can access all the services available to them? For example, what types of questions might one ask to determine if a client is in fact a veteran?

Leah: Organizations can identify more women veterans by including a question on intake or application forms that ask about military service and which branch of military they served rather than veteran status. This can help organizations identify and tap the unique leadership skills that women veterans have cultivated during their service.

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Deborah: Yes, I believe I captured a route to this in the previous question to inquire about what women veterans value in their own service by asking sincerely curious questions as to how their military experience equipped them in their lives, career, and families. These are more than soft skills, but they're levers for experiential growth and opportunity to connect with others.

Daring to ask a woman what she feels her purpose is extends beyond the introductory question of, "did you serve in the military?" assists women in determining their areas of strength, how they cultivate them, and where they find a community that pours into them, not just professionally, but socially, culturally, and in resiliency.

Lourdes: Absolutely. Helping a woman veteran identify and embrace her veteran status involves providing support, recognition, and access to resources that acknowledge and honor her military service. Here are some additional ways to assist a woman veteran in identifying her veteran status. We can provide information about the diverse experiences of women in the military and the contributions of women veterans throughout history. This can help create a more inclusive understanding of veteran identity and misconceptions that may help prevent women from identifying as veterans. Connecting women veterans with peer support and mentorship, specifically tailored to the needs of women veterans, can also provide a sense of community, understanding, and validation of their veteran status.

Veteran service providers must be knowledgeable about the unique needs of women veterans and their benefits and services. Creating an environment that recognizes, acknowledges, and supports women veterans in embracing their veteran status involves a multi-faceted approach that addresses both systemic, and individual barriers to identification, providing tailored support and knowing the facts and benefits and services specific to women veterans will foster a culture of inclusivity and the woman veteran can feel empowered to proudly embrace their veteran identity.

VA is continuously working on cultural transformation both internally and externally to both honor and recognize women veterans service and contributions. This includes the mission statement change. Additionally, efforts include creating an environment where women veterans see themselves reflected in the spaces where they seek care, and that other veterans see and recognize their service, creating a sense of belonging and community.

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Host: These are wonderful suggestions for assisting women veterans in self-identifying. Thank you so much because we know it's a critical first step. Now we're going to change direction just a little bit and focus on how we can work with women veterans to attain employment aligned with their goals. We know employers, and even veterans, sometimes struggle to understand how military skills translate into civilian equivalents. Where can women veterans find help in translating their skills to show their abilities in a way that resonates with civilian employers?

Lourdes: There are many employers and organizations that offer tools and devices to help with skills translation. For example, Military.com offers a Military Skills Translator that allows veterans to match their military experience with civilian jobs. Organizations like Boeing and Capital One have invested in tools that will also do career field translation on their websites. And finally, nothing beats a good old-fashioned mentor or sponsor. Find the veterans who are already working in that organization to connect with. LinkedIn is a great place to find them.

Leah: Mynextmove.org/vets is a fabulous resource that can help women veterans match careers that transition well from military into civilian roles, as well as explore new careers, including those with higher wages and take them through the process of preparing for those jobs. Women veterans can use these tools to prepare for their job interviews by developing a talking point that they can share with employers to help explain how their skills transition well into civilian roles. They can even add short bullets to their resume or cover letters to make these connections too.

The value of military network is also important. Connecting with other veterans and talking through the steps that proved valuable for them in civilian roles can be very helpful to women veterans.

Deborah: I love these. Please also reach out to us at Operation Job Ready Veterans, OJRV.org, as another resource for assessing and translating these tremendous military skills.

We equip and commit to providing the resources and tools for meaningful employment, such as Transitional Skills Workshop. Our onsite and online webinar courses and programming connect others in their employment journeys. Being present together in these courses collectively address today's challenges in an unfiltered environment, interpersonally promoting community while adapting to lessons learned and best practices for transitional skills. In the military, life is

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done together. Through learning and leading it together in unity, rather than competing, women veterans, as well as veteran organizations, can truly provide and equip people with the terminology for these highly sought after skill sets women have.

Host: Great input from all of you all. Thank you so much. The NVTI podcast, Promoting Registered Apprenticeships to Attract Veteran Talent, focused on apprenticeships for veterans. But are there programs specifically designed to help women veterans find apprenticeship opportunities? Deborah, will you start us off?

