

NVTI Podcast Series

Annual AJC Highlights: 2025

Episode #28 | September 5, 2025

Intro: Welcome to the National Veterans' Training Institute podcast series, where we discuss pressing issues affecting today's veterans.

Host: Hello and welcome to today's NVTI podcast: AJC Highlights: 2025. I'm your host, Hannah, and we are excited to have the recipients of the 2025 Mark Sanders Award, the West Texas Workforce Solutions Centers with us today. Awarded annually at the National Association of State Workforce Agencies, or NASWA, Veterans Conference, the Mark Sanders award recognizes a OneStop Career Center whose efforts to serve veterans go above and beyond the scope of mandatory of service provision. The prestigious award is named in honor of Mark Sanders, who during his career with the California Employment Development Department and in leadership positions with NASWA, was uniting in his efforts to promote excellence in service to disabled veterans.

Today we'll speak with the West Texas Workforce Solutions Center (Abilene, Amarillo, El Paso, Fort Bliss, Lubbock, Midland, Odessa, San Angelo, and Wichita Falls), who were nominated by the Texas Veterans Commission that administers the JVSG program in partnership with the Texas Workforce Commission. Let's start with introductions. If everyone here would tell us your role, the community you serve, a little bit more about that, and the one thing you're the most proud of in your work with veterans. Let me turn it over to our guests for just a moment.

Tremayne Hubbard: So, I will go ahead and kick this off. My name is Tremayne Hubbard. I am the district manager for the Texas Veterans Commission, Veteran Employment Services, West Texas District, and as previously noted, the seven Workforce Board or location areas is where we serve here in Texas. We have 107 of the 254 counties and as a retired Air Force member, I enjoy coming to work every day and providing veterans with hope and vision to find a great career through our services underneath the JVSG program.

Scott Graves: Morning. My name is Scott Graves and I'm part of the Texas Veterans Commission, very fortunate to be so, and I'm a district outreach coordinator. I live and work in El Paso and we have countywide, about 60,000 plus veterans and we've got Fort Bliss, which is populated with another 50,000 or so active-duty soldiers and their family members and dependents. So, we have a wide-ranging group of folks that are eligible for, potentially eligible for service under the JVSG grants. It's a, it's a wonderful job to have. I have lots of veterans in my personal family, many who have been affected through combat or by having participated in combat through the, the US military, and so the gratifying side for me is, while I haven't always been able to help directly family members, I can get that feeling of helping overall by working directly with veterans, and I really enjoy doing that and it's the, it's the thing that I wake up for every day.



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Darrell Henderson: Okay, I guess I'll go next. Hey, my name is Darrell Henderson. I serve as the Local Veterans' Employment Representative, with the Texas Veterans Commission here in El Paso. Specifically, I work on Fort Bliss. In my role, I work directly with employers locally and, and nationwide, community partners, and I work with veterans and mostly here on Fort Bliss, I work with transitioning service members. And I've tried to work with employers to create employment opportunities for the veterans and transitioning service members. My mission is to kind of bridge the gap between military service and civilian careers by connecting veterans, transitioning service members with the employers who would directly benefit from their skills from being in the military. One of the things that I'm most proud of is that I was also a service member of 24 years in the Army and I faced some challenges getting out of the military myself, trying to find a, a career when I got out and since I found the Texas Veterans Commission it gave me an opportunity to actually give back and still continue to serve my community. So, thank you.

Melayia Crum: Hello. My name is Melayia Crum. I am in the Wichita Falls office. I am our Disabled Veteran Outreach Program, also known as the DVOP, specialist and our district coach. So, I have two roles that I'm very thankful for. The first is I get to work with veterans that have qualifying barriers to employment as well as transitioning service members and, and through individualized career services, I get to help them with overcoming those barriers so they can achieve their employment goals. And the second half of my role is providing mentorship, training and technical assistance to our West Texas team. One thing that I'm proud of is I was really sad that my time in the military had ended a lot earlier than I had planned it to be and so I still get to keep serving even while no longer in uniform and helping fellow veterans, not just with finding employment but also helping them with changing their whole quality of life.

Host: Thank you all and thank you so much for being here. We hear that continuation of service so often and continue to hear that from, from all of you all. Thank you again. Now, we also heard from, from you all that the West Texas Workforce Solutions Center District covers 107 counties across 10 offices. That's a huge area. You cover a huge area. I would love to hear, and I think our, our listeners would love to hear just kind of a snapshot of the districts and what makes your service population so distinct and so, so unique. So just tell us a little bit about those 107 counties.

Tremayne: I'd definitely love to share about our coverage area and so as the JVSG program, you know the, the Texas model is it is different than what you see in most states, you know with the JVSG program being underneath the Texas Veterans Commission and in our process of that 107 counties that we cover for the West TX district, we also are in two different time zones. So, we're in the central time zone and the mountain time zone and believe it or not, just about our, our staff is kind of about split in half where we have 12 members of our staff that are in El Paso and I'd like to kind of break that down a little bit further. Actually on Fort Bliss in El Paso, we have two DVOP specialists, one LVER or L-V-E-R, and recently, recently we added in what's



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called a family career advisor on that installation so we have four of those individuals that are really close to the exiting process, being located really close to the Soldier for Life Center, where they can attend briefings as individuals are getting out and basically having our services very close to those service members that are separating or retiring. Additionally in El Paso, we are housing two additional Workforce Centers, where we have in each respectively, 2 DVOP specialists and one LVER. And so when we are set up that way, we're basically in a point in El Paso where we're catching individuals that are separating or retiring from Fort Bliss, which has a huge, huge population, but we're also there for those individuals that have already transitioned out and still are within the El Paso community.

