

Subject: Minnesota's Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Recognition Program

1. **Purpose:** To provide back ground and information on Minnesota's Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Recognition Program.

2. **Background.**

MN's Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Recognition Program began with a vision to synchronize community resources in support of Service Members and Military Families. It was an extension of Minnesota's (MN) innovative Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Training which provided training and resources to returning MN Guard and Reserve Service Members and their families. Program development was indicated by the objective to create community networks capable of providing the same resources, services and support that returning service members and their families would receive on an Active Duty Installation. Could a cross-community network provide a synchronization of effort to provide support to its' residents experiencing deployment? In 2007, the City of Farmington, MN offered to partner with the MN National Guard and the University of Minnesota's Humphrey Institute to identify ways in which key areas within a community could coordinate and synchronize resources to support, honor and recognize Service Members, Veterans and their families. Farmington documented their processes, created procedures and submitted a commitment of support to the state of MN. The City of Farmington was recognized by Governor Tim Pawlenty as the first Yellow Ribbon City in December of 2008.

From the initial process documentation, the MN National Guard developed Minimum Requirements for each key area within local communities. Key areas include: City Leadership, Public Safety, Education/Youth, Business Community, Veterans Organizations and Faith Based and Social Service/Medical Organizations. To become a formal Yellow Ribbon Network, the community would need to submit an action plan commitment of support in each area that is approved by the state of Minnesota. Minimum requirements for each community area maintained the high standards of commitment and support required to be officially proclaimed "Yellow Ribbon" within the state. The success of the Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Recognition Program has grown as MN communities have responded to the state's request to meet these minimum requirements and by doing so, the program updated in 2009 to not only provide support throughout a deployment cycle but to meet the needs of Service Members, ALL age and era Veterans and ALL Military Families.

Throughout 2009, similar state requirements were developed to form the Yellow Ribbon Company and Yellow Ribbon County Program. Yellow Ribbon Companies connect key internal organizational areas to synchronize support and resources to Service Member, Military Families and Veteran employees as well as connect company resources to local Yellow Ribbon Community Networks. Yellow Ribbon Counties connect county level key areas to synchronize support and resources as well as connect any Yellow Ribbon Community Networks within the county. In April of 2010, the Department of Military Affairs created a Director of Military Outreach position to oversee the standards of the program.

In 2010, MN's newly appointed Adjutant General, Major General Richard Nash, elevated the Beyond the Yellow Program as a key MN Department of Military Affairs Leadership Priority. As a result, twelve Yellow Ribbon Outreach Coordinators were hired to assist MN's 61 armory and airbase communities in forming Yellow Ribbon Networks.

As of October 17, 2016, 297 entities have been proclaimed Yellow Ribbon either individually or as a group. Included in that total are: 219 cities, 26 counties and 52 companies. These entities make up approximately 95 community networks across the state. These entities have submitted action plan commitments of support to the state of MN and have been proclaimed as "Yellow Ribbon". All 61 Minnesota National Guard armory/airbase communities have formed a Yellow Ribbon Network and have connected local Unit Representatives to their community Yellow Ribbon Steering Committees.

3. Mission.

Yellow Ribbon Support Networks have activated Operation Enduring Support in all MN communities with a National Guard Armory or Air Base. Yellow Ribbon Networks have been formed for all MN's 61 armory and airbase communities. All armory and airbases have assigned unit representatives to actively participate on local community Yellow Ribbon Steering Committees. In addition, the 61 armory and airbase community Networks have been assigned non-armory neighboring communities to synchronize support efforts throughout the state.

The state will continue to be reactive to assist any community, company or county interested in participating in the Yellow Ribbon Recognition Program. New entities will be connected to existing entities to continue to synchronize efforts across the state.

MISSION: MN's Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Program supports service members, ALL veterans of any age or era and military families. Yellow Ribbon Networks conduct cross-sector collaboration to synchronize locally accessible resources and identify, recognize and honor military connected residents. The ongoing mission includes:*

- 1) YR Networks will partner with state, federal and nonprofit resources to meet the needs of MN Veterans, Service Members and their families.
- 2) YR Networks will identify and support active duty Service Members and their families.
- 3) YR Networks will identify and support Veterans of any age or era and their families.
- 4) YR Networks will support the Guard and Reserve Components through all examples of service (IE: drill weekends, annual training, state activations or federal mobilizations).
- 5) YR Networks will be prepared to activate support for any future deployments.
- 6) YR Networks will form strong, sustainable relationships with 61 National Guard Armory and Airbase Community Units.
- 7) YR Networks will be connected to state, federal and nonprofit resources and state-wide Veteran support initiatives.
- 8) YR Networks will complete an annual Best Practice Checklist (attached) to ensure state standards of program are maintained.
- 9) YR Networks will connect at least annually at Joining Community Forces-Minnesota (JCF-MN) events offered around the state in order to; 1) Share best practices, 2) Receive education on

state and federal initiatives, 3) Receive recognition by state and military leadership, 4) Coordinate and synchronize resources.