Deborah: Certainly, Hannah. Operation Job Ready Veterans is located in 10 states but serves veterans across the nation and globally. Our team of directors and employment transition managers craft and cultivate relationships with employers in those states and beyond. Apprenticeships, as well as internships, are indeed a part of our programming. Through our collaborative partners, including Purdue Global and Vincennes University, and local companies such as Ciriello Plumbing in Indianapolis, apprenticeships and internships in multiple career fields are widely and openly available to interested and qualified women veterans.

Lourdes: VA is always seeking ways to support our women veterans in their career development and growth. We're developing a partnership with Google on a Google Cloud training pilot. This initiative endeavors to increase women veterans in STEM through specific training in five program paths. Those include Career Certificates, Data Analysts, Cloud Computing Foundations, Cloud Digital Leader, and Cloud Engineer.

The partnership will leverage connections across public and private sectors to facilitate learner connections and mentorship with participants. The program's goal is to have women veteran participants report improvement in their careers within six months of completing the Google program. This could include a new job, a career switch, a promotion, or a raise.

Leah: The Women's Bureau WANTO grant offers technical assistance to employers, labor unions, and apprenticeship programs to help them recruit and retain women in apprenticeship. The programs also help women, including women veterans, prepare for apprenticeship and identify traits they are well suited for.

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Women veterans can check to see if there's a WANTO program near them by checking the Women's Bureau website. In addition, the Office of Apprenticeship develops policies to support the recruitment and retention of women and increase the number of women in apprenticeship. A recent Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration publication, *Women in Apprenticeship*, is a great starting point for information. Refer to the resource guide that accompanies this podcast for links to this publication and additional information on apprenticeships.

Host: Thank you so much for sharing that valuable information about apprenticeships and for highlighting some great resources. What are some other resources veteran service providers might use to help women veterans in their employment journey?

Leah: The Women's Bureau homepage has a link called "Topics" that highlights several relevant landing pages that will be useful to organizations working with women veterans, including maps that identify states with equal pay protections and paid leave policies and worker rights during pregnancy and lactation.

Our national database on childcare prices helps identify childcare prices in nearly every county across the country. In addition, Childcare Aware can connect veterans and military families for a variety of childcare resources. Our WANTO and FARE grantees offer opportunities to connect directly with community-based organizations for training and help enforcing workplace rights.

Lourdes: The VA has an abundance of employment resources for all veterans located in the Veterans Employment Toolkit. The site has everything from links to USAJobs to small business information. The VA also has a wide variety of internships and apprenticeships across the agency. One I'd like to call out is the National Cemetery Administration Apprenticeship Program that's designed to support someone who's experiencing homelessness to get a job through an NCA apprenticeship.

Finally, I know this sounds obvious, but with the right search, you can find websites such as the Job Thesaurus, which helps to explain the job you held in the military and civilian terms. You can also find resources for resume writing and links to current job fairs happening in your area.

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Deborah: Operation Job Ready Veterans, or OJRV, provides one-on-one services such as career coaching, coursework, counsel on translating veteran skills to civilian equivalencies, launching a strong presence on social platform for employer witness, personalized service to address interview needs, attire requirements, building meaningful tailored relationships and resumes and more.

Here at OJRV, our team creates personalized relational care with our veterans. Collaborations include creating employer relationships, connecting to academic resources and programming, small business support and referral, all while seeking to determine transitional barriers first. A woman's priority to edit a resume will take a backburner to having groceries in her pantry for her children or an empty tank of fuel. Our organization drives to assess transitional barriers in addition to bolstering employment skills and progressive career growth and retention with resources.

Host: Fantastic. Thank you. And to our listeners, these resources are available in an included resource guide. Now, we also know that the gender pay gap is a real concern for all women. How does this pay discrepancy affect women veterans? Lourdes, will you begin for us here?

Lourdes: Sure, Hannah. I read a report from Hire Heroes USA that said in 2019, male military members earned 17.42% more on average in the civilian workforce compared to women. This mirrors the greater national average and means that women and their families have less money to support themselves and invest in their future.

Host: Wow, that's a significant gap. So how can women veterans advocate for equal pay? Are there resources available for them?