What kind of makes us unique outside of El Paso, is that we have three other military installations and so we have two training bases. One is in Wichita Falls where earlier, district coach Melayia Crum, who is a DVOP was, where she is located, where she goes out and talks with transitioning service members and individuals that are retiring. And in her office, she is a DVOP along with a LVER in that office as well. In our Saint Angelo office, which is very close to Goodfellow Air Force Base, we have a CODL, or consolidated individual, by the name of Zachary Peterson, and so Zach is very involved in getting out and helping even at that location with the transitioning service members in those, at that installation. In Abilene, where Dyess Air Force Base is, and it's one of our largest Air Force bases is in the district, we have two DVOPs, two LVERs, and a family career advisor because there is a dense population of veterans in that area. But all of these offices and locations I've mentioned so far also have outlying offices in, in rural cities that are anywhere from 40 miles up to 110 miles away from what we would consider to be the hub AJC that they're also required to provide services to, and so our staff does a lot of outreach to those other office locations by going and visiting them, normally on a quarterly basis, setting up events at those locations so we can really meet the veteran where they are. Outside of the ones that are previously mentioned, we do have staff members in Amarillo, Texas, up in the Panhandle, also in Lubbock, which is in the, you know, up in the South Plains part of Texas. And then lastly, I don't want to forget our Midland Odessa area, which is very heavy in the gas and oil business and so we have positions there. We actually have two consolidated positions, one is on Midland College, and the other one is on the Workforce Center office in Odessa. And also, we just got approved to put another consolidated position in Fort Stockton, just to reduce the amount of travel time that veterans have to, to travel to, to get in front of a JVSG staff member. So, we put someone in Fort Stockton, which kind of covers down on our distance between El Paso and Odessa, which is about a 285-mile stretch of land. So, when we talk rural, we're talking a really rural area of, of West Texas and so that's kind of our makeup of, of how we're set up as far as the JVSG program.

We work in very close relationships with our workforce partners to be able to deliver services along with doing many things like workshops, hiring events and things along that line. And so one of the things that we try to do is be very targeted in our outreach and our events in, in the

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rural areas by creating a battle rhythm of creating a schedule to be very consistent on when we're going to be there to be able to meet with the, with customers and employers.

Melayia: I think I'll, I'll take it next. Just to piggyback off of the ruralness, which is the very area that I cover. So, the, the areas that I serve are, it's a bit challenging because they are pretty rural and what Trey was mentioning about really relying on our workforce partners and so I am very thankful that we do have our outlying offices. And once a quarter, they each put on a job fair or resource fair that myself and our veterans' employer liaison, Sherry Dunn attend so that way we're always out in the community serving the veteran population that don't have access to come into our main office here in Wichita Falls. So just being able to, to provide that one-on-one assistance there and also to you know be able to talk to them about the services that the workforce also has to offer because there's kind of that misconception that some veterans have that they think they can only receive services from other veteran organizations, so just reiterating the services that they do have, but also the ones that are also available to them through us. But what I also, while it is hard, I do really appreciate being in a rural area because what it does is it builds a sense of community. So that saying less is more, sometimes, not all the time, but it does apply to us.

What we ended up doing was we have established a veteran's coalition in our area. So, one of our also nonprofit partners, Catholic Charities, they really spearhead that. So, all of the organizations within our very rural area come together and we talk about any kind of upcoming services that we may be getting. So, if they have any grants that they've just received, what those grants will entail and what additional things they'll be able to provide. We also look at areas where we are not able to meet services for veterans. So, one of the big issues that we had was transportation, and so we come together and we meet, how can we, how can we find those services for those veterans. And it really encourages us to think outside of the box. But it, it provides that sense of community. So, it's really, really heartfelt to share a like mind with others that share the same mission with you, even outside of your organization and coming together and just seeing what can we do more of and what, what have so little to give.

Scott: And just to cover a little bit for El Paso and Fort Bliss and some of what makes us unique here, is Fort Bliss recently we, we underwent some really, really large changes starting from about 2010 forward. But we had the General Jack Pershing here and he launched the Punitive Expedition into Mexico in, around 1915, 1916. And then Fort Bliss also participated in World War II, and we had German POWs on Fort Bliss and, and then it was the Air Defense post for the, the Army for years and for probably 30-40 years it essentially was that Air Defense post and it was roughly about 9000 to between nine and ten thousand soldiers on Fort Bliss for 30 or 40 years.

So it was, if you consider all of the population of the El Paso region in the county and the city proper, it's about 1,500,000 people and so Fort Bliss for a long time, but with 9 to 10,000

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soldiers was just a little blip. It was just a dot in the desert, and you could hardly tell it was here. That's, during the time period that I came, when it was Air Defense post here and I was in an Air, Air defense job in the Army. And I transitioned from Fort Bliss into the El Paso community. And Fort Bliss has always contributed about 7% of all the people getting out of the Army there to the El Paso community. They either retire here, or they stay here and that's pretty consistent to this day.

And then around 2010, the base realignment occurred, and Congress established Fort Bliss as an armor post, and so the first armored division is there now. There's more or less always between four and five heavy combat brigades and all the supporting units that are around that. And then the families that came in behind that and at any given time were about 40 to 50,000 soldiers and about 19,000 soldiers, according to the Transition Assistance Program on Fort Bliss, around 19,000 soldiers a year, not just from Fort Bliss but from a variety of different places, including the Reserves and, and sometimes the, the National Guard, they will transition through the, off of active duty or mobilization, and they'll be demobilized. And about 7% of those as well are landing in El Paso and either retiring or, assuming residence in El Paso.

So that's a uniqueness, I think of our population here and it and in El Paso, we have a very large retiree population. People like to retire here, and they like to retire here because it's a relatively safe place. It is a clean place, it is, we've got a great VA in El Paso and it's very accessible, it's very helpful. And the taxes are relatively low when you compare other places. So, people want to stay here. And so, we have a large retiree community, we have a large community that transitions and decides to live here. And then we have some folks from the military that decide to, that they spent a career in the military and they are from El Paso and El Paso itself contributes a lot of people to the United States Military in all of the branches. And so, they come back to, to live here. And it is a, a very good community to live in. And so having transitioned myself, I have a lot of sympathy and understanding, empathy towards the people that transition out here because it, it is discombobulating to go from active duty and having, having to convert over to the civilian world and then land on your feet and find a career. So, you know, we, all of the staff here in El Paso, I can speak to, works very hard to make sure that that transition works well for those folks, especially those that are stationed on Fort Bliss. Our staff that are stationed on Fort Bliss, they work very hard with a lot of, of people coming through our system. So that that's a unique aspect of El Paso.