***All key state and federal partners identify ongoing strategies and partnership opportunities to support the Yellow Ribbon Networks in maintaining this ongoing mission.**

4. Maintaining MN's Yellow Ribbon Recognition Program.

Yellow Ribbon Networks have been sustaining in MN communities, counties and companies since 2008. Several factors have been identified that impact sustainability:

- A. Yellow Ribbon Networks need to be kept informed of the needs of MN Service Members, Veterans and their families.
- B. Yellow Ribbon Networks need to be connected to military connected residents within their communities.
- C. Yellow Ribbon Networks need to be recognized for their efforts by state and military leaders.
- D. Yellow Ribbon Networks need to be kept informed of federal, state and local resources that can partner with their support efforts.
- E. Yellow Ribbon Networks need to sustain adherence to high program standards set by the state of MN.
- F. Key Support Partners need to connect and take an active role on Yellow Ribbon Steering Committee to ensure connection of resources and provide knowledge of local needs.
- G. Local military entities need to develop ongoing "give and take" relationships with local Yellow Ribbon Networks.

During a time of decreased deployments, Yellow Ribbon Networks can continue to meet the needs of Service Members, Veterans and their families. Annually a state-wide audit (**Yellow Ribbon Best Practice Checklist-attached**) is completed by existing community networks to ensure all federal, state and local partners have been synchronized and to identify community needs to sustain support efforts.

In addition, annual Yellow Ribbon Training Summits were held across the state between February and May. YR Summits provide an opportunity for recognition, education, best practice sharing and networking for Minnesota's YR Networks.

In 2014, the Yellow Ribbon Training Summits were combined with Family Assistance Center Regional Service Provider (ISFAC) meetings to enhance partnership and educational opportunities. These events are now called Joining Community Forces-MN Conferences.

Throughout 2015, five JCF-MN Conferences were held throughout the state. Locations included: Willmar, Alexandria, Albert Lea, Cloquet and Bloomington. This was an opportunity for state and federal partners to share the needs of military families and veterans throughout MN, share best practices and to discuss ongoing community partnerships. Military Leaders provided recognition to volunteers across the state who exemplified the core values of the Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Program. Yellow Ribbon Steering Committees are encouraged to send representation from their community to these events. Core committee members

and unit representatives participated in the event as well as state, nonprofit and federal partners to update networks on future strategic initiatives and identify partnership opportunities. Joining Community Forces-MN events have proven to be highly successful and will continue to be offered annually.

5. **Method.**

MN's Yellow Ribbon Recognition Program sets the standard for key areas within communities, counties and companies to synchronize support efforts. Requirements of each program can be found at <http://www.beyondtheyellowribbon.org/yellow-ribbon-community-campaign>. Yellow Ribbon Steering Committees are formed with representatives from key community areas. These areas include; city leadership, public safety, faith based and social service organizations, veteran organizations, social service/medical providers, businesses and employers. In an armory or airbase community, a local Unit Representative is assigned to the Core Committee. Ensuring each key area is represented on this cross-organizational committee is key to the success of a Yellow Ribbon Network. It allows for total community synchronization of effort and identification of resources. It build relationships across the community capable of working together to meet the needs of military connected residents.

Once a Yellow Ribbon Steering Committee is formed, the Department of Military Affairs provides a 90-minute community training to guide the community through the action plan process. In addition, a 16-Step Process is introduced to the network that includes the best practice process for action plan completion. The committee then completes the action plan obtaining commitment from each key community area and meeting the minimum standard of each area. Average time of process completion is 8-12 months.

Once the action plan is completed and all key community areas have committed to support efforts, the commitments are reviewed with the Director of Military Outreach who assures standard adherence and clarity of action plan commitments. Final Action Plans are approved by a state Yellow Ribbon Action Plan Review Board. Once state approval is obtained, the Governor and Adjutant General proclaim the city, county or company as "Yellow Ribbon" during a formal proclamation ceremony. This public ceremony not only highlights the commitments attained, it allows the network support message to reach their military connected residents.

Occasionally when there are several entities to be awarded, regional proclamation ceremonies are held in previously proclaimed Yellow Ribbon Communities to allow for recognition of their sustained efforts. Partnership with the MN Department of Transportation has been solidified for proclaimed Yellow Ribbon Communities to obtain street signs reflecting their community designation.

Since many MN communities were already engaged in effective military support practices, the requirement of the Yellow Ribbon Recognition Program to create a cross-community Steering Committee enhances and unites these efforts. It has also allowed military and state leaders to be aware of the strong support efforts occurring in communities, including many support practices that had been ongoing throughout the state long before the implementation of the Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Program.

6. **Summary.**

MN's Yellow Ribbon Recognition Program has created a sustainable model of support for communities, counties and companies in support of the state's Service Members, Veterans and Military Families. The program has asked communities, counties and companies to coordinate and synchronize efforts to reach every military connected resident in the state. These community networks are paired with Key Support Partners to partner in order to address and eliminate resource gaps, identify needs and reduce redundancy. In addition, the program continues to expand as federal, state and local support partners are connected to the formed networks. This ensures unity of effort is sustained to meet the needs of MN's military and their families. This has created a national model for how communities can recognize, support and honor our nation's military. The effectiveness of MN YR Networks can be utilized to continue to support any veteran, any military family and any service members' needs in MN communities. The infrastructure and organization of Yellow Ribbon Networks can be utilized to activate support for any demographic in need throughout MN. Yellow Ribbon Networks have utilized key areas and locally accessible resources to meet the needs of military connected residents across the state.

