

Disabled veterans' lives improved through participation in civic service program

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Post-9/11 disabled veterans furthered their education, improved employment prospects and continued to serve their community through participating in The Mission Continues' Fellowship Program, finds a new study by the Center for Social Development (CSD) at the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis.

The Mission Continues is a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to enable every returning veteran to serve again as a citizen leader. The Mission Continues' Fellowship Program provides disabled veterans a stipend to serve as a volunteer at a nonprofit for 28 weeks, typically at social service agencies located in their own communities.

This study is one of the first to focus on the health and psychosocial

outcomes of disabled veterans after providing civic service, defined as formal volunteering in a structured program, to nonprofits all across the country.

“After the completion of the fellowship, many of the fellows who participated in the study reported starting a new job, enrolling in school or continuing to serve in their home communities,” says Monica Matthieu, PhD, lead study investigator and research assistant professor at the Brown School.

“Veterans also felt that the fellowship prompted lifestyle changes such as getting out of the house and meeting new people, networking for their future, taking an active role in helping other veterans, being a role model to their children and teaching their communities the value of service.”

CSD surveyed veterans who had participated in the Fellowship Program from 2007-2010 to assess the program impacts, veterans’ history of civic engagement, motivations and perceived impacts of the program on their personal, professional and social relationships.

The study concentrates on three main categories of impact: education, employment and continued service.

Survey participants reported:

- 71 percent have furthered their [education](#);
- 86 percent have transferred their military skills to civilian employment;
- 91 percent have built networking opportunities for a future career path;
- 86 percent have believed the program helped them to become a leader within their community; and
- 91 percent have taught others the value of service and were able to sustain a role of service within their community.

“Civic service programs for veterans such as The Mission Continues provide disabled veterans, who might otherwise see their future as extremely limited, with the opportunity to pursue a new path in life. For some veterans, volunteering at an agency that they choose provides the time and the place to develop new skills towards an alternative career trajectory,” Matthieu says.

“Programs like The Mission Continues that offer disabled veterans social support and meaningful work have the potential to significantly improve their health, mental health and psychosocial well being across their life course.”

Mary Yonkman, Chief Strategy Officer at The Mission Continues, says, “The Mission Continues was thrilled, at such an early point in our organization's history, to have Washington University study our fellowship program so intensively.

“It is critical that we are held accountable for our impact and that we ensure we are constantly improving our model to reach more veterans. This data affirms we are making a lasting impact in reconnecting veterans to their communities, which will lead to a stronger generation of veterans and stronger nation.”

More information: View a full brief on the study at csd.wustl.edu/Publications/Documents/RB11-25.pdf

Provided by Washington University in St. Louis

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