Darrell: You can always count on Scott to follow up some history here. Now, out here in left Texas, which, which is West Texas, out here we have some of the biggest counties with not a lot of bodies in them. So, we, from El Paso all the way down to Brewster County, we have a lot of territory that we have to cover. And somehow, we do that all the way out here in El Paso. And one of the biggest things is we cover, well, we have we're bordered by two big borders. So, we, we are called the borderplex out here. So, we're bordered by Mexico, and we're also bordered by New Mexico. And so, we have a lot of our veteran population based in, in three different

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areas. So that's one of the ways that we are unique out here. My population really is based out here on Fort Bliss and we are one of the biggest military installations in the country. So, we do have thousands and thousands of service members transitioning out of the Army every year. Of course, along with their spouses and family, family members who are also looking for career opportunities. Our population is very unique because we do bring the Army, or at least our transitioning service members, bring a lot of highly transferable skills, discipline, and leadership experience and a lot of them are fairly new to the civilian job market. So, my role is about making that connection, helping employers across this huge region and seeing the value of hiring veterans and making sure they're transitioning service members, and their families are understood in how to market themselves and their employers. And the great thing about this job is I get to talk to both sides. I get to talk to the employers, and I get to talk to the transitioning service members, and I get to try to help bridge that gap. And so, we are very unique out here in El Paso and Fort Bliss, and I think that's what separates us from the rest of the state and the rest of the country.

Host: Wow, I feel like I just learned so much in those answers, and you're right, got a history lesson, learned about the state of Texas and so much about your work and I feel a little silly asking this question now. I'm going to anyway. Tremayne, I'm asking you a question, but I feel like we've heard a lot of this already. This is just going to give you a chance to really hone in on it, but specifically from your leadership perspective, what really stands out about this team's work? What really would you like to highlight? And, and again, I feel like we're hearing a lot of it, but, but yeah, what would you like to highlight and what stands out about this team's work?

Tremayne: This team comes to work every day with a mindset of helping their fellow veterans and employers recruit the right talent to fill their positions, for a career, not just for a job but for a career and the innovation that each one of these individuals brings to the table, like what can we try? What can we do better? Simply amazes me on, on the daily basis. Their out-of-the-box thinking on collaborating with other agencies and other veteran organizations to help veterans in all facets is what makes this team great. From, you know, partnering with other DOL programs like OBTT, Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Programs, and how they look at those partners and go how can we help? How can we collaborate so the veterans can get the best possible service and assistance that's out there and available to them? Also, you know, partnering with other JVSG staff from other states. We, we had a collaboration between Texas and Oklahoma, for a casino that was being open in Oklahoma, so their just out-of-the-box thinking and, and going, you know what? And, and even in that situation, working together for a common goal was fantastic. Our, you know our DVOPs on Fort Bliss and in every other location that, when they're sitting down and talking with these transitioning service members, even if they're not staying in Texas, making sure that they're going to the Career OneStop and giving them information on how to get in touch with a DVOP in another state, that they're going to. So, their selfless work ethic is something that is very hard to, from my standpoint, really get people to understand their true impact and how much work they're putting in to ensure the success of, of a fellow veteran



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or transitioning service member. Those are the things that, that stick out to me. Every day, they are looking at ways to go, how as a JVSG staff, how can we be better? What more can we do? How can we serve even more veterans? And that is the thing that makes me super proud of this team.

Host: And you can, yep, yeah, absolutely hear that 100% and let's actually dive into that some more into some specifics because your team has developed some really impressive program and I think folks are going to really benefit from hearing more about the steps taken to develop and implement these programs because they could definitely be replicable. So, let's take a little bit of time to dive into the details. Specifically, let's, let's talk about March for Success. March for Success and Salute for September. These have become signature programs. Darrell, will you walk us through what these are and why they've been so impactful?

Darrell: Yes, thank you for that. So, here on, in in El Paso, we are known for our two big hiring expos, March to Success and Salute to September. And of course, March to Success is in March and Salute to September is in September. And so, these are our signature programs for here, here in El Paso. These are large hiring expos that bring together hundreds of veterans, transitioning service members, military spouses and of course, employers who are dedicated to hiring the military community. Now, did you know that a lot of organizations do put on hiring events, but they actually charge their employers for it? Some communities or some, some people actually charge their employers up to \$1500 a table. We actually charge our employers nothing. It's at no cost to the employers for them to come to our hiring events. And that's one thing that our employers are really impressed about, is that we do not charge. And that seems to bring a lot of employers back out to our events year after year. And what makes them so impactful is the scale and the focus. At our most recent events, we had over 100 employers and more than 800 job seekers come through the doors and we have had dozens of interviews conducted on the spot. We've had plenty of confirmed hires that come from these events. And that's just some of the immediate impacts. Also, the, the bigger impact is the bridge that it builds. Service members leaving Fort Bliss can walk into these expos and see firsthand that the employers, that employers across these industries, from healthcare, logistics, IT, manufacturing are actively looking for their skills. At the same time, employers walk away with a new appreciation for just how much talent the veteran population brings. So, to me, that's why these events matter. They're not just job fairs, they're community showcases that highlight the strength of our military population and connects them to real, long-lasting careers.

And we wouldn't be able to do this without the partnership of our Armed Forces Reserve Center. They have a lot of transitioning or reservists and National Guard members that are coming back from deployment. And we do this in their facility and it's a huge facility that we're able to house these career fairs and to be able to do that in their house with a lot of these service members coming back from deployment and from their border mission because a lot of those National Guard and reservists are coming back to maybe no job or maybe being underemployed. And to

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be able to do this at their door and to be able to provide them with employers, that really feels good. To be able to get those, get those job seekers some employment. So, thank you for that question.

