



A “New Twist” to the “Old Volunteer” Programs

“Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.” -- President John F. Kennedy.

As U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees (Service), we make positive contributions to our country on a regular basis. Whether we manage wetlands on one of the Nation’s National Wildlife Refuges or Waterfowl Production Areas, write Habitat Conservation Plans, conserve threatened and endangered species, enforce wildlife laws, restore fisheries, educate visitors, enhance IT security, answer telephones, maintain visitor facilities, or help supervisors get their jobs filled, we are making a difference by conserving the nature of America and leaving a wildlife legacy for future generations.

Service employees are also giving back to their country by placing veterans, convalescing service men and women, and persons with disabilities in volunteer positions. As Your Employer of Choice, the Service is proud to participate in these new and exciting volunteer programs that are designed to help participants gain new and meaningful work experience. The Service has been leading this charge through the Department of Defense – Operation Warfighter (OWF) program; the Department of Veterans Affairs – Coming Home to Work (CHTW) program; and, the Department of Veterans Affairs – Non-Paid Work Experience (NPWE) program, and State Vocational Rehabilitation – Unpaid Work Experience (UWE) program.

These programs are a terrific way for Service managers to evaluate potential candidates, through non-paid work experience, before they make hiring decisions (when applicable). The security clearance fee (currently \$110.00) is the only cost to the Service. The following summarizes the programs.

The Operation War Fighter (OWF) Program is a Department of Defense temporary assignment/internship program for service members that are convalescing at military treatment facilities nationwide. Operation Warfighter is designed to provide recuperating service members with meaningful activity outside of the hospital environment which assists in wellness and offers a formal means of transition back to the military or civilian workforce. OWF provides opportunities for service members on medical hold to build their resumes, explore employment interests, develop job skills, and gain valuable Federal Government work experience that will help prepare them for the future. The internship periods vary depending on treatment; however, it can range from 90 days to over a year. The number of days per week and the hours are flexible and can be agreed upon by the service member and the supervisor; however, medical appointments have priority. Service members are active duty; therefore, they are paid by the Department of Defense.

The Coming Home to Work (CHTW) Program is an early intervention and outreach program conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program. The CHTW program provides non-paid work experience to eligible service members pending medical separation and veterans receiving treatment at Community Based Health Care Organizations and VA medical treatment facilities. Program emphasis is on Operation Iraqi Freedom

and Operation Enduring Freedom veterans. The CHTW period is 90 days; however, it can be extended upon request. The Department of Veterans Affairs pays the veteran a stipend while in the program. The Department of Defense pays, if the service member is still on active duty.

The Non-Paid Work Experience (NPWE) Program is a Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program. The VA provides eligible veterans with the opportunity to obtain training and practical job experience concurrently. The NPWE period is 90 days; however, it can be extended upon request. The VA pays the veteran a stipend while in the program. In turn, the agency must verify that the veteran worked the minimum hours per week based on requirements set by the VA.

The Unpaid Work Experience (UWE) Program is a state-operated Vocational Rehabilitation Program which provides services that empower individuals with disabilities to maximize their employment, independence, and full inclusion into society. The program helps people with disabilities prepare for, find, and retain employment. The program is operated by the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services Field Offices. The UWE period is 90 days; however, it can be extended upon request (depending on the project) not to exceed 26 weeks. The individual will typically work three days per week. The Department of Rehabilitative Services pays the individual a stipend while in the program.

Several veterans from the Non Paid Work Experience Program are already active in Service program offices.

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