



COLLECTIVE IMPACT

for Washington State Veterans and Military Families

A report on the action summit convened
July 24-26, 2013 by Sen. Patty Murray

Prepared by:
USC Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans & Military Families

USC Social Work
*Center for Innovation and Research
on Veterans & Military Families*

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IslandWood, Bainbridge Island, WA — July 24-26, 2013

The summit was made possible by the generous support of:



INTRODUCTION

Military families in the United States are facing enormous challenges. Since 2001, more than 2.6 million troops have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan and now face rates of suicide, depression, and unemployment that have sounded the alarm for action. Though there is wide community support for veterans and their families, the system is fragmented. There are a multitude of services available to the nation's veterans, but the disjointed nature of how they are provided by federal agencies, and a wide variety of state and community-based organizations makes it difficult for veterans and their families to navigate the system and receive the services they need.

The federally funded programs fluctuate based on presidential and congressional priorities and national emergencies. The landscape is dotted with nonprofit organizations, corporations, educational institutions, volunteer groups, public agencies and private foundations. Each provides an array of services or programs designed to meet specific needs of the United States' approximately 22 million veterans.

A collaborative that builds on the strengths of the community can be the most effective solution to this fragmentation by combining resources, identifying promising programs and strategizing for collective impact. Innovation will not be made by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) alone. Nonprofits and community-based organizations have limited resources and focused scopes. Each operates in isolation. A model of public-private partnerships that brings together a diverse cross-sector of stakeholders has the potential to effect large-scale change.

WELCOME AND CALL TO ACTION

Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash.

United States Congress

Washington state is home to approximately 46,000 active duty military members, ranking 6th nationwide. In her welcome and overview, Sen. Patty Murray noted that their unique and varied needs, along with those of veterans and military families, prompted the urgency to convene a diverse group of experts to chart a path toward increased access to services and reduced barriers to care, thus easing the transition back to civilian life.

Military family and veteran issues have always been a priority for Murray. Growing up as a daughter of a World War II veteran and Purple Heart recipient, and later witnessing the support her family received when her father fell ill, Murray early on cemented her role as a tireless advocate for veterans and their families. She has championed their causes through various avenues, including her position as Chair of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs during the 112th Congress.



Murray convened the *Military Families and Veterans Action Summit*, held at IslandWood from July 24-26, 2013, to provide for Washington state's diverse needs. More than 100 participants representing a cross-sector of fields (e.g., health, research, education, legal, employment, military families, community models and philanthropy) were brought together to leverage their collective expertise and create a partnership model that would most effectively increase access to information and services.

From Murray's address:

I believe this is really a defining moment in the treatment of our nation's veterans and service members. It's a time when our older veteran population, including so many of our Vietnam veterans, [is] increasingly relying on VA care. But it is also a pivotal point for an entire generation of post-9/11 veterans who have endured a decade of repeated deployments, stress on their family and personal relationships, and the visible and invisible wounds of war. These men and women are now facing an incredibly difficult transition home.

It's a challenge we have to meet. ... The only way we'll be able to ease the difficult transition home is by working together with private and public partnerships, with investments in unique, new programs, with unified encouragement to seek mental health care and overcome stigmas and, very importantly, with a plan to get these veterans back to work.

As many of you know, this is an issue that is very personal to me. My dad served in World War II. He was one of the first GIs to land in Okinawa. When I was a teenager, he got sick with multiple sclerosis. Eventually, he was unable to work or get around on his own. My mom suddenly had to be everything to everyone. Not only did she have to care for seven kids and my dad, but she also had to find a way to make a living and put food on the table. For a time, we even went on food stamps in order to just get by. It was a tough time, but through it all I always knew our country was there for us. Our friends and neighbors and our government weren't going to let us fail.

And that's the legacy of opportunity we have to live up to for today's veterans. It's a legacy we all have the burden of continuing. As I said before, we are in a defining moment in the history of how we treat our veterans. For many of us, particularly those who grew up with the Vietnam war, it's clear we stand perilously close to repeating some of the same mistakes of the past, but we're all working every day to avoid that.

And I know that here in the great state of Washington, we have the resources, the ideas and leaders to be a model for communities across the country. So I look forward to continuing to work with all of you to keep the promise we've made to provide not only care but opportunity to all those who have worn the uniform.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Col. David W. Sutherland

U.S. Army (Ret.)

