



Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program: Building Communities of Readiness

Introduction

The U.S. military has been at war for more than a decade. Even as operations in Afghanistan begin to draw down, efforts to reintegrate returning reserve component (RC) servicemembers with their families, employers and communities continue at a high tempo. In many ways, reunion and reintegration activities are only beginning; it will be years after the end of the current conflict before the medium- and long-term effects of this decade's accelerated deployments are fully realized. More than 855,000 National Guard and Reserve servicemember activations have occurred since 9/11, and their role as an operationalized reserve and integral part of the joint force has resulted in the need for steady and sustainable deployment-cycle support. The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP) exists to provide such a foundation for RC servicemembers and their families throughout all phases of military life.

Background

The National Defense Authorization Act of 2008 established the Yellow Ribbon program to formalize and streamline various support initiatives across the reserve component. As the premier deployment-cycle training and support program, YRRP eases transitions for servicemembers and families as they move between their military and civilian roles. It provides access to deployment-cycle information, resources, programs, services and referrals—helping maintain the readiness of the force and building stronger, more resilient families.*

Under Department of Defense consistency guidelines, the National Guard and Reserve are responsible for implementing the YRRP curriculum and support services. Each has considerable flexibility to address its unique missions and challenges. The program has impacted more than 1.1 million individuals since its inception.

Collaboration

YRRP fosters a nationwide, community-based effort to support the deployment and reintegration needs of geographically dispersed servicemembers and their families. The centerpiece of this collaborative initiative is the YRRP Center for Excellence (CfE).



The CfE gathers promising practices and data from all over the United States to build YRRP event support, policy, guidance and online tools. The data analysis conducted there, in coordination with Penn State University's Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness, enables continuous adaptation and improvement. Together, these two institutions scrutinize potential curricula, develop training delivery models and evaluate the effectiveness of training packages.

Previous operational tempo shifts demonstrated that the long-term success of readiness and reintegration programs depends on continued support from people and organizations in communities around the country. YRRP has made significant headway in building knowledge management capabilities to allow for seamless collaboration among the program's service providers and the military community at large. It has also built sustainability and scalability into its operations to ensure that the capability exists to immediately ramp up deployment support in the event of any future large-scale mobilization. Key to such flexibility and scalability are a wide range of online tools and resources hosted by the CfE, such as event templates and ready-made resource kits, lessons learned, means for collaborative communication and training modules for service providers, servicemembers and families.

Outreach

Servicemembers and their families epitomize the finest traditions of service and sacrifice passed down since the founding of the United States. Resilient RC

* For more information see <http://www.yellowribbon.mil/center-for-excellence-new>; see also AUSA Torchbearer National Security Report "Resetting Reserve Component Units: Taking Care of Soldiers and Families," July 2011, http://www.ausa.org/publications/ilw/Documents/TB_Reset_web.pdf.



Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program

The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP) is a DoD-wide effort to promote the well-being of National Guard and Reserve members, their families and communities, by connecting them with resources throughout the deployment cycle.

Through YRRP events, servicemembers and those who support them connect with local resources before, during and after deployments. Events provide information on benefits such as health care, education, employment and financial and legal counseling.



Source: Office of the Secretary of Defense

servicemembers put their lives and livelihoods on hold to serve their country by securing a better future for people around the globe. That mission continues at home as well.

As servicemembers return to their families, employers and communities, their experience in strengthening partner nations abroad is useful to help educate community members about the needs and concerns of servicemembers and families. Through YRRP, volunteers, staff, service providers, employers and citizens can become part of the extended support network. **YRRP's outreach efforts create and maintain partnerships with federal, state and local entities to build community-based resource networks and enhance community capacity, harnessing the character of America and channeling it where it is most needed.** Cooperative efforts with the services' family program offices, the Community Covenant and Joining Community Forces will ensure strong deployment-cycle support for RC servicemembers in the long term.

One example of the potential to leverage community involvement in the readiness and reintegration model is that of the Vermont National Guard, which is using the YRRP model to engage community organizations through its Veterans Outreach Program to provide ongoing assistance to veterans and family members. The program partners with family assistance specialists and other federal, state and local agencies to identify veterans' needs and facilitate access to available services

such as career skills workshops, job fairs, transportation to and from medical appointments, suicide prevention programs, assistance with Veterans Affairs benefit enrollment and financial and mental health counseling. The Veterans Outreach Program also partners with the Vermont Small Business Development Center to provide interested servicemembers with technical assistance regarding business management topics—such as locating start-up capital, marketing assistance and accounting training—all at no cost to the veteran.

Another example is that of the Army Reserve's 63d Regional Support Command (RSC), whose YRRP experience and collaboration with other commands engages servicemembers and families from beginning to end of the deployment cycle. Servicemembers and families are the "stars of the show," with staff assigned to greet event attendees at the airport and a "YRRP concierge" who guides attendees through registration upon their arrival. YRRP staff, volunteers, community partners and hotel staff are well-prepared for the events through workshops that impart the focus of the events, concepts of operation and presentation skills aimed at creating an interactive experience. The curriculum itself is creative and memorable, utilizing skills organic to the 63d RSC's native population—which includes producers and directors—to educate attendees through original skits, plays and professionally produced videos.

The Way Ahead

American servicemembers are resilient professionals who volunteer to go where the nation needs them. Even as attention and resources begin to be refocused as the military's operational tempo slows, efforts to provide servicemembers, families and communities the tools they need for successful reintegration and long-term readiness remain critical to the health and prosperity of the nation. YRRP will continue the fight to improve, evolve, inspire and deliver its premier deployment-cycle support, training and services, maximizing available resources and leveraging the expertise and abilities of individuals, agencies and communities throughout the country. Timely and predictable funding for servicemember and family total wellness will continue to be necessary for many years after the current conflict ends.