Host: Now, Scott, you've been deeply, deeply involved with the Veteran Treatment Court and the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program partnerships. Would you share a bit about how these initiatives came together and the results that you've seen from those?

Scott: The Texas Veterans Commission funds the Veterans Treatment Courts, and they fund them with a lot of money, and so they, they keep them going. And the best thing about these Veteran Treatment Courts is that they, they remove veterans from the, what I would call the normal criminal justice system, so the normal courts where when they go to court the, and it's just kind of the nature of the system I guess, the way that the normal courts are oriented when someone is charged with let's say DWI, it, it is aimed almost entirely at punitive measures for having committed a crime and so the, the veteran that goes into that system, the normal, the non-treatment court system is facing punitive measures. Simple as that, just punishment. The treatment court flips that model on its head, and it goes for a rehabilitative approach for the veterans. And so, the veterans are, they have to agree to go into the court. There has to be all kinds of counseling sessions before they go in there to agree that, yes, this is the best approach for this veteran, to be in the program and to engage in treatment of the, of the issues rather than just solely focusing on the punitive aspect and so that that's really the best thing about the court is it, it goes in and it deals with underlying issues that soldiers tend to have, which can lead to substance abuse disorders and usage and in conflict with the law.

And two of the, the main issues that we see are traumatic brain injuries and, which you don't always understand what you're looking at when you see traumatic, traumatic brain injury, you may look at somebody and think well they're, they're uncooperative or they're, maybe they're just mentally ill, when really what they're struggling with is, is having received trauma to their heads that maybe having driven over an explosive device and, and received a lot of trauma and there's a lot of folks like that. I mean, a lot of people, Afghanistan was full of that. And so, they, you, you can look at them and think, well, it's one thing, but this forces them to go in and get the treatment that they need. And veterans that have post-traumatic stress and that they're, they're still not in a safe place on that. And they may be self-medicating or self-treating. A lot of the issues that come along with PTS, they, they have to go into those courts and they have to submit to the, the treatment, and then they have to be tested and they have to be monitored and they have to be open to being checked 24/7 on a moment's notice for any kind of substances or to make sure they're in the right place, that they're supposed to be in and they're abiding by the terms of the court supervision. So, they are very strict with them. However, it forces them into rehabilitative process, and some of them they, they start out resisting that but by the 6th, 12th, 18th month, those folks are transformed and our role is to set in on that, that process and to make sure that those, those veterans are gainfully and meaningfully employed. A lot of them

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are, a lot of them, when they go into court, they they've already got their jobs or they're running a business. And they're, they're going through that program and they're doing fine financially, but a lot of them aren't. And so that's where we come in and we grab them and then we put them through our program, make them job ready, connect them with our, with our LVERs, and they help connect them to work. And so that's one aspect of it.

Now, when we were, while we've been working on that program, when OBTT, the off-base transition training, came about and when that started being implemented, we saw the opportunity to put it right straight into that court. And then I think one of the innovative aspects that we took when we started that was we asked the court if they would give them community service hours, rather than just going and washing fire trucks or police cars or doing some other punitive type of community service work, we asked them if we could give them, award them community service hours for attending that training with the hopes that the veterans would come in and, and prepare themselves to find work or to prepare themselves to find better, higher paying work and, and add to the reduction in recidivism that they might experience. And you don't see too much recidivism, honestly, out of this program, because I think the veterans that get into it, they're they already have the frame of mind that, yeah, they do want a second chance and they get one there. But there is some percentage, a small percentage of it. So, we think helping increase their employability reduces that and so that's what we've worked really hard to do and a lot of veterans have taken advantage of that. The, the secondary thing, the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program. We started doing something new this year and it and our district manager spearheaded this and saw the opportunity to get us into the American GI Forum, where a lot of that grant is implemented through and where a lot of homeless veterans go. And so what we decided to do was to place a staff member at the GI Forum once a week to do an intake process with the, the homeless veterans that are being placed into the, into housing and, and they're being handled by GI Forum and so we do co-case management with them. We're working on those homeless folks from two ends, of their social problems are being addressed, their substance abuse problems are being addressed, and then their employment issues are being addressed and it's, it's been very successful. And we brought the OBTT program into the GI Forum as well and made sure that each one of those homeless folks or the previously homeless veterans, the, the ones that now have housing are able to attend those workshops as well and increase their employability. So very happy with how it's turned out and I, I think it's been very beneficial for folks across the board and, and yeah, we're seeing results from it.

Host: That is phenomenal. That is, that's fantastic. I love hearing about these programs. And we've got another one to hear about as well. And this one's going to be from Melaysia. You took the Off Base Transition Training on the road with the OBTT Roadshow reaching nearly 400 participants. How did that program evolve and what did you learn about meeting those veterans where they are? I really want to hear some more about that specific program. You guys have done so many cool things!



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Melayia: Thank you, Hannah. Yes, so the OBTT roadshow had actually started out, of course we had OBTT classes going on in El Paso, but the roadshow actually started out with a vision from Trey, our district manager. So OBTT stands for off Base Transition Training, which is a pilot program from the Department of Labor. And what they do is they bring a variety of instructor-led and just really high-quality job readiness workshops along with workbooks to veterans and transitioning service members and their families. I also want to make sure that I mention National Guard and Reserves as well. So, while we have in-person workshops that OBTT does in our more metroplex areas like El Paso, Austin, Dallas and Houston, we have veterans that have a hard time in our rural areas, so OBTT does offer a series of virtual workshops as well. They have a really great listing that they keep up with weekly. So, we had, we saw that there was a disparity and a hardship with veterans accessing internet capabilities, or even with them just having a hard time using computers in general. So, in conjunction with our annual Hiring Red, White and You job fair, which is held annually statewide around Veteran's Day. And while it is open to the public, it is geared more towards veterans, transitioning service members, and their family. That OBTT Roadshow brings those in person workshops into our rural areas to give all of our veterans a chance to really hone up on their job readiness, their job readiness skills so that they're better prepared and more confident and they have that upper advantage while they're going into that Hiring Red, White and You job fair.