Co-founder and Chairman, Center for Military and Veterans Community Services

The *Military Family and Veterans Action Summit* kicked off with a keynote address from Col. David W. Sutherland, co-founder and chairman of the Center for Military and Veterans Community Services, commonly known as the Dixon Center. At the end of his 29 years of service, Sutherland worked in the Brigade Command as the Special Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, focusing primarily on warrior and family support. Through that position, he traveled the country and visited hundreds of communities and thousands of organizations, culling best practices for assisting veterans and their families.

Sutherland stressed the importance of collaboration and consolidated efforts in order to effect change. Plus, he added, the diverse attendees were well-equipped to be drivers of change for their community because of their unique perspectives from the social and private sectors. “We need to create an organization that consolidates all these groups. Innovation comes when we all work together, when we bring the power of community together to solve problems.”

The needs and the challenges facing returning veterans are high and complicated. No single issue stands alone, but rather rests along a continuum that encompasses access to health care, employment and education. Sutherland called on the attendees to approach the coming days as a chance to share resources, break out of their silos, and leave the summit with a common language and set of standards for long-term impact.



LEADERSHIP PANEL

Stacy Bare

Director, Mission Outdoors at Sierra Club

Anthony Hassan, EdD

Director, USC Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans & Military Families

Joshua Jacobs

Former Deputy Staff Director, Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Sen. Murray's Office

Martin LeBlanc

Vice President of External Affairs, IslandWood

R.J. Naugle

Director of Veteran Programs, Direct Technology

Joyce Raezer

Executive Director, National Military Family Association

Mindie Reule

Program Manager, Public Policy, Philanthropy Northwest

Anne Sprute

Founder and CEO, RallyPoint/6

OBJECTIVES

- Create connections and partnerships among individuals and organizations.
- Consolidate efforts and describe existing community models that currently improve overall quality of life for veterans and military families.
- Champion a consensus-building effort among a diverse service community to create seamless services and collective impact for military families and veterans in Washington state.
- Outline a plan of action and establish a framework that will create a community model for a follow-up Military Families and Veterans Summit.
- Identify leadership, gaps and needs experienced by military families and veterans.
- Create common language that will serve to create a collective impact initiative.



SECTORS

Health

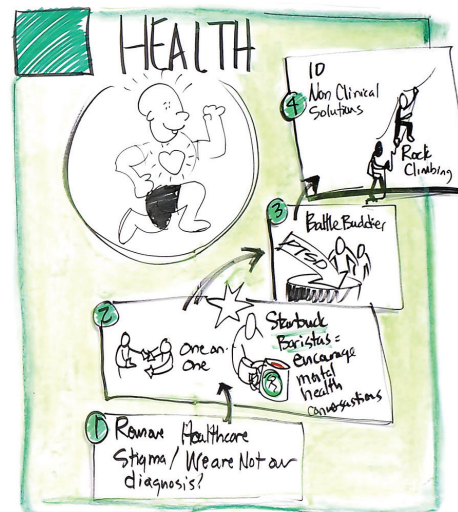
*Lead: Stacy Bare
Sierra Club*

Numerous research studies suggest that the suicide rate among active duty military personnel and veterans is related to mental health and substance abuse issues. Moreover, data also highlights that a substantial percentage of service members do not seek out mental health treatment. The summit's health group identified the dual priorities of increasing access to health care among veterans and decreasing the stigma associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

The group suggested removing the term "PTSD" from conversation when dealing with veterans. Instead, the focus could shift toward personal challenges and how to overcome them. They cautioned that they were not removing critical treatment for PTSD, but rather normalizing the discussions to center around accepting and overcoming personal challenges. The goal would be to increase service members' receptiveness to treatment by not discussing it in terms that highlight their separateness from society.

Other actions highlighted were training veteran leaders and USO volunteers as mental health "first responders," promoting peer-to-peer support, and embedding mental health professionals in public, casual settings, outside a clinical office.

Another important discussion centered on understanding the changing dynamics of a returning veteran. The veteran is transitioning from a mission- and directive-oriented life to one that may lack that structure. Clinical solutions are important, but sometimes reinstating a sense of purpose for the veteran (i.e., working outdoors, community service, etc.) can go a long way towards their reintegration in society.



