Supporting Military Families and Veterans in Flexible Careers

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Connected Nation (CN) is a national 501(c)(3) organization with a core mission to improve lives through the access, adoption, and use of broadband and its related technologies. In 2013, CN, through its Connect Ohio program, received broadband planning and adoption funds under the National Telecommunications and Information Administration’s Broadband Technology Opportunities Program to provide over 43,000 Ohioans with digital literacy training.

Building on the primary reason many sought digital literacy training—employment opportunities—Connect Ohio established Digital Works.

Now, in its sixth year, Digital Works has been leveraged in both urban and rural settings in states across the country to help people from a wide range of backgrounds. It’s a job-creation program that trains, provides placement assistance, and mentors candidates in search of high-demand, technology-based jobs.

The targeted jobs are remote, flexible positions that can move seamlessly with military families wherever they go as long as they have a high-speed internet connection.
According to a Pentagon report, even at a time of record unemployment rates for our country, the military spouse community struggles against a 26% unemployment rate and a 25% wage gap compared to their civilian counterparts. Connected Nation decided to find out if its Digital Works program could help.

Fort Knox is home to a military and civilian workforce of 19,000. In an effort to support the steady supply of military spouses and transitioning veterans in obtaining employment, CN partnered with state and local entities to implement the Digital Works program in the Fort Knox / Elizabethtown, KY area.

The demonstration project involved two, 4-week training classes which took place at the Elizabethtown Community & Technical College in Elizabethtown. The learning objectives for the program were to demonstrate and validate the viability of the Digital Works program to significantly increase the job training and placement options for military spouses and veterans. The four week training was provided in two cohorts in the fall of 2018; the first beginning on August 20th and the second beginning on September 17th.

As candidates completed training, they began applying for positions within Digital Works’ established network of employers that offer Work-At-Home (WAH) / remote job opportunities. In some cases, candidates were also able to accelerate placement with local employers.

“I quickly learned that this was a special group of people. I think there’s something about the military lifestyle that makes our veterans and military spouses uniquely qualified for this program,” noted Tammy Spring, Digital Works’ Operational Manager. “They are focused on the tasks given them, able to be self-motivated, and adapt to change even while meeting new challenges. I’ve never seen participants give so much effort to finding positions that would work for them and their families—some of them even chose to accept multiple positions so they had the most flexibility possible.”

All of the military spouses and veterans who applied for work after completing the training were able to secure jobs within weeks of completion.
Meet Some of the Digital Works Graduates

**Wendy Dickens**
Military Spouse
(22 years; 11 different duty stations; 3 children)

Wendy spent the last 18-plus years raising her family and supporting her husband as he climbed the ladder (currently a major but up for promotion next year.) Unfortunately that did not allow her to work outside of the home… until now! Wendy was offered and accepted a position with LiveOps. In addition to that, she was offered a job at the library on base in Fort Knox.

**Bettina Johnson**
Military Veteran
(3 years of active duty) and Military Spouse (25 years)

Bettina had been unemployed for 11 months and was finding it difficult to get her life back on track after dealing with disabilities resulting from a recent medical situation. Upon completion of the Digital Works program, her positive attitude, passion for training, and genuine concern for others led her out of unemployment and into multiple job offers. She accepted positions at both Startek and LiveOps.

**Suzann (Rosa) Pittman**
Military Spouse
(10 years) and father in the Air Force

Not only did Suzann end up marrying into the military, she grew up in a military family as well—her dad also served in the Air Force. Prior to enrollment in Digital Works, Suzann had been unemployed. Suzann deals with a disability that can make finding a position in a traditional work environment difficult. So, she decided to try a new approach through Digital Works. She succeeded. Soon after finishing training, she was offered and accepted work-at-home positions from LiveOps and NexRep.

**Norvinnia McLaurine**
Military Veteran
(20 years of active duty)

Norvinnia retired from the military in April of 2018 and had been looking for work ever since. His biggest challenge was finding employment that would allow him to provide care for his son. He is the primary caregiver for his autistic son who is currently in high school. Norvinnia is very passionate about his faith, people building, and cars. Soon after he completed the program, he accepted a job offer from NexRep!
Paula Clark
Military Spouse (30 years)
Veteran (13 years of active duty; 1 year in the reserves)

Paula not only served but she is married to a retired Army veteran who served for 30 years. During that time, Paula raised two little girls. She loved the Digital Works program so much that she thought her daughter might also benefit.

Wanting to assist other military spouses and veterans, Paula has inquired about helping with future classes. That’s because DW worked for her. She accepted a position with NexRep after completing the class.

“I reached out to my daughter, who is a military spouse and told her, ‘This is a great opportunity for you. Whenever you move to a new station, you will still have a job.’”

Paula Clark

Amador Garcia
Military Veteran (7 years of active duty)

Amador retired from the service due to budget cuts. Shortly after, he moved to Kentucky from Texas to help care for his grandchildren. Amador had previous IT experience and was bilingual (Spanish/English).

However, he also had an injury that limited his employment options. Although he had been unemployed for three years before enrolling in the Digital Works program, it wasn’t long before his ‘abilities’ landed him a full time position at Inspiritec.
A Better Way to Help Military Families, Veterans

Digital Works offers an effective solution to a challenging problem—how to help our military spouses and veterans overcome employment gaps and navigate relocations to find the work that can best serve their talents and needs. Digital Works offers an evergreen source of employment that can be matched with the career aspirations, growing capabilities, and personal situation of each individual.

Those who took part in the Fort Knox pilot program exceeded the normal expectations of the program. All enrollees that started the class completed the class as scheduled with no dropouts and attacked the job application process with vigor and discipline.

In contrast, general market Digital Works classes typically see about a 10% drop-out rate during training and a more protracted job search period. In the case of the Fort Knox area participants, many were able to secure one, and in several cases, more than one job within two to three weeks.

The results of this pilot program demonstrate that Digital Works is tailor made to meet the needs of military families and veterans. Digital Works can help our military spouses and veterans develop new skills for a digital job market, assist them with job placement, and provide access to flexible positions and work environments that are necessary in support of military families.

Everyone belongs in a Connected Nation.