So, the first year, Trey really kicked it off and it was fantastic. We had a really great turn out and that was, we were told that that was the most participants that OBTT had in a single week and first we started off small, so we had three locations, our Wichita Falls Office, our San Angelo office and our Abilene office. Just to kind of get a feel to see how, how it would, you know how it would end up, how would this work out for our rural areas? And it was a huge success. And so afterwards, there was, of course, an after action because we're all veterans. So, so we did our after action. We met up and, and it was discussed, how do we make this bigger? How do we make this better? So, the discussion of bringing in more of our rural offices into it was had. So, then we brought in our Amarillo and our Lubbock office and our Odessa Midland office and so we brought them in, and we were able to train them up on our best practices. You know, how did, what did we learn from last time? Where did we feel like we can do better? And so that way we were able to set them up for success in their first year and hosting it in their home offices as well as how do we get OBTT, their name out there. Moreso what we did was we looked at bringing in our other partner agencies. So, we actually had brought in the, the Texas Veterans Network powered by Combined Arms. And they consist of more than 300 veteran focused community-based organizations and government agencies and just thousands and thousands of other resources that holistically serve the veteran and military community. So, we brought them in. So, during the lunch break, they provide lunch for our attendees that are there in the workshops and they also do a presentation on their organization, so veterans are able to walk away with additional resources, not just job readiness workshops. They're able to find any type

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of services that they're needing in their area, whether it be mental health counseling, health services, even just trying to find peer groups or anything that they're looking for.

And so, then, the, the second year, that's what we did for the second year, and it, it really took off. And then we started looking at, well, how do we make this better? So, one of the things that we're always looking for within our district, are leadership opportunities. We want everyone to be able to showcase their leadership skills. So each year it's been decided that we now pass the baton on to someone else who wants to take on the task, and it, it's a pretty big deal because it's not just, it's not just the Texas Veterans Commission, it's just it's not just West Texas, we're trying to share that success with our other districts within Texas, within the Texas Veterans Commission, and we're also sharing that success with our partner agencies as well. So, so yeah, it's, it's become really big. It's become very exciting. What the most rewarding part is, is just providing those opportunities to our veterans that may not have them in their areas. And also just, I guess, just the, the best part is just seeing everyone's eyes get big when a question is addressed that they had longed to have an answer to, or after the OBTT roadshow has concluded and we go into the job fair, just being there at the job fair and seeing the veterans and transitioning service members and their families that attended the OBTT roadshow come in with their resumes that they've prepared and they say things like, hey, I was able to take the skills from on the spot interviewing or how to market yourself during a job fair, and they come in just with their head held high and well dressed and better prepared and they're really able to handle themselves amongst hundreds of other job seekers that are there as well. So just seeing, just seeing your, your fellow veterans succeed in something that you were able to do for them, that really is just the, that's the prize right there. And that's what we look forward to every year. So, every year, we actually are in the planning midst for our upcoming OBTT roadshow, it was mentioned our RVCA, our CODL, Zachary Peterson, is spearheading it this year. He's doing a fantastic job. Where it, it, it's a multitude of agencies coming together for our common goal. So, he's been handling it very well. And next year one of our staff members will have the opportunity to also spearhead that and take on some leadership opportunities as well. And we're looking forward to it this year. We're of course, always in competition with one another to see who can bring the most veterans in to, to be able to give the most services. But of course, it's all out of love and community. So, we're, we're really looking forward to it. Thank you so much for that question.

Host: Absolutely. I love it. I love it. I love the camaraderie and the embedded competition as well as the embedded knowledge management that you all have to make sure that everybody is being trained up on, on various tasks and skills. That's just, just fantastic. And it's also very clear from everything that you're saying that you all do a great job of leveraging partnerships with other agencies and organizations to better serve your participants. And we know that that's necessary across the board. I think our listeners could probably really benefit from hearing just a little bit more about that. So, how did you bring those partners into the work and what role have they played in your success within these various programs?



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Tremayne: And Hannah, I kind of want to make sure that we touch base on our DOL VETS state director Brian Schroeffer. Because you have to have a great relationship with your DVET. Because with OBTT, you know through Serco, which is one of our great partners. We literally had to go through a process and get approved through DOL VETS and Serco to even start this OBTT Roadshow, because the only city that it had been identified to occur in was El Paso. So, when it came to Texas, they basically picked up the five major cities, which was El Paso, Houston, San Antonio, Dallas Fort Worth and Austin. Those were the five cities that OBTT was being offered in in-person classes and so we went to our DVET Brian with, with a proposal. And so, I definitely want to give kudos to, to him for listening to our idea, supporting our, our idea, and, and doing the networking with Serco to, to make this happen. And so that's just one example of the partnership. Mr. Henry Davis, who is the employment resource coordinator for Serco out in El Paso. Henry does a fantastic job, even when we have our district training, Henry comes to our district training. He gives us an update on what's going on with OBTT and we're in continuous conversations with him. Mr. Edward Jones, who is the ERC down in the Austin area, who has traveled for the last two years to make this roadshow come to light, and I just want to give props to them for also seeing the vision of what we can do when we all come together. As partners in, in the world of supporting and providing services to veterans.

Melayia: I'll take it next. So other ways that we're able to bring partners into the work that we do is through our local service provider outreach. So we do, that's a big part of our job is we're always in a community outreaching, talking to other organizations about what it is that we do and how we service veterans and so in return, we're able to learn a lot about what they do. And so through a lot of outreach we just really develop our, our database and our pocketbooks of information of who does what and who is able to assist us where, so when we are meeting with our clients, we know we know everyone on a first name basis of who, who they need to see next. And we're able to make those warm handoffs and get them scheduled into appointments right before they even leave our office. So, we do connect with other organizations by finding common goals and, and building those strong relationships through our outreach. They really do help us out by offering services to veterans and so that way our veterans, they really can get everything they need and be ready for work and just really just have a successful quality of life.

