

## Welcome Home and Thank a Veteran or Military Family

As defined by the Community Blueprint, the military family includes parents, spouses, significant others, children and all extended family who form the support network for a veteran or service member.

A recent Military Life Issues survey conducted by Blue Star Families found that 92 percent of the military families who responded felt the “general public does not truly understand or appreciate the sacrifices made by service members and their families.” This highlights the huge disconnect that is felt by military families with America’s larger community.

### Project description:

Welcoming a service member or veteran home and thanking him/her for their service is a simple, easy way to let military members, veterans and families know they are appreciated and remembered. Through this service project, you can support military members and their families and express heartfelt thanks, solidarity or good old-fashioned encouragement. While there are many efforts aimed at sending items and well-wishes to our deployed troops, no other program is currently in operation to show such support to those serving both overseas and on the home front.

Volunteers can host card-signing and card-making parties for various holidays such as Fourth of July, Veterans Day, Thanksgiving and the winter holiday season. This is a great, easy-to-execute project which can be done in groups, at your desk or at home with your family.

**Type of service:** done-at-the-desk project, family/guest volunteering, group volunteering

**Objectives:** to show appreciation and support to veterans, service members and military families

**Difficulty level:** easy

**Special skills:** none

### Resources:

- Pens, markers and pencils
- Paper, cards and envelopes
- Scissors
- Patriotic stickers

### Project instructions:

#### *Step 1: Find a Partner Agency*

Contact organizations that have access to returning soldiers and/or military families (e.g., Yellow Ribbon, Blue Star Families, a volunteer coordinator at a local installation, American Legion and/or other Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs)) and ask if they can help you get welcome home and/or thank you cards to returning soldiers or military families. You may want to consider adopting a local National Guard or Reserve unit.

#### *Step 2: Identify a Day, Time and Space and Recruit Volunteers*

Now that you have access to the military community, you will need to identify a date, time and location for the project. Always be mindful of holidays and other employee events and happenings so you don’t conflict with other things happening inside and outside the company and can maximize the opportunity to get as many people there to volunteer as possible.

Think about where you will go to create these cards. Do you want to have it in the office so that it is accessible for the employees? Do you want to go to a local memorial site so that you can reflect on the sacrifices made by our military soldiers and their families? Maybe you want to go to a local park to get

employees out for some fresh air and combine it with a brown bag lunch outing? Whatever you decide make sure you identify a place and if appropriate, make reservations.

Once you have identified the time, date and location, it is now time to ask your friends and colleagues to participate in this activity. Always remember that the personal “ask” is always the most compelling.

### *Step 3: Create and Deliver Cards and Notes*

Consider the following tips when writing cards and notes:

- Create your cards by writing encouraging notes of appreciation and thanks. Cards should be appropriate for general audiences. They should avoid overtly religious or political messages and should avoid unseemly or suggestive humor.
- Begin your letter with a simple salutation such as Dear Parent of a U.S. Service Member, Dear Military Spouse, Dear Military Child, Dear Veteran or even Dear American Hero.
- Keep messages simple, sincere, uplifting and supportive. “Thank you for your service” and “Welcome home” are always great phrases to use. Avoid phrases that suggest sympathy such as “during this difficult time,” as well as gifts or inserts (e.g., cash, phone cards, business cards, photos, prayer cards, pamphlets, etc.).
- Keep in mind that not all service members are necessarily deployed or separated from their families at this time. While there are thousands of troops serving overseas, there are also many who are at their home base. Your letter may not necessarily go to a family or service member currently experiencing a deployment.
- If your letter includes a reference to a specific holiday, be sure to mail your letter at least six weeks prior to the holiday, unless advised otherwise by the partner agency.
- There are many different branches of the U.S. military (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard and National Guard). Gear your letter to a general service member or military family unless you would like for it to go a member of a specific service.
- Avoid references to war or political statements about the implications of war.
- Do not use loose glitter, confetti or anything that is not attached to the letter or card.
- Do not date your letter(s).
- Do not seal the envelope.
- Deliver finished cards to partner agency.

Be sure and continue to connect with the agency to ensure the cards were sent and gather any information that might be good for the volunteers to hear.

### *Step 4: Reflect and Recognize*

When the project has ended, reflect on what went well and what needs improvement. Write this down and have it handy for the next event. Make sure you thank your volunteers, either personally or as a group. Take pictures and send them to your volunteers. Above all, talk about your project internally and externally.

### **Sample Letters:**

Dear Military Spouse,  
Our family is thinking of you and your service member and wishing you all the best. We know it is not just the service member who serves, but it is the entire family. We would like to let you know our family appreciates what you and your family are doing.  
Sincerely,

Dear Military Child,  
Our family would like to tell you how much we appreciate what you do as a military child. Your whole family serves alongside your parent and you must be so proud of what your family is contributing by giving of yourselves. It must be hard at times, when your parent has to deploy, so we want you to know we appreciate it and are thinking of you.  
Sincerely,

Dear Military Parent,  
Thank you for raising a child who has grown up with the desire to volunteer in our armed forces. Our family appreciates your sacrifice and we wish to say "thank you" and that we are thinking of you and wishing you and your family all the best.  
Sincerely,

Dear Veteran,  
Thank you for your service to this country. Our country is a better place because of people who stand up and serve. Our family honors you and wishes you all the best.  
Sincerely,

### Additional Resources

- Partner agencies - Resources include the state National Guard office, your local military recruiter, local chapters of the American Red Cross, veterans organizations, VA hospital or local VFW, local office of the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs or the state VA office.
- HandsOn Network [www.handsonnetwork.org](http://www.handsonnetwork.org)
- Community Blueprint [www.the-communityblueprint.org](http://www.the-communityblueprint.org)
- Veteran Stand Down Events <http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/StandDown.asp>
- Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program <http://www.yellowribbon.mil>
- Blue Star Families' Operation Appreciation [www.bluestarfam.org](http://www.bluestarfam.org)
- A Million Thanks [www.amillionthanks.org](http://www.amillionthanks.org)