



OPERATION WARFIGHTER

Road to Recovery: Wounded, Ill and Injured Service Members Make the Transition to New Challenges and Opportunities

On April 23 Patrick Brick, the AFSC program coordinator for [Operation Warfighter](#) (OWF), was so busy we postponed our conversation about the program until the following week. Patrick's schedule didn't change much. He's always busy. His mission: look for meaningful internship activity for Active Duty Wounded, Ill and Injured (WII) Service members outside of the hospital where they are recuperating.

The OWF program was developed to positively impact the wellness and recovery of Warriors-in-Transition by using their free time as outpatients productively to prepare them for (re)employment, whether back to duty or into the civilian workforce. For Service members returning to duty, the program keeps their skill sets active and offers the opportunity for additional training and experience that can benefit the military and the Warfighter. For those transitioning out of the military, the program helps them build their resumes, explore employment interests, develop job and interview skills, and gain valuable federal government work experience.

In addition to career benefits, the OWF program has tremendous physical, psychological and social benefits for all recuperating Service members. It encourages productive activity, reinforces lessons learned in resilience training and provides an opportunity to move forward in the recovery process. The program shifts an individual's focus from limitations to abilities, encouraging a "can do" attitude.

In turn, federal government agencies have the opportunity to work with transitioning Service members and experience their dedication, skills, and challenges. That exposure leads to greater awareness of some of the more defining injuries of Warriors-in-Transition from Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, such as post traumatic stress and traumatic brain injury. AFSC's Patrick Brick has been a driving force in creating, sustaining and expanding this successful Office of Wounded Warrior Care & Transition Policy program. Join me in learning more about this great program and a great AFSC colleague.

Question: Would you explain the origin and evolution of the OWF program?

Patrick Brick: Operation Warfighter started in 2004 as Wounded Warrior visits to the Pentagon provided an opportunity for the Pentagon workforce to recognize these Wounded Warriors for their service and say thank you. It began as a grassroots effort. Leadership quickly learned that these Warriors-in-Transition often have therapy only two-three days per week, with significant downtime in between, and determined they needed more meaningful activity. In April 2005 the program expanded and invited all federal agencies to host WII Service members as interns. This year we have 205 participants in the National Capitol Region (NCR) and beyond. We are working with the Services to bring the program to a number of installations, including community-based Warrior Transition Units (CBWTUs) which cover a number of states and facilities. We are expanding where there is interest and a need.



Question: What are the program's goals and how do you measure success?

Patrick Brick: OWF was created as a wellness program designed to have a positive impact from the point of care through the return to work, both mentally and physically. It also has a positive impact on employment preparedness, whether that's a return to duty or through separation followed by a gainful civilian career. Our primary goal is to have a positive impact on the wellness of WII service members. A second benefit is potential employment with the agency where the WT interned or, at a minimum, valuable additional training for future jobs and careers. These combine to provide real-world experience which encourages and enables academic direction and focus in a post-military career. While post-military employment is not the ultimate measure of success for this program, I can tell you that 70 OWF participants transitioned out of the military and into permanent civilian employment in FY 2009. That's about 20% of all OWF participants during that timeframe. Feelings of self-worth and hope which can't be measured are just as important.

Question: Who does OWF serve?

Patrick Brick: Wounded Warriors from all branches of service are eligible to participate. We do have an application process and all the candidates are vetted by the Services before participation.

Question: Where is OWF operational?

Patrick Brick: OWF started here in the NCR. The legal jurisdiction of the program requires that we work with federal agencies for the internships, so the NCR was a natural place to start. We now have about 80 actively participating federal agencies and sub-components within the NCR. We're also working jointly with the Services to serve areas in need beyond the NCR. The participating NCR facilities are Fort Belvoir, Fort Meade, National Naval Medical Center Bethesda and Walter Reed Army Medical Center.



Question: How is OWF unique?

Patrick Brick: OWF offers Service members a large number of internship opportunities from which to choose (e.g., FBI, DHS, State Department). Each warrior can fashion that opportunity to ensure a great learning experience which leads to future success. Federal agencies don't typically get exposure to this population and their skill set, so hosting these talented and dedicated individuals gives the agencies an opportunity to interact and learn from people for whom they develop programs and products.

Question: How can interested federal agencies get involved?

Patrick Brick: Federal employers should contact us through the [OWF website](#) to begin the process of vetting their program. Next, we'll provide an in-brief and discuss our SOPs and tools for outreach, monthly performance reports and data gathering.

Question: Tell me about your involvement with OWF, background, and how you came to AFSC.

Patrick Brick: I've been involved with OWF since 2005, when I worked in the Department of Defense State Liaison office at [Military Community and Family Policy](#) (MC&FP). Our focus was assistance to severely injured Service members, and I worked with state and local officials at organizations such as the National Governors Association and the National Conference of State Legislatures. We reached out and educated them about the top issues. Ultimately I inherited the program duties and have worked to grow OWF. Assisting severely injured Service members when

they return back home has long been a top priority of many Military and Veterans service organizations. Recently OWF moved to the [Office of Wounded Warrior Care and Transition Policy](#) (WWC&TP) from MC&FP. I was given an opportunity to join AFSC and the decision was easy because so many current and former AFSC employees said great things about the company.

Thanks Patrick.

For more information about Operation Warfighter and upcoming career fairs in the NCR, please visit the [OWF website](#). Download the [Operation Warfighter Program Overview](#) to learn more about benefits and processes for both Service members and prospective federal agency employers.