



**Joining Forces Mentoring Plus™**  
**Military Spouses: Employment and Careers Issue Brief**  
**May 2012**

The success of our nation’s all-volunteer military force depends to a large extent on the unwavering support of our nation’s military spouses. More than 2.2 million service members comprise our nation’s active duty, National Guard and Reserve forces. According to the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), more than 55% of military members are married — meaning there are more than 1.2 million military spouses left behind during deployments to manage their households, families and careers. Nearly 1.15 million, or 95% of those military spouses are women, an overwhelming majority of whom want and/or need to work (Military Spouse Employment Partnership [MSEP], 2012). **Unfortunately, 26% of military spouses are unemployed. This is three times the unemployment rate of their civilian counterparts** (U.S. Department of Treasury [Treasury] and U.S. Department of Defense [DoD], 2012).

Surveys of military spouses indicate that satisfaction with employment and career development significantly affects their well-being. The military community is predominantly a family-oriented environment and family life issues play a strong role in a service member’s decisions to remain in the military (RAND, 2006). For more than a decade, operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have challenged retention and reenlistment in the military. Reenlistment is such a concern, that the Department of Defense (DoD) increased their budget for reenlistment bonuses from \$864 million in 2000 to \$1.4 billion in 2008. While financial compensation is significant, the DoD and Treasury report states “a spouse’s employment [also] plays a key role in the financial and personal well-being of military families, and their job satisfaction is an important component of the retention of service members. Without adequate support for military spouses and their career objectives, the military could have trouble retaining service members.” In fact, “when the spouse is supportive, reenlistment is more likely than if the spouse is not supportive” (Scarville, 1990). This brings us right back to spousal employment, the second ranked issue of concern for military families (Blue Star Families, 2010).

Blue Star Families, an organization committed to supporting, connecting and empowering military families and known for constantly capturing real-time feedback, surveyed military spouses and found that half of the respondents said that being a military spouse had a negative effect on their ability to pursue a career. This is not simply a perception. A 2010 RAND report cited nine studies, spanning 30 years, that conclude military wives work and earn less in the U.S. labor market than their civilian counterparts — despite being on average, better educated. The DMDC concludes, “the majority of military spouses believe that the military lifestyle — including frequent moves, deployments and long hours that keep service members from assisting with parenting, and living in areas with poor local labor market conditions — has negatively affected their employment opportunities.” For example, as a result of frequent moves, spouses working in professions requiring state licenses or certification bear a higher financial and administrative

**1.21 million military spouses**

**(95% are women)**

**85% of military spouses want and/or need to work**

**26% of military spouses are unemployed – 3 times the unemployment rate of civilian wives.**

**42%: the overall wage gap between civilian and military wives**

**\$12,000: the annual gap between college-educated civilians and military spouses.**

burden since credentials often do not transfer across states. In addition, more than 13% of those spouses whose careers have been impacted negatively by their military lifestyle have experienced some type of discrimination due to their status as a military spouse (Blue Star Families, 2010).

Military spouses are educated, committed, flexible, and capable of juggling multiple roles in transitional situations. Military spouses are increasingly being recognized for their stellar abilities to juggle work, school and children, household finances, military and civilian networks and expectations, frequent moves, emotional stressors of a spouse who may not be consistently present, and a host of other events which are part of their “normal” day. Military spouses are well educated: 84 percent have some college; 25 percent have a bachelor’s degree; and 10 percent have an advanced degree (MSEP, 2012). More than two-thirds have work experience (DMDC, 2008), and 38 percent have relatively high levels of education for their current jobs (RAND, 2010). Furthermore, spouses volunteer three times more than civilians, and tend to take on the more demanding leadership roles in their volunteer organizations (Blue Star Families, 2010). It is only fitting that these skills be viewed by potential employers as adaptable, resilient, persistent and dedicated. Unfortunately, this is not yet the case.

Over the past few years, Business and Professional Women’s (BPW) Foundation has championed women veterans and military spouses in their efforts to succeed in civilian careers. BPW Foundation’s work is based on nearly a decade of research on the challenges facing military women as they endeavor to find civilian employment. In 2005, BPW Foundation made a commitment to better understand the employment transition of women veterans. The [research](#) highlighted translation and portability of skills as major obstacles and underscored an overwhelming gap in career and employment support among the growing population of military women upon their return to civilian life. Armed with this learning, BPW Foundation initiated studies and engaged private and public sector partners to outline employment access strategies.

