

Bridging the gap on military spouse unemployment

Posted by [Joy Shrum-Reporter](#) On 08/16/2017

California, MD- Traditionally, it is difficult for military spouses to expand their careers because of the demands of the military and their transient lifestyles. About 16 percent of military spouses are unemployed, despite their education, experience and credentials. The National Military Spouse Network (NMSN) is stepping in to help reduce those unemployment numbers.

"The military spouse who wants to work should be able to work," explained Sue Hoppin, president and founder of NMNS. The group, which was founded in 2010, focuses on networking, mentoring and professional development. For the past 25 years, Hoppin has focused on military family issues. "One of the things I found was that military spouses already had degrees and started on their careers but they didn't have a network." That's where NMSN steps in.



For years, military spouses have fought to find lucrative employment as they travel from installation to installation with their service member, often times making them less desirable candidates for employment. But those times are changing. "I think it's becoming easier for spouses because the entire country is more transient but military spouse unemployment is still high." Hoppin noted.

The main focus of NMSN is to create a so-called "good ol' boy" network for spouses. "We need that safety net for spouses for an easier employment transition from installation to installation or out of the military." Hoppin said. "We provide events across the country where military spouse professionals can come and network with their tribe." Hoppin assures entrepreneurs and professionals will walk away with more connections and more visions to help them get ahead and grow their business or progress in their career.

"We help you make connections. We will tell you who you need to talk to and we make that introduction. We're not just networking, we're building enduring relationships." Hoppin boasted. "It's an opportunity for us to build the military spouse community and be very supportive of one another by hiring one another, promoting one another, and helping each other by making introductions."



Recently, Hoppin has traveled to Southern Maryland to meet up with local spouses. She was invited here by Moni Jefferson, self-proclaimed "serial" entrepreneur and MilSpouse Speaker. "We met at another NMSN event in DC and we talked about doing something in Southern Maryland." Jefferson said this area needs more resources for military spouses who are entrepreneurs.

"Military spouses are at a disadvantage and it's being addressed across the country. But we need to do more," said Jefferson, who is working to provide networking skills and a support community for spouses when they transition to NAS Patuxent River.

"Many spouses find themselves as entrepreneurs because they can use their talents, they're not starting from the bottom every time, and they don't need to re-invent themselves after each transition," Jefferson explained. She went on to say many military spouses are turning to virtual work but they still need support. "How can we support each other? How are we going to find clients and networking opportunities?" Those are questions Jefferson is working to answer with the help of NMSN.



On Tuesday, August 15, a small group of military spouses, along with Jefferson and Hoppin, met at Blue Wind Gourmet. “We like to go out in the community and participate in these local meet ups,” Hoppin said. “During our last meeting, it was decided we needed a Twitter tutorial to help enhance businesses.” Hoppin walked the spouses through several key objectives to use Twitter effectively.

Jefferson said entrepreneurship can offer many benefits to military spouses who are looking to work but can’t find employment. “Every time you move, it takes a toll on your career. Entrepreneurship is a continuous venture. You’re building your own brand, you’re creating your own job, and you have power to still support your service member while helping to support your family.”

Jefferson would know from personal experience. After being passed up by an employer who “didn’t want to invest in her because she would be moving,” Jefferson decided it was time to invest in herself. She launched Dog Tags and Heels, LLC--without any solid business plans. Jefferson’s virtual PR firm has taken off, and she credits NMSN with helping to make that happen. “You have to think outside of the box and attend these events because there are some heavy-hitters who can really help you.”



Hoppin said the key to succeeding in your career is to surround yourself with people who are just like you. “You need to be around people who understand. If you’re interested in growing your business and expanding your opportunities, you need to get out and meet people.” Hoppin also noted, once spouses start expanding their aperture and their networks, things will start to happen.

NMSN also offers a virtual magazine. “We have experts who are specifically addressing the issues facing military spouses.” Hoppin said those issues include how to negotiate your salary, how to explain your worth and how to explain the gaps in your employment.

While the NMSN doesn’t get much national recognition, it has found itself on the national stage. “We do lend our expertise if it’s requested. We have been invited to a few roundtables at the White House,” Hoppin said.

“We’re not so worried about the big numbers, we’re more worried about you. What can we do for you?” Hoppin asked. “Come to our events. It’s great to be around people who are just like you and they want to be around people who understand.”

NMSN is hosting its Annual Military Spouse Career Summit this October in Springfield, VA. The two-day event will address entrepreneurship, federal employment, corporate employment and volunteering. You can find more information and register here [NMSN Annual Military Spouse Career Summit](#).

Visit the [National Military Spouse Network](#) to learn more about the group and how it can help you.

Contact Joy Shrum at j.shrum@thebaynet.com