





Army Master Sgt. Randall Thompson of Lubbock, Texas, says he applied for some 60 jobs before getting his first offer. “I started looking for a job a year before I retired from the Army,” Thompson said, “but no one wanted to talk to me until I was out.”

With assistance from a veterans research and referral specialist (VRRS) through the Texas Veterans Leadership Program (TVLP), Thompson was placed in a job with Federated Insurance Co. in Lubbock.

Another Army vet, Troy Herrera, enrolled in the Navarro Police Academy in Waxahachie, Texas, after 3½ years of active duty. After starting his academy training, Herrera learned that VA denied his education benefits claim, stating he “was never enrolled in the GI Bill program at the time of enlistment.”

A VRRS obtained Herrera’s original enlistment contract, and he was then able to use the GI Bill benefits he earned.

From September 2008 (when the program was launched) through June 2009, 2,130 veterans like Thompson and Herrera benefitted from TVLP—an average of more than 200 per month.

Created by Tom Pauken, Vietnam veteran and Texas Workforce Commission chairman, TVLP is a resource and referral network geared for returning Iraq and Afghanistan War veterans. Some 28 VRRSs work to find employment, training, medical, education and other services through community service organizations, veterans service organizations and faith-based programs.

“So far we’ve been able to help thousands of veterans here in Texas,” said Pauken, a member of VFW Post 6796 in Dallas. “Everything from getting a job, to civilian life, to getting them into training programs to get them necessary skills, or getting their benefits.”

### ‘Welcoming Vets Back the Right Way’

Established in April 2008, TVLP was modeled after the Vietnam Veterans Leadership Program, approved by President Reagan in 1981—eight years after the end of the U.S. war in Vietnam in March 1973.

“TVLP was run entirely by Vietnam vets to help our fellow vets who were unemployed or underemployed,” Pauken said. “We don’t have the societal divisions now that we had back then; we are now separating the warrior from the war.”

TVLP is designed to help vets returning from Iraq and Afghanistan to make a successful transition back to civilian life. The program is not intended to be permanent, but rather to assist their transition during the next few years.

“It’s quite a change for a veteran going from an intense battle situation in another part of the world under difficult circumstances,” Pauken said, “to coming home as a civilian in a society that only knows what it occasionally reads about what these young men and women have gone through.”

Pauken says that a “common bond” between TVLP specialists and job-seeking vets creates a sense of “veterans helping veterans,” as returning vets open up to and connect with fellow veterans. Public service announcements and TVLP’s Web site are getting the word out about the program.

“We’re welcoming veterans back to Texas the right way, not just thanking them with a single event,” Pauken said.

### ‘VFW is There for These Vets’

TVLP’s program director, Jason Doran, is a retired Marine gunnery sergeant, Iraq vet and Silver Star recipient. A VFW member since 1991 and former commander of Post 3359 in Garland, Doran encourages his co-workers to work closely with VFW.

“VFW is the No. 1 resource we send vets to for help,” Doran said. “VFW Posts down here in Texas are really picking up the gauntlet. If we want to do something—a job fair, transportation to VA for an appointment—usually we can get somebody, and usually it’s a VFW member. I’m thankful that VFW is there for these veterans.”

Doran said that employment in Dallas is currently difficult to come by. Also, many vets TVLP works with have been unexpectedly medically discharged. The program works to get these vets the assistance they need while they wait for a job to start. This includes financial support, such as that provided by VFW’s Unmet Needs program.

“VFW gives us anything that we need,” Doran said.

Doran says one of TVLP’s primary goals is to physically locate veterans, particularly those who do not seem to be “connecting back.”

“The greatest thing they need is direction,” he said. “They know they want to go to college, they want to get a job. But they don’t know how they want to utilize the benefits that are there.”

At first, TVLP staff found that employment was a key concern. With the new GI Bill, now they are finding that a lot of veterans just want temporary employment while they go to school. Fortunately, Doran says, most colleges have been more than willing to help.

“They even fund it into their budgets,” he said. “People will help veterans if you just give them a chance. We don’t want veterans to feel excluded, like they’re outside.”

Doran also notes the temporary nature of the program. He says that when the current wars end, veterans will have certain needs. If those needs are not met, these vets may require more assistance in the future.

“We’re trying to get them the help they need so those problems won’t be there,” he said. “We’re hoping to quickly catch problems out the door now rather than later.”

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## For More Information

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