- Decrease Stigma from Health Care
- Case Management
- Define Success
- Understanding Support Issues

Research/Education

Lead: Anthony Hassan, EdD

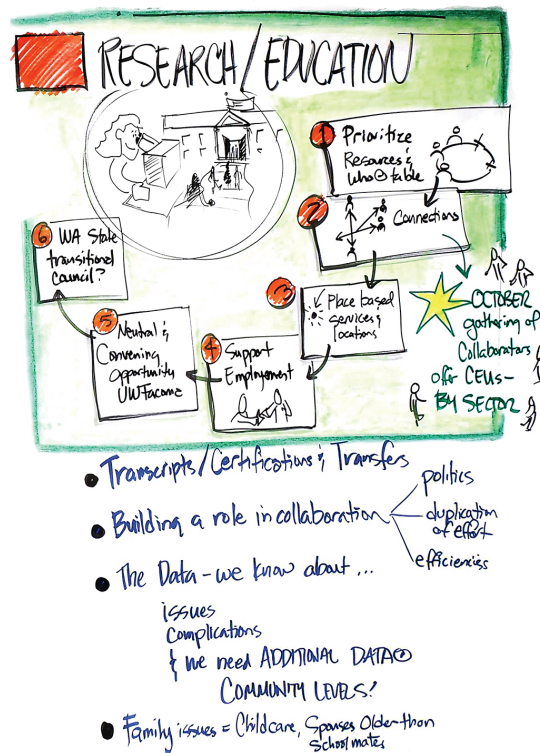
USC Center for Innovation and Research on Veterans & Military Families

Institutes of higher education can play pivotal roles in both identifying gaps that need to be addressed and building a collective impact group to support area veterans and their families. One of the most fundamental challenges to helping these populations is a lack of knowledge from well-intentioned community groups, nonprofits, foundations, corporations, and others. To truly understand the issues, actions need to be data-driven. University researchers can both conduct original research and analyze national and regional datasets to identify gaps and direct policy efforts.

Universities also operate outside the sphere of service delivery. As such, they are ideally positioned to act as natural and neutral conveners for collective impact groups. Dr. Hassan pointed to the role his center has played in scaling up the Los Angeles Veterans Collaborative, a group composed of community stakeholders and representatives from organizations serving veterans and military families in the Los Angeles area. Under the center's administration, the collaborative has grown to more than 220 members and six working groups focused on particular areas of interest.

Access to higher education is also a real challenge for many veterans. Many are navigating the system blindly and finding trouble transferring credits between different institutions, receiving the appropriate credits for military vocational and certification programs. Also, some veterans do not receive proper counseling in how to use federal funds, which could lead to wasted time and efforts.

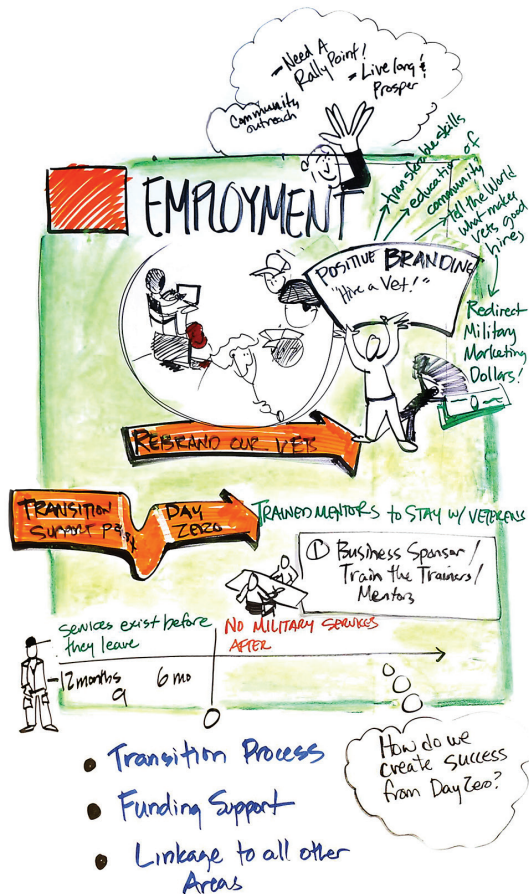
Unfortunately, military family needs are not always prioritized in education circles. The demographics of this population may not reflect a “typical” undergraduate student. They may be in need of childcare, be attending college later in life, be transferring locations, etc. A lack of engagement is one of the key reasons students leave school. A growing body of research points to the correlation between a higher education degree and lower rates of unemployment and poverty. Not prioritizing the needs of military spouses—many of whom may be the head of household—puts at risk their ability to earn a degree or certificate.



