



## HOW TO WELCOME HOME SEPARATING SERVICEMEMBERS

Servicemembers (active duty, National Guard and reserve) separating from the military and their families face many challenges as they transition to civilian life. The search for post-service employment can be difficult. So can be the psychological adjustments required to reintegrate with family, friends and the community. While the military provides transition assistance programs, they extend only so far into the servicemember's reintegration timeframe.

The American Legion Auxiliary is well-positioned to support servicemembers and military families separating from military service. As members of military families, Auxiliary women understand through experience the importance of preparation and peer networks at every stage of the deployment cycle, including the return to civilian life. Auxiliary members are frequently leaders in their communities and civic organizations and can serve as community guides to their new neighbors. Of course, the Legion Family has practical, social and recreational support to offer. By ensuring that separating servicemembers and their families feel recognized and appreciated, the Auxiliary can have a profound and lasting impact on those individuals and families.

### How to Welcome Home Servicemembers and Families

There are two ways an Auxiliary member or unit can welcome home servicemembers and their families:

1. **Do It Yourself:** If you learn that an individual servicemember or a unit is returning to your community, make sure to organize an event welcoming and celebrating the homecoming, or participate in an event being organized by someone else. Events can include celebratory dinners, parades, barbecues, gift basket delivery or simply showing up as the servicemember(s) reach the airport. Consider the following tips as you plan your own welcome-home event:
  - Bring posters, banners, patriotic clothing and other items to demonstrate your support.
  - Spread the word by connecting with American Legion posts, Auxiliary units and other veterans service organizations in your community.
  - Connect with local TV and radio stations to raise community awareness of the welcome-home event.
  - Contact local motorcycle groups to provide patriotic escorts for the servicemember(s). These groups include The American Legion Riders, Leathernecks MC, Nam Knights of America MC, Rolling Thunder and Warriors' Watch Riders. There may be others in your community.
  - Invite municipal political figures, such as city council members or mayors, to attend.
  - Do not treat the welcome-home event as a recruitment drive. Demonstrate virtues of the American Legion Auxiliary through your actions.
2. **Get Involved in Formal Reintegration Initiatives:** The U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs support community-delivered initiatives to assist separating servicemembers and their families. The DoD initiative is called the "Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program." The VA initiative is called "Welcome Home." Yellow Ribbon and VA welcome-home events take place across the country and throughout the year.

Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program—Yellow Ribbon events are local information and service referral fairs organized for reserve components and their families under the auspices of the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP). Through YRRP events, servicemembers and



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loved ones connect with local resources before, during and after deployments. YRRP services include information on healthcare, education/training opportunities, financial planning and assistance, and an overview of legal benefits. The YRRP works in conjunction with the Small Business Administration, the U.S. Departments of Labor and Veterans Affairs, and other federal partners to provide up-to-date and relevant information to servicemembers and their families.

YRRP events are implemented by the reserve components of each military branch. They are mandatory for National Guardsmen being activated or deactivated from federal service. Reservists' attendance is optional, but they are highly encouraged to participate throughout their deployment cycle. Many events strongly advise family members to attend as well. Some events also offer child and youth activities.

Welcome Home—The VA organizes Welcome Home events in each Veterans Affairs Medical Center catchment area. Welcome Home events are similar to those organized through the YRRP. The events provide important information and guidance on accessing healthcare and other benefits through the VA.

American Legion Auxiliary members and units can contribute to Yellow Ribbon and Welcome Home events in number of ways. The Auxiliary's role will vary depending on the event. Factors like expected attendance, the size of the community and the specific support available to the participating VA, Guard and/or reserve command will determine the best method for the local Auxiliary to engage. Consult with the event leader to determine the specific needs.

Typical function for Auxiliary members and units at these events:

- Event logistics support such as setup and breakdown of tables and chairs, event registration and acting as greeters.
- Refreshment and/or meal provisions, service or cleanup.
- Organization of activities for children, such as lessons on Americanism, games, sports and creative arts.
- Distribution of information materials on Auxiliary and Legion Family programs and resources in the communities. Check with the event organizer to determine whether outside organizations are permitted to promote themselves or their programs and services beforehand.
- Community outreach to assist the event organizer in recruiting community service providers to bring information materials to the event.

## Connecting with Yellow Ribbon Events

Locating Yellow Ribbon events is a simple process. Follow these steps:

1. Visit [www.yellowribbonevents.org](http://www.yellowribbonevents.org) to open the EventPlus homepage.
2. At the bottom of the page you should see a box with three categories: "Service Component," "Deployment Phase" and a green button that reads "Find Events."
3. Using the drop-down menus from "Service Component" and "Deployment Phase," select the appropriate categories for the event(s) in which you are interested. Once you have done so, click the green "Find Events" button.



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4. A list of events meeting your selected criteria and taking place within the next three months will be generated. Clicking on an event provides pertinent information such as event time and location, main points of contact and the registration deadline for participants.
5. You can filter or expand your search results using the menu on the left side of the page. For example, you may wish to search for both Army Reserve and Army National Guard events. Alternatively, you may broaden or narrow the event timeframe or search only in a specific state or states. Once you have refined your search criteria, click "Update," located just beneath the listing of Deployment Phases.
6. To contact the event organizer, click the specific event name. You will be led to a page displaying the event organizer's name, phone number and email address.

### Connecting with Welcome Home Events

Locating Welcome Home events is a simple process. Follow these steps:

1. Visit [www.volunteer.va.gov/Welcome\\_Home\\_Events.asp](http://www.volunteer.va.gov/Welcome_Home_Events.asp) where you will be taken to a listing of VA Welcome Home events.
2. Click on the VA Welcome Home event in which you are interested. You will be taken to that event's page. As VA Welcome Home events are organized by the local VA, there is no standard event page; each will look slightly different.
3. The event page will contain contact information for the event organizer, event information such as time and date and a summary of event activities.
4. Contact the event organizer for information about how you can help.
5. If you **do not** see an event nearby, you may wish to contact your local VA Voluntary Service office to learn more about ways you can help. Find your VAVS office by visiting [www.volunteer.va.gov/directory/index.asp](http://www.volunteer.va.gov/directory/index.asp).

### Promote the American Legion Auxiliary, and Report Your Impact:

- Be sure to report your volunteer activities and hours to your unit's National Security chairman, the ALA committee with oversight of Welcome Home activities.

### Additional Resources:

- Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program website: [www.yellowribbon.mil](http://www.yellowribbon.mil)
  - To learn about available resources, what to expect at YRRP events, how servicemembers can register, how to address concerns about distance and/or travel and other common issues, visit: [www.jointservicessupport.org/YRRP/YRRPEvents.aspx](http://www.jointservicessupport.org/YRRP/YRRPEvents.aspx).
- VA's Welcome Home events website: [www.volunteer.va.gov/Welcome\\_Home\\_Events.asp](http://www.volunteer.va.gov/Welcome_Home_Events.asp)