Best practices have been identified from high functioning Yellow Ribbon Networks. Below are known sustainability practices for each key community area:

Yellow Ribbon Steering Committee.

Yellow Ribbon Steering Committees are made up of representatives from key community areas; City Leadership, Business Community, Veteran Organizations, Public Safety/Judicial, Education/Youth, Faith Based, Social Service/Medical Providers. YR Network Steering Committees meet regularly to maintain community key area commitments, create processes to identify and support service members, veterans and military families, identify needs of military connected residents and create community awareness of veterans and military family issues. The MN National Guard has representation on 61 Armory/Airbase committees. This representation on the Core Committee has also served to build lasting relationships between the local armory/airbase and every sector of the community.

BEST PRACTICES:

- 1) YR Steering Committees have been able to identify military connected residents and inform them of the existence of a local Yellow Ribbon Network. This can be obtained through:
 - a. Strategic marketing/PR campaigns.
 - b. Steering Committee visibility at community/county events.
 - c. Strengthening partnerships with public safety, school and youth programs, city leaders, veteran organizations and faith based organizations, veteran programs and social services to utilize their internal communication methods to reach their key demographics.
 - d. Maintaining the cross-sector community representation and collaboration at Steering Committee meetings.
 - e. Developing process to identify of the needs of military connected residents.
 - f. Developing relationships with other organizations and programs to synchronize resources.
 - g. Maintaining consistent representation of key community areas on Steering Committees.

These strategies have proven successful in an all-community approach to identifying active duty families, meeting the needs of Guard and Reserve Members during training/drill weekend/state activation absences, identifying elderly and isolated veterans and supporting parents of currently serving Service Members.

- 2) The annual YR Best Practice Checklist encourages YR Networks to identify partnership opportunities and build relationships with representatives from a Key Support Partner Team:
 - Armory/Airbase Unit Representative
 - Local Family Assistance Centers (FAC)
 - Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Representatives (ESGR)
 - Family Readiness Support Assistants (FRSA)
 - Air and Family Readiness Assistants (AFR)
 - County Veteran Service Officers (CVSO)
 - Workforce Center Veteran Employment Representatives (DEED)
 - MN Assistance Council for Veterans (MAC-V)

This Key Support Partner Team provides the ongoing communication of Service Member, Military Family Member and Veteran needs to the local YR Steering Committee. They educate the community network on resource gaps specific to the area and then partner to address identified gaps. They support the ongoing adherence to program criteria and assist in the creation of strategic solutions to address local issues. This allows the YR Network to be utilized to meet the specific local needs of military families and veterans. Unit representatives are responsible to maintain the cohesiveness of this team in supporting the success and sustainment of the YR Network. Involvement of this Key Support Partner Team to a local Yellow Ribbon Steering Committee is essential for successful sustainment of a YR Network.

- 3) Further collaboration between the state and federal Departments of Veterans Affairs, other state and federal agencies and nonprofit organizations are needed to connect YR Networks with military support initiatives and provide education on initiatives to avoid duplication of effort. This includes but is not limited to:
 - a. Department of Education
 - b. Department of Human Services
 - c. Department of Health
 - d. Local VA Community Based Outreach Clinic Leaders
 - e. Local VA Hospitals and Clinics
 - f. State and Federal nonprofits and civic organizations
 - g. Business and business association partners
 - h. Department of Defense Programs (DoD)

City Leadership.

City leaders in MN YR Networks must meet the requirement to show visible signs of support for veterans and military families throughout their community. They have also been key in connecting military connected residents to the YR Network and enhancing city/county veteran recruiting and hiring procedures.

BEST PRACTICES: City Leaders continue their efforts to identify ways in which the community can show a visible sign of support to Service Members, Veterans and their families and connect military residents to Networks by:

- Participating, attending and volunteering at YR Network meetings and events
- Partnering with the YR Committee to identify further ways for leaders to connect families to the network and to identify the needs of military connected residents.
- Carrying small cards with YR contact information has proven successful in connecting both military families and potential volunteers to the YR Network
- Hosting all-community appreciation weeks and Welcome Home parades
- Displaying flags down Main Street
- Acknowledging veterans or veteran employees at city council meetings
- Reviewing and identifying gaps in city and county veteran recruiting and hiring practices, military employee policy and procedures and support processes for military connected employees.
- Connecting HR Departments with local Workforce Center Veteran Employment Representatives to identify potential employment needs and/or future employment opportunities
- Connecting city/county employees to YR Network volunteer efforts of support throughout the community
- Including the YR Network in community communication venues (website link on city website, information in community newsletters, announcements at council meetings etc.)
- Connecting military-connected residents to their local networks throughout the course of normal community leader duties
- Providing city leaders with an opportunity to receive an annual update on YR Network activities and goals
- Providing YR Network contact information in water bills or new resident packets
- Adding military specific resources in all community crisis plans
- Ensuring all city leaders and employees are aware of military specific support resources
- Acknowledging Veteran publically during City Council meetings (Welcome Home, Veterans Day, Memorial Day, etc.
- Encouraging military recognition during city/county community events
- Hosting Town Hall meetings to gain feedback from local military connected residents on how the city can provide support

Business Community.