Employment

Lead: R.J. Naugle
Direct Technology

For years, the unemployment rate among veterans, particularly those post-9/11, has stubbornly remained higher than the general population. Though recent efforts have started to show a slowdown and reversal in that trend, obstacles persist in preparing veterans for a career outside the military. Veterans have both strengths and challenges to present to the civilian workforce.



The employment working group noted that improved communication efforts are needed to properly highlight the skills veterans possess that can be successfully translated into the civilian workplace. Military training instills certain values in veterans, and the benefits to employers are far-reaching. Veterans are self-motivated, organized, analytical and results-oriented. They work well in team situations, but can also be called upon as natural leaders. They have experience working with diverse populations. Emphasizing these qualities was seen as a key condition for success. The employment group considered creating a strategic communications plan that would feature transition success stories.

Another important area that requires more and expanded communication efforts is the transition process. Separating service members are now required to meet with military transition counselors, beginning a year before they leave. Once they separate, however, veterans no longer have access to that resource and most end up fend-

ing for themselves. Integrating business organizations and career counselors into this process would be useful for everyone involved. Veterans would learn from business leaders what they need to succeed in the private sector, and businesses would see what veterans can bring to their workplace. Also, the working group suggested working with universities and colleges to create curricula for human resources and hiring managers that would make them aware of the benefits and challenges involved with hiring veterans.

Legal

Lead: Joshua Jacobs

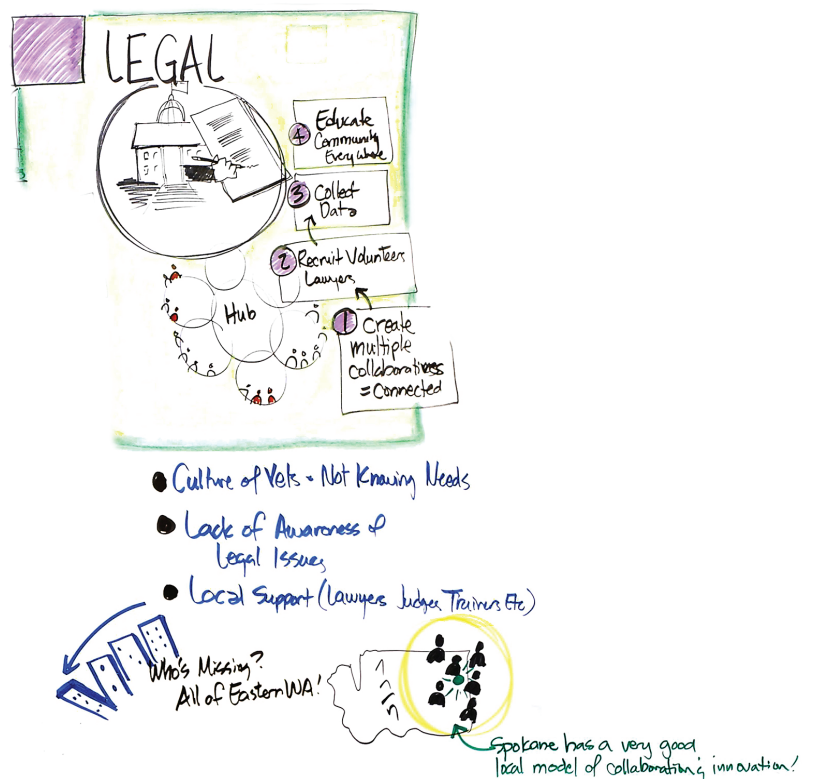
Former Deputy Staff Director, Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Sen. Murray's Office

Veterans, unfortunately, are confronted with numerous legal issues and most of them stem from a complete lack of awareness of their situations. Many veterans do not realize they have a legal problem (i.e., being behind on child support, alimony, rent, etc.) until they have been swept up into the system. These legal issues can have a compounding effect: Veterans fail to make their payments and are then levied a fee. They remain ignorant about the fee, which could trigger an automatic loss of a business license, eligibility for subsidized housing, employment, etc. By the time some veterans are informed of a legal matter that needs their attention, they are faced with an impossibly complicated set of issues.