Leah: There are a few factors we know that help women earn higher pay. This includes pursuing higher wage jobs that are often called nontraditional for women, like jobs in tech, trades, and manufacturing fields. Also, being part of a union is highly correlated with higher pay for women. They can take negotiation skills training and utilize salary research tools to communicate their value in their job market effectively. The Women's Bureau provides information and tools for understanding and addressing the wage gap, and you can find a link to that in the resource guide.

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Deborah: I love that. And I'd also like to add that this may be new terrain for our veterans, since in the military, we know pay is based on rank, and that rank has a defined structure based on experience and time-in-grade. The civilian sector may lack that transparent structure. While it can be positive because it could mean the best candidate gets that role, in some places, it's just not that simple or clear cut. A mentor can help women to research and identify goals with reasonable and proportionate compensation and equip them with the interview skills needed to press and negotiate for fair, equitable wages during the hiring process.

Host: Thank you for those insights. You know, I don't think that we can say enough about the importance of mentorship. Let's talk a little more about why having a mentor is beneficial for women transitioning into their civilian careers.

Leah: Having a mentor is like having a guide through the civilian work environment. They can provide insights on how to navigate it, help translate their military skills, provide solid career advice, and connect women to valuable professional networks. For women veterans, having a mentor goes beyond just professional growth. It boosts confidence and makes the transition smoother by offering both practical advice and emotional support. Mentorship plays a pivotal role in empowering women veterans, helping them navigate new career paths, and fostering personal and professional growth during the shift from military to civilian life.

Host: Absolutely. Mentorship doesn't really end at the end of the workday. That positive relationship and the confidence that ensues is so important for overall wellbeing as well. Deborah, you have insight on tailoring mentorship programs specifically to the needs of women veterans. Would you tell us a little more about that, please?

Deborah: Certainly. Mentorship is indeed key for development and growth during the transition period. At organizations such as Operation Job Ready Veterans, we pair women veterans with mentors aligned in their career fields if they're interested, as well as employment transition managers who consistently walk alongside them addressing employment, career goals, and struggles. While these are only a few programs employed here at Operation Job Ready Veterans, our goal in both our one-on-one services and community strategy is to consistently seek opportunities for improvement aligned with our mission to tailor specifically to one-on-one veteran needs.

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Host: Great example. Thank you so much. So along with getting paid less on average, many women also experience the double burden of being responsible for domestic tasks. That might include childcare, aging parent caregiving, unpaid domestic labor, and often they're doing that while being employed outside of the home. How does this affect their experience when seeking employment?

Lourdes: This situation can create challenges in balancing work and family responsibilities, which can also cause stress, fatigue, and limited time and flexibility for job searching, networking, and professional development. Additionally, the need to balance caregiving duties with employment can make it difficult for women to commit to certain work hours or travel requirements, and this can affect their ability to get and keep jobs.

Thankfully, there are resources that help women veterans with family care, mental health counseling, travel and lodging, and other financial assistance when they are on the job hunt and during employment. Some examples of those resources include government programs, veteran support organizations, educational institutions offering on campus childcare, and nonprofit organizations like the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, which offers support to caregivers.

Also, some state and local governments offer childcare subsidies for low-income families, including veterans. These subsidies can help offset these expensive childcare costs. There are also colleges and universities that are more proactive, like Smith College in Massachusetts, which provides on campus childcare through its Center for Early Childhood Education, as well as many after school programs for children.

Leah: ChildCareAware.org is another great resource that has dedicated services for military and DOD families seeking quality and affordable childcare.

Host: Great resources. Thank you both. Now, we also know that homelessness and the risk of homelessness can be, unfortunately, a real concern for the veteran community, but it impacts women quite differently. What are the unique challenges for women veterans facing homelessness?

Lourdes: Sadly, yes. Homelessness is a huge concern in the veteran community. A recent blog post from the VA Homeless Programs Office reported that between

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2020 and 2023, while total homelessness among veterans saw a decrease of 4.5%, homelessness among women veterans saw an increase of nearly 24%, rising from 3,126 to 3,980.

While the overall proportion of women veterans experiencing homelessness is still relatively low, the upward trend is concerning. Especially considering that the VA estimates that women will make up 18 percent of all US veterans by 2040. Additionally, women veterans often will have dependents with them, especially if they're fleeing an environment where there's intimate partner violence or domestic violence.