Yellow Ribbon Networks have been included in statewide initiatives including the MN Veteran Employment Initiative, streamlining the messaging to connect any unemployed veteran to a MN Workforce Center Veteran Employment Representative within the MN Department of Economic and Employment Development (DEED). In addition, Community, Company and County representatives provide resume review and mock interview one-on-one support at Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Trainings throughout MN as well as networking opportunities within local professional associations. Yellow Ribbon Networks provide volunteers at reintegration trainings to assist with family registration and youth program support. Through the YR Best Practice annual checklist process, all Yellow Ribbon Networks connect to local Veteran Employment Representatives at MN Workforce Centers.

BEST PRACTICES: MN business communities continue to enhance the partnerships between MN Workforce Centers and local YR Networks by:

- Hosting/participating in veteran job fairs
- Identifying current and future employment needs
- Developing ongoing relationships with local DEED Veteran Employment Representatives to identify partnership opportunities
- Providing training to hiring managers/supervisors on the value of hiring a Veteran
- Enhancing military employee policy and procedures
- Developing veteran networking opportunities
- Developing veteran career progression/promotional programs
- Developing veteran mentorships opportunities
- Providing volunteers for resume review and mock interviews and share resources for veteran job seekers
- Identifying potential YR Companies-YR Companies participating in the state's recognition program have an opportunity to enhance their partnership with local YR Networks. Many YR companies already provide a representative on the local YR Community Networks. This has further synchronized and coordinated service members, veterans and military family support, honor and recognition efforts
- Partnering to review, identify gaps and share best practices in veteran recruiting and hiring practices, military employee policy and procedures and support processes for military connected employees.
- Connecting employees to volunteer efforts of support throughout the community
- Enhancing the partnership with ESGR (Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve) to ensure training for HR employees in all community businesses is conducted on the rights of MN Guard and Reserve Members and to remain proactive in support to impacted employees
- Partnering with YR Networks on community recognition and honor events. Cross-community planning committees to plan and execute recognition and honor events within MN communities have been effective in expanding the audience and enhancing the ability to have larger, more impactful ceremonies and programs
- Participating in MN's Yellow Ribbon Company Program

- Building relationships with local military leaders (providing organizational leader training programs to military leaders, scheduling Meet and Greets to share best practices and initiatives, learning more about local units)

School/Youth Support.

Yellow Ribbon Networks are being utilized to support MN's military children. Minnesota is home to over 23,000 military connected youth. Program standards require school districts to identify military connected youth within their schools. In October of 2011, Yellow Ribbon Network representatives from all over MN participated in a Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) Public Engagement in which participants were educated on best practices for supporting military children and asked to collaborate on action steps to implement best practices throughout MN schools. Future MCEC free training opportunities will be made available to all YR Networks.

Beginning July 1, 2012, Yellow Ribbon Communities began distribution of free K-12 Military Support Toolkits to all MN school districts. The toolkit, created by the Department of Military Affairs Family Programs, provides group and individual curriculum/activities for counselors and teachers to best support children impacted by a military deployment. Many YR Networks host annual recognition events to recognize new graduates entering the Armed Forces. This has allowed the networks to connect with military families upon entry and has been a proven best practice to meet military families immediately.

MN's Yellow Ribbon Program has developed a partnership with the state's MEPS (Military Entrance Processing Station) to provide voluntary "Yellow Ribbon Cards" for those entering the Armed Forces to complete in order to connect the service members and their family to a local Yellow Ribbon Network. This in addition to the minimum requirement to recognize all graduating seniors entering the Armed Forces. These initiatives have served to connect with military members from the beginning of their service. These initiatives have been successful in notifying new service members about community support efforts. Many family members or service members in the Guard and Reserve have joined local Networks to become volunteers or Steering Committee members.

BEST PRACTICES: School Districts/Youth Programs continue this collaboration by:

- Identifying military connected children in all schools (Public, Private, Charter)
- Encouraging YR Network visibility at school events
- Ensuring the use of the K-12 Toolkit
- Recognizing and supporting graduates entering the Armed Forces-early connection to military families
- Updating teachers and staff on local YR Network activities/resources
- Connecting school administrators to military youth resources
- Connecting with all local youth programs (Scouting programs, 4-H, Honor Clubs, Early Childhood development, private and charter schools) to identify partnership opportunities and identify military connected youth
- Partnering with MN Youth Family Programs to support summer camp opportunities and provide babysitting for military family events