Also important for legal matters is the growing number of veterans who are returning from service suffering from PTSD and TBI. Left untreated, their mental health disorders could lead to direct involvement in the criminal justice system.

The legal group identified gaps and opportunities for improvement. First, there is a cultural disconnect between veterans and those who would make initial contact with them in legal and justice matters, like police officers. The group hoped many veterans could be steered away from the criminal justice system by training first responders in identifying underlying mental health issues and directing veterans toward needed services, not jails or fines, thus avoiding the snowball effects they create.

Veterans Courts were specifically established to deal with minor issues, primarily those resulting from service-related illnesses, which can provide alternatives to incarceration. They are, however, sporadically located in Washington. Four courts primarily serve the western region and one more is located in Spokane. Another challenge is the lack of pro bono lawyers who can provide legal services for veterans and military families. Recruitment could expand the numbers by providing incentives for pro bono work.



Military Families

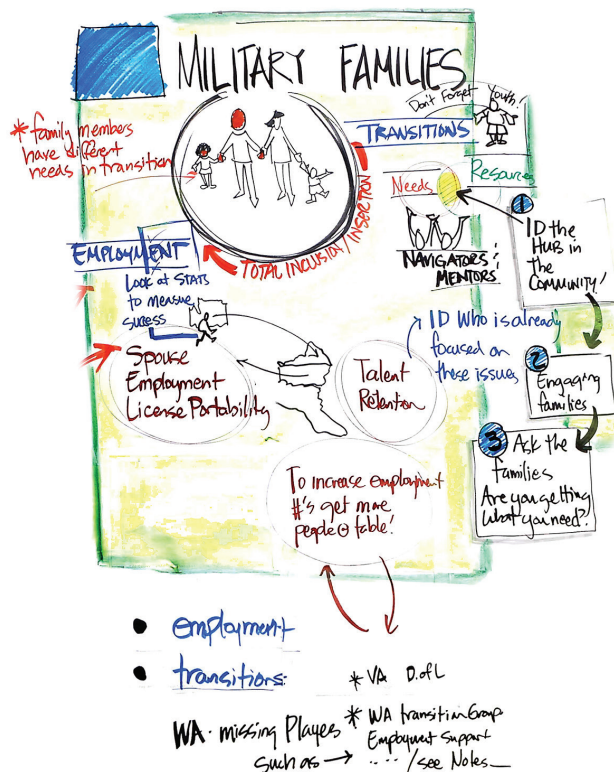
Lead: Joyce Raezer

National Military Family Association

What makes addressing military family issues so challenging is that they experience a full spectrum of issues, much like the individual service members. They struggle with unemployment issues. They experience challenges when the service member spouse/partner or parent is transferred. They struggle with redefining household roles when they transition out of the service. They require comprehensive child care, access to higher education and health care. They also experience mental health issues as spouses/partners and children of active duty and veteran service members.

The military family group focused their attention on employment. Much like the summit's general employment group, the military families identified improved communication with employers as a possible solution. Spouses and partners may be the primary breadwinners in some military families. As such, when they face scheduling conflicts with children or the possibility of transferring locations, it could be a significant challenge. Having an open dialogue with employers about these unique challenges is key; they could be open to flexible working schedules, such as working from home, virtual offices, weekend hours, etc. Another possible solution to

ensure relocation does not lead to unemployment is easing the barriers to transferring licenses and certifications across the country. Involving as many groups as possible in these discussions would also help ensure success, like chambers of commerce, Military Spouse Employment Partnership, support groups, VA transition groups, and others.



