



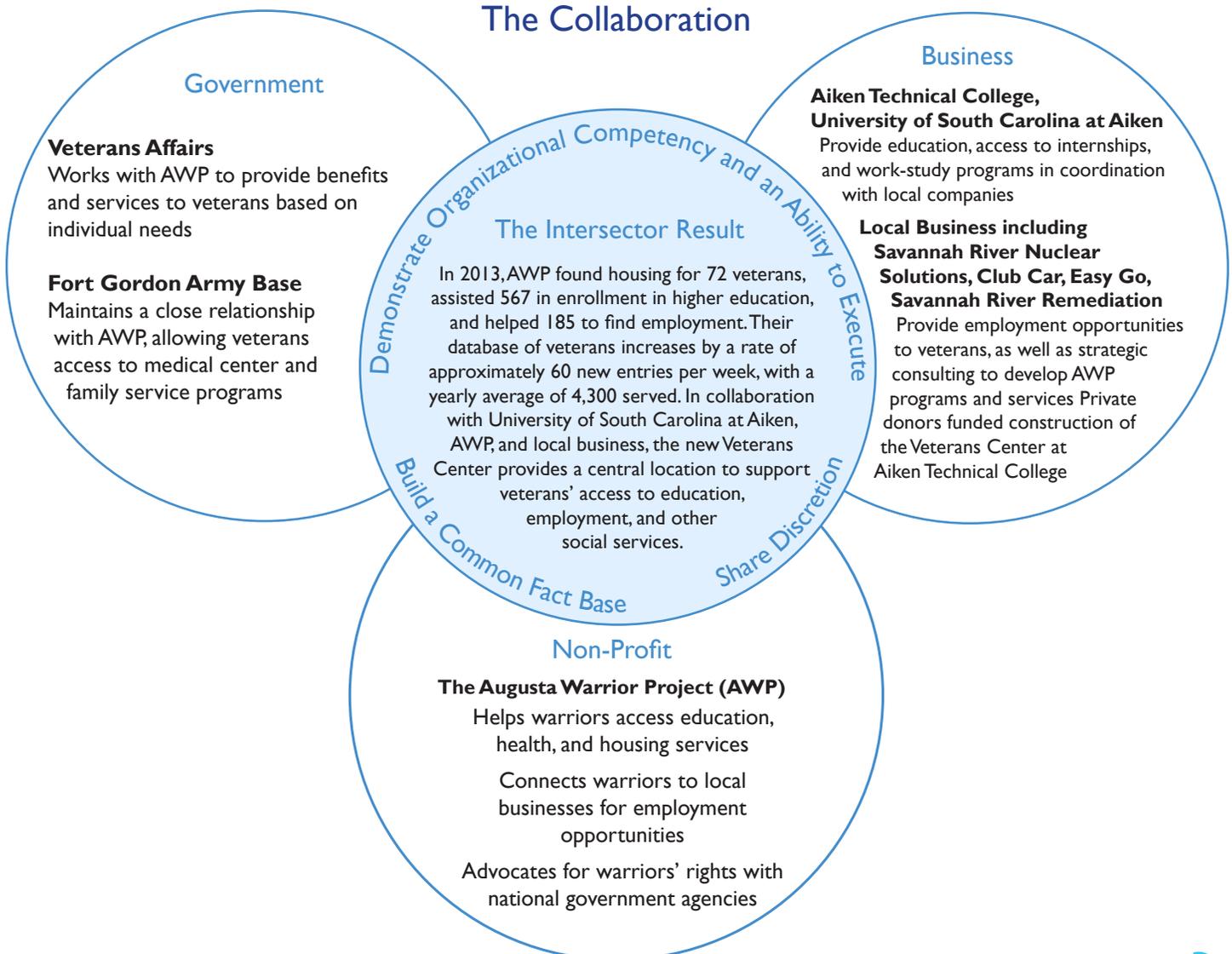
Connecting Veterans to Resources in the Central Savannah River Area

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The Story

The Augusta Warrior Project (AWP) is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of “warriors” – veterans, as well as military personnel who are in between tours – in the Central Savannah River Area. AWP estimates that there are over 66,000 “warriors” living in the area, who are entitled to a number of benefits to facilitate transition into civilian life; many, however, lack an awareness of the resources available to them and so are unable to access services. Through various outreach, advocacy, and educational programs, AWP takes a proactive approach to identifying veterans’ needs, coordinating local resources, and connecting veterans. Under the leadership of AWP Executive Director Jim Lorraine, the Project has taken a collaborative approach, developing partnerships with other non-profits, local businesses, and governmental agencies to improve veteran care in thirteen counties in Georgia and South Carolina. AWP currently works with 4,300 ‘warriors’ per year, providing tailored support to their needs. In 2013, AWP and its collaborative partners unveiled a new Veterans Center at University of South Carolina at Aiken, providing a centralized area for veteran support.

The Collaboration



The Leadership

Familiar with many aspects of the military experience, Jim developed AWP into an organizational model that uses a collaborative approach to improve the variety and quality of services available to veterans.