- Connecting with local libraries to ensure reintegration-support and other support books and resources are available to military connected residents. Libraries have also been partners in hosting speakers and awareness training on military issues within the community.
- Connecting school district annual veteran recognition programs to YR Networks to create a cross-community effort to enhance these programs within the schools
- Utilizing local military units in teaching physical education, geography, history and industrial arts classes in local schools. This builds positive relationships between school leaders and local armory/airbase personnel
- Educating school districts on military connected employee support best practices
- Enhancing school district veteran recruiting and hiring practices
- Utilizing school employees as volunteers in community support efforts
- Connecting school districts to local senior living/nursing home to connect, build relationships, recognize and honor elderly veterans
- Utilizing school groups (Honor Society, Sports Teams, Leader Groups) as support volunteers
- Partnership with MN Department of Education military support initiatives
- Developing high school Yellow Ribbon Networks of students connected to community efforts.
- Forming “Yellow Ribbon Student Chapters” within the High School to mentor younger military youth, provide volunteer support to the community YR Network, host military awareness activities within the school, provide peer support to military youth.
- Student-led hosting all-community patriotic events within the school.
- Connecting students to local assisted living and senior living home to recognize and collect veteran stories.
- Honoring graduates entering the Armed Forces by hosting a dinner with area veterans and new recruits and their families, providing red, white and blue tassels for graduate mortarboards to wear at ceremony, hosting a cake and punch recognition program in school with new recruit families and school and community leadership.
- Honoring Veterans during halftime at football or other sports games.

Family Support.

Yellow Ribbon Networks are fulfilling the needs of MN Service Members, Veterans and their families. Volunteers coordinated by Yellow Ribbon Steering Committees and in partnership with local Family Assistance Centers have been activated to provide lawn care, household chores, medical appointment rides, babysitting, tutoring, snow shoveling and car repairs to service members, veterans and their families. Yellow Ribbon Networks have organized events to honor military parents, military connected youth and military spouses. Yellow Ribbon Community Networks have been most effective in caring for the families of injured Service Members and Gold Star Families long after initial support efforts have ended. The networks are dedicated to ensuring their loved one is never forgotten and include the families in ongoing recognition and honor events.

Yellow Ribbon Networks have directly connected with MN Family Assistance Centers (FAC) to meet the needs of service members and their families. All YR Networks report need requests to their local FAC in order to ensure proper partnership and follow up is maintained. This also allows the FAC to collect data to determine regional need trends and measure Yellow Ribbon Network effectiveness.

BEST PRACTICES: The opportunities for veteran and family support continue despite decreased deployments. The support structures developed by YR Networks have the ability to support Guard and Reserve families during annual training, out-state training and drill weekends. YR Networks have been able to identify active duty families and isolated, elderly veterans in need of support in MN communities. This need will continue.

YR Networks continue to increase family support by:

- Increasing outreach and support efforts to connect resources to elderly or homeless veterans within local communities
- Connecting with volunteer groups seeking opportunities to help. Match volunteers with military family and veteran needs
- Outreaching to MN Senior Centers, Nursing and Assisted Living homes to meet the needs of elderly or isolated veterans
- Providing support to parents and siblings of currently serving service members
- Providing ongoing support to Gold Star Families and Wounded in Action Families
- Developing effective crisis plans that can become activated in the event of a military family crisis. All YR Networks communities should have military specific resource information readily available to city leaders, public safety, faith based leaders and schools
- Educating YR Networks on resources available to military connected residents
- Developing PR/Marketing campaigns to build awareness of military connected residents in need
- Providing rides to medical appointments or caretaker respite to elderly veterans
- Building volunteer networks throughout the community that can activate to meet needs
- Providing meals, childcare, household support to military families or elderly veterans
- Partnering with school or county social workers to provide a multi support approach to meet needs
- Partnering with the local Family Assistance Centers to provide support
- Continuing to identify any and all resources that a military family in need can be connected to within the local community

Veteran Organizations.

Yellow Ribbon Networks have reached out to the veteran community by fully partnering with MN Veteran Organizations. Their commitment to ensure no MN veteran feels isolated or alone has led to networks holding Vietnam Veteran Welcome Home parades, hosting community educational events, creating veteran mentoring programs and honoring veterans in local nursing homes. Several instances have been recorded in which veterans were able to access assistance from a local Yellow Ribbon Network instead of applying for MN's State Soldier's Assistance Program, an once-in-a-lifetime grant. This has allowed the grant to be available for other needs or access to more participants.

BEST PRACTICES: YR Networks continue to enhance their partnerships with local Veteran Organizations by:

- Full partnership with YR Networks in planning and executing annual community veteran recognition and honor events
- Creating proactive programs activated by Veterans Organizations to identify military connected residents
- Educating community on veteran organizational programs and benefits
- Identifying veteran needs within the community
- Creating community wide support of local veteran organization establishments and benefits
- In addition to the VFW and American Legion, enhancing partnerships with ALL congressionally chartered service organizations in MN; Disabled American Veterans (DAV), AMVETS, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Vietnam Veterans of America, Jewish War Veterans, Marine Corps League, American Ex-Prisoners of War
- Connecting elderly veterans with OEF/OIF Veterans to develop mentoring relationships
- Utilization of the YR Network by County Veteran Service Officers (CVSO) to enhance county-wide initiatives. All CVSO's should be meeting regularly with YR Networks to educate on the needs of veterans within the county and to partner on identifying solutions to meet the needs
- Providing an opportunity for veterans to come together (IE: Monthly veteran dinners, free travel to military programs, meetings with CVSOs, etc)
- Establishing a Veteran Mentor Program
- Connecting veteran to County Veteran Service Officers and other programs
- Identifying active duty service members throughout communities and connecting them to the YR Network

Public Safety.

