

**Making Changes to The
Transition Readiness Program
for Discharged Marine Corps Veterans:
A Recommendation Report**

Prepared for: A Group of Marine Corps Veterans

Prepared by: Samantha Motto, Undergraduate Student at
University of New Haven

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Abstract

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Military individuals serve our country whole-heartedly. They deserve the best care that they can possibly receive due to the fact that they fight for this country every single day of their lives. With this process, comes a set of classes that are organized by the Transition Readiness Program in order to part from the military. In order to provide an accurate recommendation on if this program successfully sets up our military personnel to be discharged with the right resources, I carefully reviewed the Transition Readiness Program. I then looked at secondary and primary resources, researching articles and conducting interviews, to determine how military veterans view this program. With my findings, I came to a successful recommendation, stating that these programs need to make some improvements, such as offering Zoom sessions when classes cannot be held in person. I also discuss how each veteran should be assigned to an out-reach individual from the Veterans Affairs (VA) that personally helps the veteran transition successfully into civilian life after they are discharged and settled into their home.

Keywords: Military, Veterans Affairs, Marine Corps, Transition Readiness Program

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Executive Summary

To ensure that our military veterans receive the proper care when being discharged, a group of Psychologists and I decided to take a closer look at a specific type of program that our military veterans must go through in order to be successfully discharged. Each branch of the military has its' own name. I will be looking closely at the Marine Corp Branch. Their type of program is called the Transition Readiness Program. This program requires military veterans to participate in classes that prepare them to transition to civilian life.

I wanted to take a closer look into this and provide any improvements that the Transition Readiness Program can make in order to ensure that our military veterans are successful in their civilian lives after being discharged. This involved looking into the program and what it offers, along with interviewing a military veteran who had to partake in these types of classes. I also conducted secondary research, finding articles to support my claims and recommendations.

My main finding was that the classes are an excellent source for providing as much information as possible to veterans. Many veterans felt like the classes were helpful. However, what was also discovered was that many veterans wished the program was more personable. It focused on veterans as a whole, not considering that many are getting discharged for different and sometimes, complicated reasons. Along with that, if an individual cannot take the classes in-person, they found that taking them online was challenging.

With this finding, I recommend that the Transition Readiness Program offers online classes via Zoom. This will allow veterans to feel like they are in a learning environment still, just in the comfort of their home. This will allow them to get experience from skilled professionals despite not being in-person.

I also recommend the Transition Readiness Program aligns the veteran with an out-reach professional from Veterans Affairs (VA). Once a veteran is discharged and is settled into their home, many often feel lost, not knowing what direction to go in. With the help of a professional who works for the Veterans Affairs, they would be able to work one-on-one with the veteran, providing them resources to become employed, seek medical help, etc. This would make the experience more personable, which a lot of veterans feel is missing.

Introduction

To determine the best course of action for making sure that our military personnel receive the best care when preparing to discharge from active duty to civilian life, I set out to determine if the Transition Readiness Program is a viable resource that has successful rates of actually helping military individuals' part from active duty. Specifically, I am focusing on the Marine Corp Branch.

When we think about individuals who serve in the military, most believe that they deserve the best care when they are a part of the military, and when they are discharged as well. Unfortunately, this might not always be the case. When a military veteran is getting discharged, they have to go through training to prepare them for civilian life. This is done through a Transition Readiness Program (TRP). With this program, the veteran must take a certain amount and type of classes that will prepare them for the next step in their life. These classes can be taken in-person or online.

It is necessary for veterans to receive proper care. Individuals who fought and served this country, should be able to successfully transition with little to no setbacks. Being discharged from the military can be a challenging, confusing, and scared time. Veterans go from a civilian mindset, to a military one, and then back to civilian. There are rules and regulations set in place that an individual who enters the military must follow that they do not have to follow when considered a civilian. It can be challenging for a veteran to recognize that they have the freedom to do certain activities, like wear certain apparel and have their hair cut whatever way they like.

Research has shown that veterans argue that the Transition Readiness Program helps to prepare them for civilian life. Others may disagree, stating that it does not prepare them well enough. While opinions differ, I believe it is important to see the benefits of having a program like this.

Therefore, myself and a group of psychologists have set out to determine the pros and cons of this type of program and from that recommend any changes that the Transition Readiness Program should make. Some steps I will follow will be:

- Doing more research into TRP and determining everything their programs have to offer for Marine Corps Veterans.
- Doing secondary research to receive opinionated and professional views on TRP.
- Conducting primary research by interviewing Sean Lyons, a retired Marine Corp Veteran, who went through these programs when he was being discharged.
- Assess the pros and cons of this type of program.
- Recommend any changes to the Transition Readiness Program/Marine Corps Community Services on how they can better their program based off of research and interviews.