Scott: And I'd like to add that what, what I routinely try to do is I try to make sure and figure out what is making a partner agency or the person in the partner agency tick. In other words, when I work with the folks over in GI Forum, I ask the person I'm working with, that one that I have a client in common with, I say, okay, what is your performance standard for this client? What are you going to be judged on for this client? And very often with them, it's whether the client goes to work or not. Well, guess what? We have that in common. My goal is to get that veteran to work too, and that's a performance standard of mine. So, I like to burrow down with every partner I work with and find out what is it that's making you tick organizationally. What are you, you know what's making you deserve your paycheck? And once I find that out, I align. If I've got



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an aligning standard, boom, we're partners because we're both going in the same direction. We both have to accomplish the, a similar goal and I let them know those things up front, too. Hey, you've got to do this. I've got to do this. Let's do it together because we're both going to get a win on this. We're both going to get points on this when, when our veteran walks away, meaningfully employed. And so yes, it's fun to do those things. It's absolutely fun, but we have performance standards too. And, and the minute you can align a performance standard in common with your partner agency. Everybody's on the same page and we're all, we're all doing exactly what we need to do and it's, it's good, it's healthy for everybody. It's healthy for the client. It's healthy for the partner. It's healthy for us. So that's, that's the main approach that I try to take when working with different partners.

Darrell: I think after COVID one of the big, one of the big ideas that I had was I wanted to try to find us a, a space that we could use for hiring events. Because our partner agency, Texas Workforce Commission, they'll let us use their, their space inside the workforce centers to bring employers in. But the spaces are not big enough for what I wanted to do. I mean, we could bring in employers onesie, twosies, and that's, that's fine, but I wanted something bigger. So, I had the mission to find us a space that we could use at no cost. And through outreach, I was able to find the Armed Forces Reserve Center that I mentioned before and I have to throw the kudos out like, like Trey did, to one of our, our point of contacts down there at the reserve center, the Soldier and Family Readiness Specialist, Ms. Mary Goldsmith. And one of the Battalion OIC's, it's Major Hartis. Now Mary has been instrumental for us because she bridges, she's the bridge to the families. She makes sure the soldiers, and the families know about the resources available, not just for themselves, but for their spouses and children as they prepare, prepare for their transition. Major Hartis is that leadership, because without the leadership we, we need that buy in and that's absolutely critical. Because when the Battalion OIC says that this is important, we want our soldiers and our families to be prepared for civilian life, it sets the tone across the unit and his support gives us the access and the credibility to reach more soldiers and it brings employers right into the room. Together with those partnerships to transform, could have just been another hiring event and that March to Success and Salute to September, it, it really, it's really a great thing that we're doing for the city of El Paso and for the soldiers. So instead of working in silos, we combined our resources, shared our networks, and now we've created something spectacular that not only draws hundreds of job seekers and employers, it really brings a sense of community. So, it's not just me doing all the work, it's the collaboration with partners like Mary and Major Hartis that makes these programs so impactful and sustainable.

Host: That collaboration really is the, the key there and I love that you use the, sustainable as the word because that really is the key to make it sustainable. Because you cannot do it all on your own, right? And Darrell, I want to talk to you a little bit more here because you've been, as you've talked about, embedded on Fort Bliss, directly connecting with transitioning service members and employers. And that's just a really unique, really amazing position to be in and I want you to talk a little bit more, if you would, about how being inside the installation changes

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the way that you serve those participants. How does that change and how does that impact the way you're able to serve participants in your program?

Darrell: Well, prior to being embedded on Fort Bliss, I was, I was in a downtown location so I was removed from Fort Bliss. I do have two career advisers that worked on Fort Bliss and they would send me, they would send me the soldiers to, what we do, we call it a case conference. So, once they get the veteran job ready by, you know, getting them interview prepared, job search, they know how to job search, they get their resumes squared away and they give them the labor market. They would send them to me, and I would try to make that connection with the employer to see if they have an open position. And then I would advocate for the veteran, and not always, I would be able to see the soldier face to face. But now that I'm on Fort Bliss. I can actually talk with the soldier face to face instead of virtually, and I can ask some of those questions that maybe I wasn't, maybe not comfortable asking virtually. So now I can actually be a bit more personable with the soldier, and I get to meet the soldier where they are while they're still in uniform and planning their next chapter of their life. And so, I can advocate for them a bit more and have a bit more personality to be able to advocate them for the employer. Now on the employer side. Here on Fort Bliss, we are fortunate to have what we call TAP Tuesday. That's the Transition Assistance Program. Every Tuesday they have a hiring event right here in the same building that I work at, and they have between 35 and 50 employers in one room at the same time. And they have a busload of soldiers come over and get to meet these employers every Tuesday. So, I'm down there and I get to network with these employers every week. And I get to find out if they have open positions. I get to find out what their hiring practices are, and I know of when the open positions become available and I'm able to advocate for those soldiers, even when it's not on a Tuesday. And I think that's a great thing. And I'm also here on Fort Bliss, where there are just hundreds of federal contractors coming and going on Fort Bliss on a yearly basis. Of course, that's one of the challenges as well, is figuring out which contractors are here. But that gives me a chance to do some more outreach. But being here on the installation, it shortens the gap between a service member being unemployed after they get out. And I'm able to connect them while they're still on active duty. And if I'm able to catch them early enough, maybe able to find that gap that they may have. Maybe they're missing that education, that certification, or whatever it is, we might be able to send them to a SkillBridge program before they get off of active duty. And they might be able to transition to a job directly after they get out. And so, I think that's what can turn stress into an opportunity and I think that's what gives me the edge being here on Fort Bliss.