Intellectual Thread

With over 22 year of active duty experience as an officer and Flight Nurse in the Air Force, Jim has extensive knowledge of challenges faced by army personnel. After retiring from active duty, he became the founding Director of the United States Special Operations Command Care Coalition, a veterans care organization that served over 4,000 military personnel – wounded, ill, or injured – and their families. This experience gave Jim insight into the medical issues many veterans face when assimilating into civilian life.



Contextual Intelligence

Jim's leadership and success in interagency coordinating helped him improve veteran care from multiple positions, in both the government and the non-profit sectors. At the Care Coalition, he worked to ensure veterans received the best possible medical care; he also oversaw the organization's operations, which assisted veterans in several ways, including healthcare resources and education opportunities. Additionally, Jim's time at the Pentagon gave him a bird's-eye view of how top military commanders understood veteran care and their ideas on how it should be improved.



Integrated Networks

Previously, Jim acted as a liaison for the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon as Special Assistant for Warrior and Family Support. During his years in the military, Jim developed a network of military officials and military care providers who could help him overcome bureaucratic hurdles. "For us in Augusta, our success was my ability to reach outside of the community's bureaucracy, especially when it came to government and federal organizations... and get things moving."



Balanced Motivations

Jim's mother, sister, and wife were nurses, and this, combined with his own work in the field, developed his empathy and dedication to veterans; he believes "you can only accomplish the goals you have by serving others." Working with the Care Coalition convinced him of the collective impact and in the benefit of working as a team.

The Toolkit



Build a common fact base

AWP uses a data-driven approach to its operations. By meeting one on one with warriors in the Central Savannah River Area, AWP is able to assess how to help veterans; this information creates a database to generate community support for the veteran services (partners found that veterans who avail themselves of services like the GI Bill, and who complete their education, contribute about \$18,000 per year to the economy.) AWP used data to promote the Veterans Center both to University of South Carolina at Aiken, and the local business interests that funded the project.



Demonstrate organizational competency and an ability to execute

AWP demonstrated how effective a partnership between sectors could be. In early meetings with veterans organizations, it became clear that the lack of a single point of access to veterans was problematic for direct service providers, government agencies, and potential employers. AWP became the connecting space where participants could access veterans, and where veterans could educate themselves on the opportunities available to them. Local businesses guided AWP to develop their capacity and programming, including database management and awareness campaigns of veterans' issues. Government agencies such as Veterans Affairs provided a variety of health services for which veterans maintain a high need. At AWP's "Transitional Round Table," leaders from all sectors - including leaders from the Army, Department of Labor, Veterans Affairs, and community organizations - met to discuss solutions for warriors and their families.



Share discretion

Located on the campus of University of South Carolina at Aiken, in Graniteville, South Carolina, the Veterans Center is administered and staffed by the school. AWP serves an advisory role and provides specialist support. Funded by local private businesses such as Savannah River Nuclear Solutions, Easy Go, and Club Car, the Center has a permanent staff member to provide general advice and counsel.



Communicate the interdependency of each sector

Each sector stood to benefit from a collaborative effort addressing veteran services, and veterans were helped with education, employment, and health services. The non-profit sector followed through on its social mission, providing a smooth transition for soldiers as they moved into civilian life; the private sector gained access to a labor source with a wide range of skills to offer; and government agencies had a point of access through which to reach veterans. University of South Carolina at Aiken was interested in increasing their veteran enrollment numbers, which the Center accomplished. Business owners in the local area wanted to support an organization that would combine veteran support with educational opportunities. AWP provided a crucial link between these interests.

The Intersector Result

The Augusta Warrior Project enrolls 60 new veterans in its database each week. Its successful model of collaboration across a number of projects has provided a prototype for communities looking to address the needs of their veterans. Projects such as the Veterans Center at University of South Carolina at Aiken, unveiled Veteran's Day in 2013, showcase a model for successful collaboration across sectors. Working with other non-profits, the government, and local business maintains the level of flexibility needed to address the variety of veteran needs. Since 2012, the Augusta Warrior Project has permanently housed 124 homeless veterans, assisted 83 veterans get employed in local businesses, enrolled 120 veterans in school, and identified and assisted 1,822 veterans through reach out campaigns and public events.

- > The Veterans Center at University of South Carolina at Aiken has attracted the attention of the Wounded Warrior Project, a veterans service organization for warriors affected by 9/11, which provided a grant to veterans on campus to supplement the GI Bill.
- > University of South Carolina at Aiken has created enrollment targets with the goal of increasing increase veteran enrollment by 20 percent a year.
- > The Department of Veteran Affairs awarded AWP and its partners a \$900,000 Supportive Services for Veterans and Families grant, a partnership between the Augusta-based Central Savannah River Area Economic Opportunity Authority and Goodwill.

“AWP develops relationships, identifies shared goals with partner organizations, and works with stakeholders within the community to develop a comprehensive approach that improves the lives of Warriors and their families.”

— Jim Lorraine, Executive Director, Augusta Warrior Project