MN Public Safety organizations have often been the first responders connecting military families to local YR Networks. They have created house check and fire safety programs to help military families feel secure. They have made commitments to identifying and supporting Service Members, Veterans and Military Families. They develop annual training and awareness programs for all public safety personnel and have created effective processes to respond to military family issues within the community.

Public Safety has been instrumental in connecting veterans in crisis to resources and notifying veterans and military family about local YR Networks. Public Safety partnerships and relationship building with County Veteran Service Officers has been essential in ensuring veterans are connected to resources and benefits. Many examples have been documented across MN in which Public Safety has been able to identify "at risk" service members and connected them to mental health resources or the local YR Network for ongoing support. In several communities across MN, Public Safety Officers have been able to provide mentorship to military youth while their parent is deployed. In 2012 a partnership was implement with the Midwest Community Policing Institute to provide low cost 'Veterans in Crisis Training' across the state. At this day0-long training, YR Network, Family Assistance Center and County Veteran Service Office Representatives were able to attend and provide more information to the public safety attendees, further enhancing the synchronization of effort across the state.

BEST PRACTICES: YR Networks continue to enhance partnerships with all Public Safety personnel by:

- Providing marketing material that Public Safety can distribute to families in crisis
- Educating Public Safety personnel on veteran and military family needs and resources
- School Resource Officers (SRO) partner with school counselors to be aware of the K-12 toolkit and other military youth resources. SRO's have also proven to be excellent mentors for school children with a deployed parent
- Enhancing Safety and House Check Programs and market to military families
- Connecting military residents to the YR Network through Public Safety events such as National Night Out or Departmental Open Houses
- Public Safety personnel trained annually on military specific resources or veterans issues
- Providing veteran specific crisis and suicide prevention training for all public safety personnel
- Developing mentoring program for veterans seeking careers in law enforcement/public safety
- Provide training to all Public Safety personnel on county veterans court programs (IE: Midwest Community Policing Institute's "MN Veterans in Crisis" Training)
- Implementing Veteran recruiting and hiring initiatives

Social Service/Medical.

YR Network partnerships with the medical community have identified local Tricare providers and built relationships with locally accessible mental health partners. If a Tricare provider is not locally accessible to military families, Yellow Ribbon Networks have challenged their community clinics to sign up to accept Tricare resulting in every community ensuring a medical care option is easily accessible. As of 01DEC2012, all armory/airbase communities have identified locally accessible healthcare in MN communities. This has been so successful, Tricare has reported the availability of participating medical providers throughout every area of MN eliminating the long distance required for care previously reported by military families. This success is a direct result of YR Networks ensuring their local medical partners have committed to accepting Tricare insurance. In addition, YR Networks commit to ensuring they have at least two mental health professionals that can be called upon at any time to assist during a crisis.

BEST PRACTICES: YR Networks are required to identify and develop relationships with at least two local mental health professionals (accepting Tricare) that work closely with the YR Network to educate and be available in a crisis. In addition, YR Networks have been asked to identify all Financial Literacy Resources available within the community. Armory and airbase community units have an opportunity to build ongoing relationships with these mental health professionals.

There is opportunity to connect YR Networks with state and federal initiatives dealing with military connected mental health, chemical dependency, suicide prevention and resiliency issues (R3SP). An update of suicide prevention and resiliency initiatives has been provided at the 2013 YR Training Summits as well as an opportunity to discuss partnership opportunities to allow YR Networks to assist in the success of state-wide initiatives.

Social Service/Medical areas within communities can continue his partnership by:

- Identifying all local Social Service Resources that can be connected to the YR Network
- Educating all Public Safety and Community Leaders on veteran/military family specific crisis resources
- Providing resiliency/suicide prevention training to YR Network and community leaders
- Building relationships with local mental health providers to enhance locally accessible resources
- Reviewing community crisis response procedures to include military specific resources
- Connecting community suicide prevention programs to YR Network
- Identifying all social service resources in community including alcohol and chemical dependency resources
- Identifying chemical dependency resources within the community
- Connecting Veterans to Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs)
- Providing homeless veteran resources

Faith Based Organizations.

The faith based communities across MN share existing resources to meet the needs of service members, veterans and their families. Marriage and mental health counseling, youth support, child care, financial education and employment resources have been made available to military residents through the connection of faith based communities throughout MN. Faith based communities also utilize internal communication tools to connect military members to the local community network. Faith based organizations have provided venues and funding for YR Network events to bring together military families.