Community Models

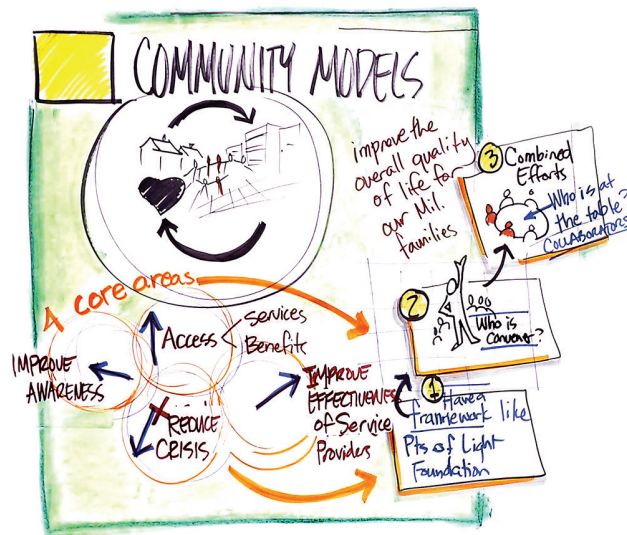
Lead: Anne Sprute

RallyPoint/6

The community model group began with the goal of improving overall quality of life for veterans and military families. They identified four core areas that would guide their future work. They are: improve awareness of veterans and military family issues, reduce the number and severity of crises in the military community, increase access to services and benefits, and improve the overall effectiveness of service providers. An engaged community of stakeholders with a common mission can go a long way in ensuring that veterans and military families do not fall through the cracks of a fragmented system.

The initial step needed for a community model to be successful is identifying local leaders within multiple sectors. This would be the start of a collaborative, and these key leaders could rally other service providers and stakeholders. Once leadership is established, then the group suggested conducting an environmental scan to identify where the veterans are located and what their needs are. The goal would be to combine efforts and create a framework, which would include measurable indicators of success.

Some questions remain, such as deciding who will convene the group, who/how many stakeholders and collaborators will be invited to participate, and creating a common definition for their main audience. How will “veteran” be defined?



- 10 local leaders/collaborators
- Have framework to share w/ Gov't office to align → Have ways to measure & report periodically
- All veterans → Have Common Definition of veteran

SUMMARY AND NEXT STEPS

On the final day of the summit, the individual groups came together to report out. It became clear, early on, that there was much overlap for both the biggest challenges and the greatest opportunities to improve the transition of veterans and military families into civilian life.

In order for the collective impact effort to be successful, it must be collaborative, data-driven, coordinated, goal-directed, transparent, flexible and free of competing interests, and receive sustained support.

The steps to success must include:

1. Developing a clear road map;
2. Surveying the population to get a better grasp of the needs;
3. Creating a communications plan where all members share in a common dialogue;
4. Identifying indicators and how to measure success; and
5. Building on existing efforts.

In the end, the success of this effort hinges on attendees' commitments to each other, their work and veterans and their families. The group pledged to come together monthly to work on building collective impact within each of the sectors and again in a year's time to discuss the milestones they have reached and any unforeseen challenges they may come across.



SUMMIT ORGANIZATIONS REPRESENTED

Association of United States Army
Bank of America
Ben B. Cheney Foundation
Center for Military and Veterans Community Services (Dixon Center)
CityUniversity of Seattle
Debbie Vancil Public Affairs
Direct Technology
Farmer Veteran Coalition
Goldman Sachs
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America
IslandWood
Joint Base Lewis-McChord
JPMorgan Chase
King County
Madigan Army Medical Center
Madigan Warrior Transition Battalion
Medina Foundation
Military Child Education Coalition
National Military Family Association
Naval Base Kitsap
Northwest Outward Bound School
Office of the Secretary of Defense
Office of U.S. Senator Patty Murray
Operation Military Family
Philanthropy Northwest
Pierce College District
Pierce College Military Program
Prudential
Puget Sound Regional Council
Purdue University
RallyPoint/6
SCA Young Adult Programs
Sierra Club, Mission Outdoors
South Puget Sound Community College
Spokane Veterans Forum
State Attorney General
Tacoma Vet Center
The Boeing Company
TriWest Healthcare Alliance
United Healthcare Military & Veterans
United Way of Pierce County
University of Southern California

University of Washington
U.S. Air Force Reserves
USO Northwest
Veterans Promise Coffee, Inc.
Veterans Training Support Center
Wal-Mart
Warrior and Family Support, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
Warrior Gateway
Washington Joining Community Forces
Washington National Guard
Washington National Guard Family Programs
Washington State Bar Association
Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges
Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs
Washington State Governor's Office
Washington State University
Western Governors University
White House Joining Forces
WorkForce Central
Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County
Workforce Development Council of Snohomish County
Wright Collaborative LLC



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