Host: Oh, absolutely. I could see that. And, and what an edge and what a unique situation. Very, very, very cool. Now we only have three questions left. Wanted to, to say that for our listeners, we are coming towards the end of our podcast. And what a fantastic conversation it is. I do know, or I have to assume anyway, that serving veterans across such a large and really diverse region isn't easy. We've certainly highlighted that a little bit during our conversation today, but for our listeners, I'd love to just hear a little bit about a challenge that you've faced

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and how you overcame it. We know that that's a great lesson for folks. So, yeah, what's a what's a challenge that you've faced within your role and, and how have you worked to overcome that, if you would, would let us know a little bit more about that please.

Tremayne: I will take that, that question. I think one of the biggest challenge is getting the partners within your AJCs to understand with the JVSG program being a grantee that there's, there's only certain things we can and cannot do, and so, you know, when we're working very close with WIOA case managers and, and people that know similar works as our as our DVOPs do, really getting a clarity on who does what when a customer comes into an AJC. So we have been very engaged in doing partner training to ensure that our partners understand what is coming out through our Veterans Program Letters and, and sharing with them our limitations on things that we can do and, and that's been a challenge to get people to understand that there's, there's only certain things by law that JVSG staff can do, and this team has done a really good job at setting up partner training, which is part of our performance standards to understand, or explain those roles and responsibilities so people don't think that we're just trying to put something on their plate because we don't want to do it, if that makes sense. So, one of the, the challenges is being, getting to the point where we can have open communication and, and good quality training with our partners to really understand roles and responsibilities. And I think part two of that is, you know, as far as metrics and performance standards go, you know we definitely want to be at a point that we are working with our workforce partners, not against and so the collaboration of going, oh y'all just, y'all want all the veterans piece, you know you've worked through a lot of hey let, let's do joint ventures together, there are you know plenty of individuals that can get referred, on jobs, when we're working together, just because the JVSG staff refers a veteran on the job doesn't mean that the work, the workforce BSU team member can't do the same. And so, I think one of the challenges was really kind of pulling down the silos in training and networking to get everybody to understand that everybody that is underneath that umbrella working in that American Job Center, it's a one team, one fight. And I think we have been preaching that that message and walking that, that pathways with our partners to the point to where it's not a challenge as much now as it was in the beginning, just to really get everybody aligned and understanding that we're all one team, you know, one fight, we just have a particular focus in the JVSG program to assist and help our veterans, transitioning service members, and dependents.

Melayia: And I think I'll, I'll pick it up after Trey. One of the, one of our big challenges or one of the big challenges that I face in, in our area and I know I mentioned this a lot, but it, it is hard out here for us, as reaching veterans in remote areas especially with limited access to services. We have veterans that, that I serve in, in our area that are sometimes an hour to an hour and a half away from my office location so, so I overcome that and I know a lot of us in our rural areas, we just really overcome that by building not just strong local partnerships but also strong partnerships within our AJC's and like Trey was saying with having continuous partner training so that way they know the proper avenues that, that we have to go through in order for us to be



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able to serve veterans. So just making sure that that is done, but also just having a continuous presence. That's also very important. We make it a point to be at one of our local, one of our outlying offices at least once a quarter. So, we, we do that through the job fairs and the resource events that they hold. So, myself or our veterans employer liaison, Sherry Dunn, or both of us will go and attend to those meetings. So that way we're, we're helping not just the veterans in those areas, but also the employers because the employers are looking at hiring veterans as well. So she builds those relationships with the employers and, and I focus on the veterans becoming job ready so we can, we can hand them off to each other. But, that we, we're just always finding new, new avenues, whether it be virtual tools, whether it be training to make sure that we're all working cohesively with one another and just staying connected. Of course, we still always have our challenges. That's just part of the job. So you can't ever just smooth everything out 100%, but what's really just helpful is having a network of, of individuals and colleagues who share the same goal as you and that are always just willing to help you out along the way and being able to do anything that they can to make those challenges less, less burdening.

Darrell: I think one of the big challenges that I think that we all face is that you can't help every veteran or servicemember that comes to the door, especially on the, on the LVER side land the exact job that they want right away. Some of our veterans have their sights set on a particular industry or job, but they might be missing one or two key pieces that the employers are looking for. Most employers are looking for a combination of three things: education, certifications, and experience. And because our veterans have been serving their country, shooting guns, driving tanks, flying airplanes, I guess in the Air Force or driving boats in the Navy, I guess, right. They may be short on one, sometimes all three of those requirements, the education, the certs or the experience. The good news is there are resources to help fill those gaps. Some veterans may still be able to use their GI bill, cover the education piece. At least here in El Paso, we're fortunate to have a program called Pathways for Heroes funded by our Workforce partners, which can help transitioning service members earn those certifications that they need. For the experience, that's where it gets tricky, and that's where my role really comes into effect. I can often advocate directly with the employers to help them see how military experience can actually translate into that job that they're looking for. And you know, as long as we have the resume, you know, written the right way with the help of our veteran career advisors, you know we can show them that some of their soft skills, the leadership, the discipline and even their technical skills that they gained while driving those boats, flying those airplanes and shooting up tanks and whatever else we do in the military, that's exactly what the employer is actually looking for. And that's exactly where I spend a lot of my energy these days. Talking to the employers.

Scott: What I would add is I would add that sometimes one of the challenges we can have in the, in a more densely populated area is that we have too many clients and we cannot serve them all. And so, what I would recommend with that is to share the clients with other agencies.

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There are other agencies that do things similar to what we do here and a little bit of overlap in regard to that, but that's a good thing. And some of the folks we run into, some of the veterans we run into, they're not eligible for JVSG, but that doesn't mean it's the end of the road for assistance for them. We have partners in AJCs that we can lean on, and we have partners in, in other agencies, agencies on Fort Bliss that we can lean on. And so, I think not feeling like you have to, you have to be intensive with every single client and just realize that you can share with others. That's what I would recommend as a solution.