BEST PRACTICES:

In January 2013, an additional minimum requirement was added to the program of faith based communities requiring the connection of military connected members to local YR Networks. This will ensure the commitment from the faith based organizations of connecting all military connected members to the local YR Networks. This will also ensure the existence of a proactive approach to assisting the community in identifying all military connected residents in need. Faith based communities also have an opportunity to connect volunteers to YR Networks to provide military family support within the local community. The faith based community continues this partnership by:

- Educating faith based leaders on military support resources/issues
- Providing veteran recognition and honor services
- Providing military youth support through already existing youth programs
- Providing military couple marriage/relationships support through already existing relationship programs
- Providing support to parents of military connected residents
- Providing employment support
- Providing financial literacy counseling

- Providing outreach resources/communication tools to identify military connected residents within the community
- Creating volunteer groups to meet the needs of service members, veterans and military families within the community
- Connecting with local Yellow Ribbon Networks on support initiatives
- Provide community educational opportunities on military related issues
- Providing spiritual support to military connected residents and volunteer committee members
- Providing education to all clergy on military-specific issues and resources (2014 Partners in Care training offered to all Yellow Ribbon Networks)

Armory/Airbase Relationships.

All MN National Guard armory and airbases have assigned unit representatives to actively participate on local community Yellow Ribbon Steering Committees. Forming and maintaining these community relationships, the MN National Guard strengthens their presence and good will in MN communities.

BEST PRACTICES: By actively participating in YR Networks, unit representatives have an opportunity to build strong relationships with a cross sector committee. By leading the effort to connect a Key Partner Team (FAC/FRSA/CVSO/ESGR/DEED) to support local YR Networks, they can ensure program adherence and strengthen the cross-sector collaboration efforts. This team can work in partnership with the community to connect resources, educate on needs and recognize effort in order to maintain sustainment of the program.

In January of 2015, via Operation Order "Operation Enduring Support" each Unit is responsible to further enhance these relationships by meeting the following mandatory requirements:

- 1) Connect with the local YR Network at least 4 times throughout training year (01OCT-30SEPT).
- 2) Recognize a YR Network volunteer at least 1 time each training year.
- 3) Ensure collection and completion of YR Network annual checklist
- 4) Attend annual JCF-MN event

Each Unit is responsible to report above requirements quarterly at the Quarterly Readiness Conference (QRC) reported directly to the Adjutant General and Command Team.

Other Unit sustainment best practices include:

- Providing consistent unit representation at regular Yellow Ribbon Network meetings
- Inviting community leaders to learn more about unit mission and capabilities
- Inviting YR Network to participate in unit activities
- Recognizing YR Network volunteers and leaders at unit events
- Participating in community recognition/honor events
- Connecting Key Partners (FAC/FRSA/CVSO/ESGR/DEED) to support local YR Networks
- Providing volunteers to support community events
- Identifying opportunities for Chain of Command to acknowledge and recognize local community efforts

- Identifying opportunities for Chain of Command to communicate needs of military families to the YR Network
- Developing transitional processes for successful hand off when a change of unit/airbase representation is made on the YR Steering Committee
- Reporting issues/needs of YR Networks to Director of Military Outreach to enhance network support
- Awareness and outreach to neighboring non-armory Yellow Ribbon Networks
- Connecting Family Readiness Groups to local Network to identify family needs

County Networks.

Yellow Ribbon County Networks have been instrumental in connecting and supporting their Yellow Ribbon Communities. Representatives from the community Yellow Ribbon Steering Committees unite at the county level to synchronize their efforts and identify needs throughout the county. MN Counties have reviewed their youth programs to identify how they can better support military connected youth. This has included ensuring child and adult books about deployment and reintegration are stocked at county libraries. County networks have reviewed their employee policies and hiring procedures to ensure they are modeling high standards of military connected employee hiring and support. County Networks regularly bring community representatives together to meet and share best practices and to synchronize county-wide efforts.

BEST PRACTICES: County level YR Networks take a proactive approach in connecting community networks within a county to unify and synchronize efforts across MN communities. County Veteran Programs can partner with YR Networks to enhance their outreach and strengthen their programs by utilizing the synchronization of effort that has been successful in MN communities. Counties also make commitments within the area of employment, county leadership and country programming support.

More MN Counties need to assist in this successful connection of their community YR Networks. There are opportunities to enhance the partnership with County Veteran Service Officers to include their advocacy within their respective counties to participate at the county level in the YR Program. County participation can assist the state in unifying their YR Network and act as a communication and support network to synchronize efforts throughout the state.

Yellow Ribbon Company Program.

Due to the success of the community networks, in 2008, Minnesota formed the Yellow Ribbon Company Program. Yellow Ribbon Companies create action plans with commitments from key areas within an organization. These key areas include; Company Executive Leadership, HR-Recruiting, HR-Policy and Procedure, Training and Development, Community Outreach and Support and Employees Outreach and Support. The YR Company Network follows a similar process with the resulting action plan submitted to the state of Minnesota for final approval. Company Networks connect with community networks to enhance the synchronization of effort. Bi-annual YR Company Seminars bring companies together to educate on state and federal veteran employment initiatives, share best practices and build relationships.