There are still many myths out there regarding receiving help when you have dependents. Many are concerned that they'll lose their children if they declare homelessness. I just want our listeners to know that that's further from the truth at VA. We will work to ensure that the family unit stays together.

Leah: The unique challenges for women veterans experiencing homelessness are rooted in the multiple layers of trauma they've experienced. A report from the Women's Bureau highlights this, emphasizing how women veterans experiencing homelessness often have significant histories of combat related stress, military sexual assault, and intimate partner violence. Recognizing these unique circumstances is crucial for service providers to offer effective care and support. Additionally, women veterans with children face difficulties finding shelters that accommodate families, intensifying the challenge of securing safe housing for both them and their children.

Host: And now I think there was one more resource from Lourdes that you wanted to talk about on here. What was that one?

Lourdes: Yeah, absolutely. So, the Center recently partnered with the Homeless Program Office, VA, on a podcast called "Ending Homelessness: Improving Access and Outcomes for Women Veterans." So, if you're interested, please give that a listen.

Otherwise, veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are strongly encouraged to contact the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans at 877-424-3838 for assistance. Trained counselors are available 24/7 to provide support.

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Host: Perfect. Thank you so much for sharing that additional one, Lourdes. Now, you can also refer to our NVTI podcast, “Episode 18: Serving Veterans Experiencing Homelessness”, for additional information about programs that support veterans.

There's been a real positive shift in mental health awareness in the veteran community and numerous resources have become available to assist veterans. However, we also know that veterans often do not seek help or access the available resources. Why might women veterans hesitate to seek mental health services? Is there still a stigma associated with it? Deborah, would you share first?

Deborah: Absolutely. Many women may not seek help for all kinds of reasons. It could be because of logistical issues like living in rural areas, not having easy or accessible transportation, or concerns about cost. Some may fear judgment or worry about seeming weak, especially in a military culture that values that strength and resilience. They might not know where to start or even be aware of available mental health resources because they didn't receive enough provisional information when separating from the military.

Lourdes: I absolutely agree with Deborah. The stigma persists in women veterans, especially if they've experienced military sexual trauma or gender-based discrimination, which some find hard to share with those that they do not think will understand. They may also have some privacy concerns or fear that it could impact their professional careers. Service providers should create supportive environments and reassure veterans that care is confidential and private.

Host: That makes a lot of sense. Thank you, Lourdes. And that really does lead me to my next question. How can veteran service providers work to change how mental health is viewed by the women they serve?

Leah: To change perceptions, service providers can actively develop trauma informed care practices and create a supportive and inclusive environment. This involves implementing educational initiatives to debunk myths and reduce stigma, emphasizing that seeking help is a sign of strength. Service providers can also integrate mental health discussions into routine care appointments and utilize gender sensitive language to help normalize conversations around mental health in all veterans.

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Deborah: So good, Leah. Service providers should also seek to go beyond that basic clinical care. It's so important to address immediate medical needs, but also consider mental, emotional, spiritual needs of veterans. Instead of sticking to one provider, spread that support through referrals and recommendations to other providers. After all, it takes a village. Encouraging community support and group workshops outside of the clinical setting can help veterans forge relationships with their peers, help them feel understood, safe, and confident.

Host: Community is so critical in any setting. How important is this connectedness to women veterans specifically?

Deborah: Humanity doesn't thrive in solitude. Connectedness is natural for military women, as we know the importance of teamwork for mission success. This unique connectedness can be challenged at the end of service, so it's ideal to stay connected or venture to plug into a new community or seek to serve in a new capacity for others and oneself. It's so very fulfilling.

Host: Absolutely. No question. How can women veterans find this community? And then further, how can that community help them as they seek employment?

Leah: Joining veteran focus groups, attending network events, and engaging in online forums for women veterans can foster a sense of belonging. This connection is particularly helpful when job hunting as it provides access to a supportive network of women that get it. It opens doors for career coaching, job leads, useful tips for navigating civilian work, and even friendships. Being a part of a community that values your experiences not only boosts your wellbeing, but also plays a big role in landing meaningful employment opportunities.