I found that veterans who completed these courses found them useful at the time-being, but wish they had more help once they were officially discharged and home. They wish they had more personable help, as not everyone experiences the same type of reasons for separating.

I recommend that the Transition Readiness Program assigns veterans to an out-reach individual from the Veterans Affairs, in order to ensure that the veteran is receiving the help they need, and

allowing it to be a more personable experience. In the following sections, I provide additional details about the research methods, the results I obtained, the conclusions I drew from those results, and my recommendations.

Research Methods

I began my research by looking at the science behind the Transition Assistance Program. I wanted to know all about this program with a complete overview. That includes looking at the fact that the Transition Readiness Program stems from the Transition Assistance Program. It is important to know as much about this subject as I possibly can.

Since I am focusing on the Marine Corps branch, their program is a slightly different name. It is called Transition Readiness Program (TRP). This program provides “transitioning Marines and their families with the resources and tools needed to reach their personal goals. I searched for the purpose of the TRP and how they delivered their courses. I also looked for incentive to finishing the seminar, and why it is required.

I continued my research by interviewing Sean Lyons, a veteran who was medically discharged from the Marine Corps after suffering a head injury. I asked him questions pertaining to his time in the military. I wanted to know why he was leaving the military and if he was required to take these courses. Since I am focusing on the Transition Readiness Program, I wanted to know his opinion on the program; what he liked and disliked, and what he wishes was different. It is important to get a veteran’s intake on what I am researching for reliability.

To corroborate what Mr. Lyons told me, I sought to find articles from other veterans that can support his opinion and my research. It is important to find other articles that can support my research and further prove my points. This allows me to reflect on what others are saying and be able to come to an appropriate recommendation.

Not only did I want to get other veterans’ opinions, I wanted to research the program itself and find as many reasons as I can for wanting to write this recommendation report. I needed as much support in order to feel like I was able to write a report that was reliable and could give inputs on situations and topics that matter. I did this by finding other articles that showed me what improvements could be made, and how the program is viewed by many.

Results

In this section, I present the results of my research.

Analyzing my interview with Sean Lyons

Due to the ongoing pandemic, Mr. Lyons was unable to complete his classes in person. He wishes he was able to take them in person, as he thinks this would have made his experience better. Mr. Lyons emphasized how great the program was while taking the courses, but he wishes that it was “more personal.” He explained to me that the program did an excellent job at preparing him to discharge. They offered him many websites and resources that he could use if he deemed fit. However, Mr. Lyons felt like the program was not personable enough. Every veteran that is being discharged, whatever the reason, takes the same classes. There is not extra classes or specific ones geared towards the main reason that someone is being discharged. For Mr. Lyons, he was being medically discharged. He felt like the program did not offer him help medically. In other words, he felt “lost” when it came to figuring out doctors he needed to say and how to continue receiving his medication.

Mr. Lyons said he wishes the program was more personable. He recommended that if the program offered each veteran an “out-going” worker from perhaps the Veterans Affairs (VA), that could continue helping the individual settle in once they are discharged and back home, he would have felt more secure. He argued that the program only was useful until he was completely discharged. Once discharged, he felt like he was “thrown out into the wild” and had to “fend for himself.”

Looking at other articles to support Mr. Lyons’ opinion and further my research

I found an article about a man named Kyle Ohearn, who talked about how his journey into civilian life has not been the easiest. Ohearn explained how he sent out 150 applications, three requested interviews, but none offered him the job. He explained “It’s like you know that there are companies out there that want to hire former Marines, but you just can’t make the connections or find anyone who is hiring” (Klaus, 2003).

This article by Klaus also discusses a program called Marine for Life. It is a program that provides transition assistance to newly discharged Marines. It “attempts to link recently discharged Marines with other Marine veterans and businesses interested in hiring Marines in the community” (1). However, Ohearn lives in Cleveland, and the program was not available there.

Making this program available world-wide would be useful for veterans who are struggling to receive employment. Each year, nearly 200,000 service members are discharged from the military. Out of this amount, Pew Research Center wrote an article expressing how veteran either had a job lined up for them, or looked for a job right away when leaving the military. One in four veterans said they had a job lined up for them when leaving the military. About half (48%) said they didn’t have a job lined up for them, but looked for one right away. 21% looked for a job but not right away, and 5% did not look for a job at all or retired from working.