### How to Support Military Spouses

Supporting military spouses, requires a multi-pronged approach including research, mentoring and support, employer practices, and public policy solutions. The Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs have recognized this as they research and extend services to military spouses through mentoring services, family counseling and support services and referrals for personal and military related stresses.

Research	Employer Practices
<p>As recently as 2006, there were significant shortcomings to existing research on the employment status of military spouses (RAND, 2006). While DoD has worked considerably to provide more in-depth, reliable and consistent data, further research could probe more deeply into the nature of underemployment, to ensure that limited resources available for military families are maximized.</p> <p>Other research deficiencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More robust data on military spouses</li> <li>• Success stories and lessons learned at the organizational and individual levels to support successful career transition.</li> <li>• Impact of access to mentoring and networks in facilitating military spouses’ job search and adjustment</li> <li>• Characteristics of military spouse-owned businesses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilize job boards and job fairs targeted to military spouses</li> <li>• Ensure recruiters are knowledgeable about portability of skills and transition challenges</li> <li>• Develop hiring campaigns to reach military spouses</li> <li>• Monitor/evaluate military spouse employee statistics</li> <li>• Develop career transition assistance tailored to military spouses (e.g. apprenticeship, internship, leadership training programs)</li> <li>• Implement mentoring activities</li> <li>• Develop business and professional networks and/or resource groups for military spouses</li> <li>• Provide flexible scheduling</li> <li>• Ensure practices fully support military spouses and their unique needs and challenges</li> </ul>
Mentoring and Support	Public Policy Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career transition mentoring and assistance, including translation and portability of skills and experience</li> <li>• Awareness, resource referrals, and training for entrepreneurship exploration and opportunities</li> <li>• Linkages and networking for military spouses</li> <li>• Easily transferable advanced education and other training access and guidance for military spouses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce or eliminate federal, state and local barriers to employment and services due to licensing and credentialing</li> <li>• Increase opportunities for federal and private sector careers</li> <li>• Increase access to educational advancement and reducing negative impact and loss of credits due to frequent moves</li> <li>• Increase access to affordable, quality childcare</li> </ul>

## BPW Foundation's Action Plan

In January 2012, BPW Foundation launched *Joining Forces Mentoring Plus™*, a program dedicated to helping military spouses and women veterans connect with working women mentors and subject matter experts (SMEs) to receive support, guidance, career development, and to ultimately obtain meaningful employment. The structure of *Joining Forces Mentoring Plus™* will enable mentors and mentees to work together to design and develop customized goals and benchmarks for mentee employment plans. A cadre of online resources and subject matter experts will assist mentees in areas that affect workplace attainment, adjustment, retention, and/or supplier chain participation for small businesses. With this grassroots capacity to guide mentees in their job searches and career development, BPW Foundation will pair 10,000 mentees with mentors over the next few years. While a significant target number, there is a significant need. There are 1.2 million military spouses currently. More than 150,000 women are projected to leave the military over the next five years, and these women will join the more than 1.8 million female veterans who have proudly served our nation.

## About BPW Foundation

BPW Foundation supports workforce development programs and workplace policies that recognize the diverse needs of working women, their families, communities and businesses. BPW Foundation is a 501(c)(3) research and education organization. To learn more, visit <http://www.bpwfoundation.org>. To join *Joining Forces Mentoring Plus™* as either a mentor, subject matter expert or mentee sign up on the [Mentoring Plus](#) webpage.

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## Mentoring = Success

### for Mentees:

- 43 studies over 20 years confirm employees with mentors are more satisfied with their careers, receive more promotions, and earn higher salaries
- Professionals with mentors earn an average of \$5,000 – \$20,000 more than professionals without mentors
- Working women with mentors saw a +90% increase in their productivity

### for Mentors:

- 76% of Fortune's Top 25 companies offer mentoring programs, as they benefit both mentor and mentee performance
- 75% of executives credit mentoring as a key factor of career success
- 44% of CEOs cite mentoring programs as one of the top three most effective strategies for women's advancement to senior management
- A multi-year independent study by a major international corporation reported a +600% ROI on mentoring program costs

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