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Expanding Opportunities

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Expanding Opportunities

Military Spouse Employment Partnership Provides Resources and Support for Family Members

Military spouses certainly do not have an easy time when it comes to finding jobs: Troop deployments mean the average military family moves every two to three years, making it extremely difficult for the non-military spouse to build and sustain a career path. Indeed, military spouses face a 21% unemployment rate and a 25% wage gap compared to their civilian counterparts, according to a 2021 survey conducted by the Office of People Analytics.

A unique program operating under the umbrella of the U.S. Department of Defense is designed to help alleviate some of the employment-related stress and complications: The Military Spouse Employment Partnership (MSEP) connects military spouses with hundreds of partner employers who have committed to recruit, hire, promote and retain military spouses.

Launched in 2011 with 45 employer partners, the MSEP today has more than 500 employers offering job opportunities and hiring military spouses. "MSEP is one program of the Spouse Education and Career Opportunities, or SECO, which provides a number of initiatives and projects that support military spouses in realizing their educational and career goals," explains C. Eddy Mentzer, associate director, Military Family Readiness Policy, DoD, Military Community and Family Policy. "MSEP employer partners represent Fortune 500 companies, small businesses, non-profits, and federal agencies.

"Military spouses have faced an extremely high unemployment rate, calculated above 20% for more than a decade," Mentzer continues. "Like most American families, military families want or need to be



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-C. Eddy Mentzer

within their workforce. Second, we strive to educate employers about the challenges military spouses face in securing meaningful employment and the impact this has on national security."

In addition to relocating frequently, military spouses face other hurdles when seeking meaningful careers. "In many cases, installations may be located in areas without robust employment opportunities," Mentzer states. "While military spouses can benefit

dual-employed. Military families relocate every two to three years on average, usually across state lines and sometimes overseas. This can make maintaining a career challenging and directly impacts that financial stability of the military family. Family satisfaction with military life is a direct contributor to service members leaving the military and the inability of a spouse to maintain a meaningful career directly leads to dissatisfaction."

MSEP is funded through Congressional appropriations, and provides numerous services, open to the more than 950,000 military spouses around the world, including:

- Career exploration opportunities to help them understand their skills, interests, and goals
- Education and training to help them identify academic, licensing, or credentialing requirements that can help them reach their career goals
- Employment readiness assistance to optimize their self-marketing skills
- Employment connections that help them find and maintain a rewarding career

"MSEP has two objectives," Mentzer points out. "First, we want to connect military spouses to employers that have committed to recruiting, hiring, promoting, and retaining military spouse talent

By DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ



spouses to contact the SECO Career Center through Military OneSource, to get started. Setting up a meeting with a career coach or advisor will really allow a spouse to better understand all of the resources and tools they can leverage.

"It is also important for a spouse to create a profile on MySECO, our web portal to all things SECO," he continues. "And not just start a profile but build out a complete profile. Spouses

can opt in or out of being searchable by potential employers allowing employers to connect directly to military spouse talent."

Mentzer says the program has had a major impact across the armed services. "The individual stories are what truly make a difference when we see the impact our programs have on military spouses," he remarks. "We recently received feedback from a spouse that had used multiple services under the SECO umbrella to land her dream job with a large beverage company in the U.S. The key here is that she utilized our programs for training, coaching, job search and resume assistance, etc. and was able to find her meaningful employment opportunity.

"A military spouse with a master's degree in public and environmental health, and a bachelor's degree in biology with a minor in marine science was accepted into the Military Spouse Career Accelerator Pilot and offered a fellowship with the Marine Conservation Institute as a remote development and communications assistant," he adds. "They came to SECO with a goal to find a remote federal job and completed 17 Federal Coaching Package sessions with a SECO Career Coach."

The program also can assist military spouses in working toward longer-term goals. "Another military spouse recently attributed the SECO Career Center to her being accepted into a graduate program," Mentzer relates. "So, while the outcome was not an immediate job, in her mind, we have helped her to prepare for that opportunity that may come later." 🇺🇸

greatly from remote work opportunities, not all roles can be accomplished remotely, and many employers will not entertain remote work options. Another challenge is that roughly 90% of military spouses are female, further compounding challenges women face in the overall workforce."

SECO and MSEP resources are available to military spouses of current active-duty troops, as well as spouses of the National Guard and Reserves. Military spouses can also leverage SECO resources up to 365 days post-separation or retirement of the service member.

Both the SECO program and MSEP are 100% virtual, which allows military spouses to connect to the program from wherever they are; job postings on the MSEP Portal are continuously updated on a 24-hour basis.

A key component of the program is the SECO Career Center, where spouses have access to master's level, certified career coaches and advisors. These career coaching sessions can be everything from helping identify the type of work a spouse is interested in, a job search session to find relevant jobs, a practice interview, a resume review, and more. According to Mentzer, the Career Center conducts more than 150,000 career coaching sessions annually with a 98% satisfaction rate, and in 2022 it, was named "Best Mid-Sized Contact Center" by the International Customer Management Institute.

"Wherever a spouse may find themselves in their employment journey, the SECO Career Center can assist them with amazing resources," Mentzer notes. "I always advise

Additional Assistance Available

Another initiative designed to assist military spouses in finding employment is the Military Spouse Career Accelerator Pilot, or MSCAP, a three-year pilot program.



"MSCAP is a one-week, competitive fellowship with industry where the Department of Defense is compensating the military spouse while they are in the fellowship," Mentzer explains.

"The goal of MSCAP is to connect military spouses to potential employers and hopefully they will be converted from fellow to employee," he adds. "In the first year, more than 400 spouses participated in the fellowship with 85% receiving employment offers from their host employers."