As I dove further into my research, I came across another website called “The Legion.” This website discussed some improvements that the program needs to make. It started by explaining the positives, which Mr. Lyons and others have said already. Some positives include the amount of quality of information that was conveyed in a short amount of time and the instructors who taught the classes seemed to have a “good grasp on the material being presented and were able to answer nearly all questions” (1).

The Legion further explained some improvements that they believe is needed, which coincided with what Mr. Lyons and Mr. Ohearn were discussing. The program does not focus on personal qualities that can help the individual become employed. Mr. Lyons emphasized how he wishes the program was made more personable. Mr. Ohearn had trouble finding the right connections to get him employed. The Transition Readiness Program does not offer this type of personable knowledge. It focuses on the Marine Corps veterans as a whole, and provides them with very general information.

To further prove the point of the program not being as personable, a website called “Veterans of Foreign Wars,” expressed concerns for the “lack of involvement of accredited Veterans Service Organizations.” Ryan Gallucci, the deputy director, went more in depth in this statement, explaining how “a critical element in the transition process is ensuring that when service members leave the military they have timely access to their benefits” (1). This only proves my point further, about how the Transition Readiness Program is not as involved as they should be once a veteran is discharged.

Looking at employment for retired veterans

Results showed me that employment is a challenge for discharged veterans. Nearly half of veterans did not have a job lined up for them when separating from the military (Kim Parker, 2019). As stated previously, nearly 200,000 veterans are discharged each year. We want our military veterans to be able to be employed, so making sure that they are successful with this, is important.

How Transition Readiness Program classes are portrayed

Most of the time, classes are in-person. This allows for a more informative session, where the individual is learning from another person. Due to the ongoing pandemic, many, including Mr. Lyons, completed the courses online. In the eyes of Mr. Lyons, he wishes the classes were able to be in-person. Unfortunately, this is out of his control, but they offered no relief. They expected the individual to complete these courses, that took hours to complete, in their own environment. There was no proctor, or someone who could help if necessary. As stated on the Marine Corps Community Services website, this type of seminar sets marines up to meet career readiness goals, educational goals and personal goals. This type of class can be offered online or in-person. The courses have to be completed before the veteran can receive their DD214.

Looking at life after TRP

Mr. Lyons and Mr. Ohearn are two examples that individuals wished they were offered more guidance after being discharged. Mr. Lyons felt lost after being discharged, and was not sure what direction to go in. Many questions he had, he could not get answers for unless he sought out the right resources on his own. Since he was medically discharged and was receiving benefits, he was unsure when these benefits would start and what steps he had to take to ensure he receives proper care and the right amount of financial support. Mr. Ohearn could not find a job because he felt like the connections were not there for him.

Conclusions

In this section, I present my conclusions based on my research. I relate this section to the five bolded sections above.

Analyzing my interview with Sean Lyons

After sitting down to interview Mr. Lyons, I have concluded that it would be useful to set up each veteran with an out-reach individual who works for Veterans Affairs. This would allow a more personable experience even after being discharged from the military. It also allows the veteran to feel less lost and feel like they have support when adjusting to civilian life.

Looking at other articles to support Mr. Lyons' opinion and further my research

I have drawn the conclusion that it is a good idea to consider creating a program in each state that allows recently discharged veterans to connect with older discharged veterans. It also allows for businesses that are interested in hiring veterans, to reach out to these individuals. Veterans can help each other and provide resources to each other.

Looking at employment for retired veterans

On the basis of my research, I conclude that increasing resources for our military veterans in order to increase their chances of being employed after being discharged from the military, is necessary. Increasing resources for veterans to look for employment, or even creating a program like the one mentioned earlier, Marines for Life, can lessen how many veterans end up homeless or unemployed. Jobs set us up for success in our futures, mainly financially. It allows for individuals to be stable and support themselves and their families. We want our veterans to be employed considering they served our country.

How Transition Readiness Program classes are portrayed

Natural causes are out of our control. If for some reason, classes cannot be completed in-person, I conclude that classes should be offered in a different way besides online. Classes can be online, but via Zoom, or any other type of video messaging application that allows a skilled instructor to help prepare veterans.

Looking at life after TRP

After conducting research and interviewing, I concluded that veterans are not as prepared to be discharged from the military as the program might believe. Many veterans still feel lost and struggle with finding the right resources to find a job, find medical and mental health care support, and have someone guiding them through these steps over the phone or in person at a facility, offered by Veterans Affairs. Increasing support and resources after being discharged is necessary.