Host: Fantastic examples and great solutions to go along with them, so I think those will be really useful to our listeners. Thank you all so much. We know that winning the Mark Sanders Award was a huge achievement and congratulations on that again, of course, that's, that's why we're having the conversation today. But of course, one of the questions is what's next, what's next for West Texas Workforce Solution Centers? Are there new initiatives already in motion? Are there things you're working on? Not to put pressure on you all, but, but yeah, what's next on the docket for you all?

Melayia: Well, there are always new initiatives in motion. It is always a spinning wheel. This past June here in Wichita Falls, we hosted our first ever Women Veterans Celebration luncheon. It's the first time that this had ever been done in Wichita Falls. We noticed that we were really lacking a community amongst women veterans. So, in observance of Women Veterans Recognition Day, which is June 12th, we had a luncheon where we had 27 women veterans and spouses in our midst. So, we were able to, to celebrate them. And currently, as it was mentioned, we have our third annual OBTT Roadshow in the works. So that way we're able to deliver those job readiness workshops right before, in time of our Hiring, Red, White, and You annual state job fair that is always hosted around Veterans Day. What's just really great about our team is that there's always heart in what we do. As my late grandfather would always say, if you love what you do, you'll never work a day in your life. And so, I feel like that really just drives us daily. There's always a new opportunity to help our fellow brothers and sisters in arms and at the end of the day, West Texas is going to find those opportunities and make that opportunity happen.

Darrell: I think next our 50-meter target is Salute to September, which is on the 18th of September coming up. Right now, we have over 55 employers signed up so far and we're still getting more daily and at last count would you say, Scott, we had over 300 job seekers signed up and those are just the ones that signed up?

Scott: They're in the chute.

Darrell: They're in the chute.

Scott: Yep.



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Darrell: And Scott, our District Outreach Coordinator, has done a phenomenal job at getting the word out for these types of events and I don't know how he does it, but he does a great job of getting the word out to all the job seekers out there. So, we plan on having a big day on the 18th.

Scott: Absolutely. We're going to have a big day, and we are also extending further into our more rural areas, areas as our DM alluded to earlier. And we're we've been doing a lot more outreach into the remote areas of Alpine and Marfa and Presidio and Fort Stockton and generating interest in extending resources to those areas. So I think that's an area to watch for sure and especially when we get a full time staff member out there, we should see a, a lot of changes and, and hopefully we'll be doing more activities to generate interest and, and see what we can do to really penetrate that that area more deeply than we already have. So those are a couple of things on the on the burner for the future here.

Host: Wow, I love that I asked for, hey, do you all have anything in addition to winning this really prestigious award and you just came with examples, just loaded me up with them. Those were fantastic. Thank you so much. And there were a lot of them. I should not be surprised at all from you all that there were a lot of them. That was fantastic. As we close out this podcast and again, thank you all so much for, for joining, for spending this much time with us, for all of your expertise, for all of the actionable information, I think there's been some really good examples provided. Are there any final thoughts that you all would like to share about the great work you've been doing? Any advice that you'd like to offer listeners who want to replicate your success or just any final thoughts that you would like to share with our listeners as we close out this podcast?

Tremayne: I would like to start with, it's all about relationships and understanding how even the JVSG staff fits into the world of employment services worldwide and, and developing relationships to work together our, our veterans employment liaisons, they go out with our, our BSU team leads when they visit employers. So, you, you know, we're trying to make sure that when we're out, we are doing things in a way that we are delivering the whole workforce system to the best, to the best of our ability. I, I would say that is one. As, as a manager, I try to hear out everything that my staff is bringing to me as an idea and, and making sure they, they know they are heard. And I think that's the, the biggest thing is, is, is letting your staff know that they're appreciated, rewarding them, you know, when we can. One of the things that we were also fortunate enough to do in the West TX district about 3 years ago, is we also started a, a star performer of the quarter program to recognize, you know our, our DVOP that was doing the best that quarter, our LVER that was doing the best during that quarter, just recognition to show people that they are, they are doing a great job and so our entire agency does that as well. But in Veterans Employment Services, you know, we have done a lot of things to, you know, incentivize and award people for, for hard work. And so I would say, those things you know,

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building relationships, listen to your team. They're the rubber that meets the road. They know in those particular areas what, what is going to work best or where we could be better in those areas. So, I try to always intake everything that is coming to me, look at it and, and see how we can formulate a plan to maximize our reach, our services, especially in in such a rural part of West Texas.

Melayia: It's just been incredibly rewarding to support our veterans in finding meaningful employment and really just reconnecting with their purpose after the military and the, the success that we've seen really just comes from building trust and meeting people where they are and staying committed not just to our clients' growth, but to our own growth as well. And my advice for those that are looking to replicate the same impact would be just to listen with empathy and advocate fiercely. That's the one thing that everyone's really just looking for is someone in their corner, someone to advocate for them and just never stop believing in the, the potential of those that you serve. And of course, always keep your leadership in the loop. That's not just me saying it because mine is here. That is a true testimony to really good leadership like we have here in West Texas. They will be able to support you in any initiative that you were trying to seek to, to just do more and to help out more. And they can also help you with finding avenues to achieve your goals.

Darrell: I think it's just go to work with, with a good attitude. And just the willingness to serve your community and just leave every day knowing that you did your best at work. And don't be afraid to try new ideas. You know, within your, within your guidelines, of course. Don't be afraid to ask questions to try to figure out a better way to do things. And I think that you're always able to make your program better.

Scott: And I would say don't forget where you came from. You transitioned too. And innovate. Embrace the innovation.

Host: Alright folks, thank you all so much and thank you to our listeners. If you would like more information about serving veterans, please visit NVTI.org to access resources such as this podcast. We are constantly adding new material, so please check back often. And we also, of course, invite you to continue the conversation at the Making Careers Happen for Veterans Community of Practice. Thank you so much.

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