BEST PRACTICES: Company Networks take a proactive approach in connecting to community networks to unify and synchronize efforts across MN communities. Company Networks make commitments in the area of Veteran recruiting/hiring/retaining, military connected employee support and military connected community support. Companies meet minimum requirements to achieve “Yellow Ribbon Company” status. One minimum requirement is the establishment of a deferential pay policy, the Guard or Reserve member employee cannot make less during a deployment. This is one example of how MN’s program requirements have changed policy and procedures in support of military employees.

Company Networks create supportive, stronger work environments for military connected employees and can be key partners to sustain and strengthen local YR Community Networks. Local Armory and Airbase Units have an opportunity to build relationships with Yellow Ribbon Companies to share best practices and resources and connect with local communities. Relationships have also been established in sharing best practices between the MN National Guard in organizational diversity and energy sustainment initiatives.

Twice a year the Yellow Ribbon Companies come together to share best practices, build relationships and hear updates on military support initiatives and resources. Yellow Ribbon Companies have reported increase morale from military connected employees, improvement in veteran hiring statistics and increased involvement in community military support initiatives. Yellow Ribbon Companies have developed relationships to the point of sharing veteran resumes between companies to find the right fit for a veteran job seeker. Yellow Ribbon Companies provide volunteers at Minnesota’s Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Training events to be matched per industry to service members seeking employment. Volunteer mentors attend the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration events to provide one-on-one mentoring in resume review, interview prep and networking advice. This process will soon be taken to the drill weekends where mentors will be matched to service member job seekers during their drill weekends. Annually over one hundred Yellow Ribbon Company volunteers support Military Appreciation Day at the State Fair by providing workers to assist in events throughout the day. Yellow Ribbon Company volunteers have the ability to create large scale volunteer groups to tackle larger projects such as Veteran Stand Downs, landscaping projects, homeless veteran athletic sock drives and home rebuilds. Yellow Ribbon Companies partner with local community networks to provide financial and volunteer resources to meet local community support needs. Yellow Ribbon Companies represent a wide range of industries and interests yet come together to further synchronize support effort across the state.

AmeriCorps VISTA.

In April and August 2015, MN Military Affairs obtained two AmeriCorps VISTA Members through a grant from the American Legion Auxiliary. 2015 AmeriCorps VISTA will work with metro area YR Networks and another grant will be obtained for greater MN in 2016/2017. VISTA Members will be working to meet the following objectives:

- 1) Ensure each YR Network has connected with all available community and county resources.
- 2) Ensure each YR Network has connected to and actively engaged with all Key Support Partners.
- 3) Ensure each YR Network has the capability to practice all best practices for sustainment and need fulfillment.
- 4) Identify new/existing resources not previously known to YR Networks.
- 5) Develop a marketing toolkit with products available to YR Networks to reach out to military connected residents.
- 6) Develop a marketing plan for all service branches to publish internally to service members and families to ensure they connect with the local YR Network in their home of record.
- 7) Create a state mental health/financial literacy directory compiling the resources already identified by YR Networks.
- 8) Ensure each YR Network has connected with state, federal and nonprofit resources capable of meeting the needs of service members, veterans and military families.
- 9) Identify needs of YR Networks and participate in ongoing sustainment initiatives.
- 10) Communicate best practice education to YR Networks.

Effectiveness Measurement.

Measuring the effectiveness of autonomous, grassroots community networks can be difficult. The success of MN's Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Program has been providing minimal state requirements/guidance for regulatory compliance while allowing the YR Networks to function in the most effective way that fits within their own community/county. After several years of benchmarking other community programs and organizational measurements, two measures have been established that minimize the risk of overloading volunteer Steering Committee members. Currently the effectiveness of Yellow Ribbon Networks are measured in two ways:

- 1) Annual Checklist: each Yellow Ribbon Community Network is required to complete an annual checklist. This ensures the Network has maintained representatives from key community areas, connected with Key Support Partners and are educated on the military support needs specific to their community/county. In Networks with a local Unit Representative (61 networks) the Unit Representatives are required to ensure checklists are completed each training year. YR Networks that have established and maintain all areas of the checklist are the most successful and sustaining.
- 2) MN National Guard Unit Representatives are mandated to partner with their YR Network in three ways: 1) attend a YR Network committee meeting at least four times per training year, 2) Attend an annual Joining community Forces-MN Conference, 3) Ensure completion of YR checklist, and 4) Recognize a YR network volunteers once per training year.

Updated 17OCT2016

When the above measurements are achieved, the community is partnering with Key Support partners, setting annual goals and objectives based upon the needs of service members, veterans and military families specific to their area and maintaining the high standards of the Yellow Ribbon Program throughout the entire community. When YR Networks sustain and strengthen, YR Networks reach more military connected residents in need and connect them to resources.

MN's Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Program has been effective in unifying efforts across the state, reducing redundancy of services, building relationships with MN communities and companies, and creating force multipliers in order that no service member, veteran or military family member feels isolated, unsupported or alone.