Recommendations

I recommend that the Marine Corps Community Service and Transition Readiness Program work together to pursue this option:

Adding more resources and help after being discharged from the military

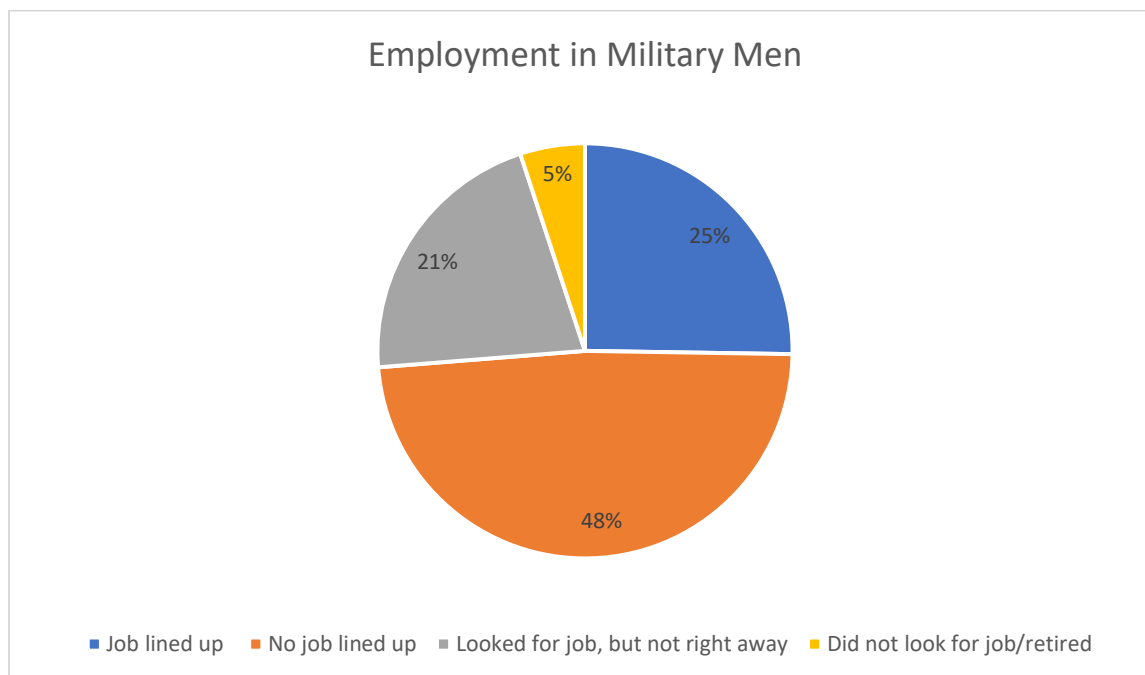
With research and interviews, I concluded that the Transition Readiness Program is excellent. It allows veterans to learn the ins-and-outs of being discharged and help prepare them to transition from a military mindset to a civilian lifestyle. However, more resources should be added to these programs. If the program cannot be held in-person, it should be taught via Zoom. Zoom allows instructors to share their screen and interact with their veterans. This allows the veterans to not be alone when going through the program, and if any questions arise, they have an available, skilled person to readily ask.

Along with that, once being discharged, veterans should be set up with their own out-reach individual who works with the Veterans Affairs. This employer can work with the discharged veteran to make sure that they transition to civilian life correctly, and have someone to provide them with resources that can help them seek a job, prepare for an interview, find medical and mental health help, if needed. This way, the veteran will not feel like they were tossed into civilian life with no guidance on how to get to where they want to be. Some veterans do not know the right step to take after being discharged. Having an employer from the VA be assigned to them, would cause less confusion and complications in a veteran.

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Appendices



Interview with Sean Lyons

Questions posed with answers from Mr. Lyons:

1. **When did you medically discharge from the Marine Corps?**
 - a. *I was officially medically discharged on July 31, 2020.*
2. **Did you partake in the Transition Readiness Program?**
 - a. *Yes, I did.*
 - 2A. **If yes, did you complete it online or in-person?**
 - I completed it online due to COVID 19*
3. **Describe some of the classes you had to take?**
 - a. *Some classes included how to find a job, how to find healthcare, how to cope with leaving the Marines and transitioning back to a civilian life, etc.*
4. **Would you say that TRP prepared you to discharge from the military?**
 - a. *Yes, I would say it prepared me as well as it could given the situation.*
5. **What do you wish was different about the Transition Assistance Program?**
 - a. *Since I was medically retiring, there was a lot of information I did not know. For example, I was very confused when it came to all of my medical board information and how that is going to affect my benefits. I wondered when I would receive my benefits, if I had to do anything to receive it. I wish I had an out-reach individual assigned to me, so they could help me personally adjust, as every veteran's discharge circumstances are different.*