Deborah: Oh, Leah, I so agree. I have yet to meet another woman veteran that I wouldn't gladly support or cheer on. We are stronger together. So, lean in to build those connections. People like Leah, Lourdes, and myself at Operation Job Ready Veterans are out there in your communities. We're ready to connect and bring value. It's in these networking relationships that one's character, ethics, tenacity, and wisdom are highlighted. It opens doors for employment and career progression, just connecting with one person at a time.

Host: Oh, I love this conversation. Thank you all so much. After transitioning from the military, women veterans are often left asking themselves, "Okay, now

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what?" So what kind of growth and resilience opportunities are available for women veterans? Lourdes, would you mind jumping in first and sharing your thoughts?

Lourdes: Absolutely, Hannah. From a professional standpoint, providing women veterans with the tools, support, and resources they need to successfully transition to civilian life, pursue their goals, and thrive in their post military endeavors will certainly help.

You can go the education route, various organizations offer tailored education and training programs specifically tailored to veterans presenting opportunities for apprenticeship, pursuing higher education, and enhancing career prospects. Or if you'd like to open your own business, many programs offer resources and support for entrepreneurship.

They provide training, mentorship, and access to financing options. Notably, VA's Office of Small Disadvantaged Business Utilization, or OSDBU, has a program for the Commitment to Diversity in Women Veterans in Business, which supports minority and women veterans in business.

Deborah: I'll hop in here and say to you that transition is not the limited time between a military separation date and a start date in a civilian role.

It's an ongoing journey. Growth is personal and communal. Creating connections with others in shared military service, retirement, volunteering, faith groups, mentorship, and education creates that purpose and resilience. Embrace the discomfort of growth for the valued feeling of purpose and connection and community.

Host: That is some fantastic wisdom to share, and I want to thank you all for all of your words and wisdom here today. Unfortunately, because I could talk to you all day, we do have to wrap this amazing podcast up, but I would love to hear any final thoughts. What would you like to leave our audience with today?

Leah: We are here today to learn and engage, but most importantly, celebrate the remarkable women who have served our nation as veterans. Veteran women have demonstrated unwavering dedication to our nation, often in the face of adversity. They've shown resilience, courage, and a commitment to preserving the freedoms we cherish. The journey from military

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service to civilian life can be difficult but does not have to be a journey traveled alone. With the right resources and support, the transition can be smooth and rewarding. You can always use our homepage at www.dol.gov/wb for more resources and veteran data.

Deborah: I second that Leah. While transition may have a separation date in the military, transition does not have an expiration date in life. Together, we celebrate our communities of women veterans, and we seek to continually bridge life's transitional gaps for the many stages of life after and during service. While challenges are not easy to endure, I encourage those listening today to feel empowered in your service, no matter where you're at in your journey.

Reach out, share our resources, and support widely and willingly, and know you are unique, and you have a welcome place of belonging. Operation Job Ready Veterans, www.ojrv.org, and our sister supportive services are here to walk alongside you. We're here to equip, assist, mentor, celebrate, and continue to place our veteran service members and their families in lasting, meaningful employment and community.

Lourdes: I absolutely appreciate everything the ladies have said and echo their sentiments. On a personal note, I know the Air Force taught me lessons about resiliency and grit. Family, friends, mentors, and colleagues who have accompanied me on my veteran journey reinforce my sense of self-worth. They all help us to thrive and grow beyond our perceived limitations.

The fabric of this nation is woven with threads as colorful as our people, and there are over a million stories of women who have shaped the history of this great nation. If you are a woman veteran, go tell yours to the world and inspire hope for the next generation of young women that can make a difference, built on a culture of respect and service.

And the VA Center for Women Veterans is one of the keys dedicated to empowering our women veterans in their veteran journey. Find us at www.va.gov/womenvet. Know that VA is here to be with you as a trusted partner throughout the rest of your journey, whatever your goals and wherever your life leads you.

Host: This has been such an important conversation today. I want to thank you, our panel, for joining us for the podcast and providing all of this valuable information to help our veteran service providers better support women veterans. To our listeners,

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if you would like more information about serving women veterans, please visit NVTI.org to access resources such as this podcast and our Serving Women Veterans class. We are constantly adding new material, so check back often. We also, of course, invite you to continue the conversation at the Making Careers Happen for Veterans Community of Practice. Thank you!

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.