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Systems Thinking Tool: Journey Mapping

JUNE 20, 2017 | SANDRA MEDRANO, CARA PRIESTLEY

SHARE



Aimee's spouse is in the Army and her family has relocated 14 times over the course of his career. In each community, she stops at the library to learn about her new home and local resources.

Vu is a student veteran. After a successful career in the Marines, Vu used his GI Bill benefits to enroll in university, where he and fellow student veterans helped establish a military resource center on campus.

Mia is a female veteran who struggles to find connection as a civilian. She attends therapy sessions at a local veteran service organization and learns about resources, benefits, and other supports for veterans through word-of-mouth.

The **Institute of Museum and Library Services** (IMLS) partnered with FSG to bring the stories of veterans and military families to life. These stories, collected using journey maps, help represent the diverse experiences of veterans and military families. They remind us that this population interacts with and contributes to their local communities in many ways. Through this work, we identified promising practices museums and libraries can use to engage veterans and military families. This may seem like an unconventional pairing, but museums and libraries are actually well positioned to support veterans and military families: museums and libraries are anchor community institutions that are trusted, neutral, and well-connected to community networks and resources.

To help museums and libraries understand the range of ways they could engage with this population.

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develop place-based solutions to support this population. We wanted to encourage an atmosphere of learning, connection, and curiosity for these practitioners. Using the journey maps, we were able to foster creativity and increased understanding about the unique opportunities to serve the military community.

What Are Journey Maps?

Journey maps are visual depictions that describe an individual's unique life path. They often begin with conversations among strangers, but because they are rooted in **Human-Centered Design**, a practice that emphasizes empathy and understanding, they can lead to deep connections between individuals. Here's an example of 2 journey maps—they look different, but communicate the same concept:

How Did We Use the Journey Maps?

Prior to the Town Hall, FSG created 6 journey maps based on interviews we conducted with veterans and military spouses. During the Town Hall, we organized practitioners into small groups and used these journey maps as a launching point for conversation. Each small group reflected on the journeys and discussed 3 prompts:

1. What do you **observe** about this person/family's experiences?
2. What **opportunities do you see to support or engage** this person/family at points along the journey?
3. How might **museums and libraries play a role** at each of these critical points?

Through this experience, we found the journey maps were particularly helpful to:

- **Showcase specific perspectives and unique experiences:** The maps highlighted important community characteristics and mental models that ultimately influence how practitioners support or engage with the population.
- **Highlight stories based on real-life experiences:** Using this human-centric approach allowed practitioners to identify practical and relevant opportunities for engagement rooted in real life experience.
- **Use storytelling as a powerful alternative to quantitative data:** This sparked curiosity and desire to learn and connect in a more authentic and personal way.
- **Initiate community engagement:** For museums and libraries in the early stages of engagement with the

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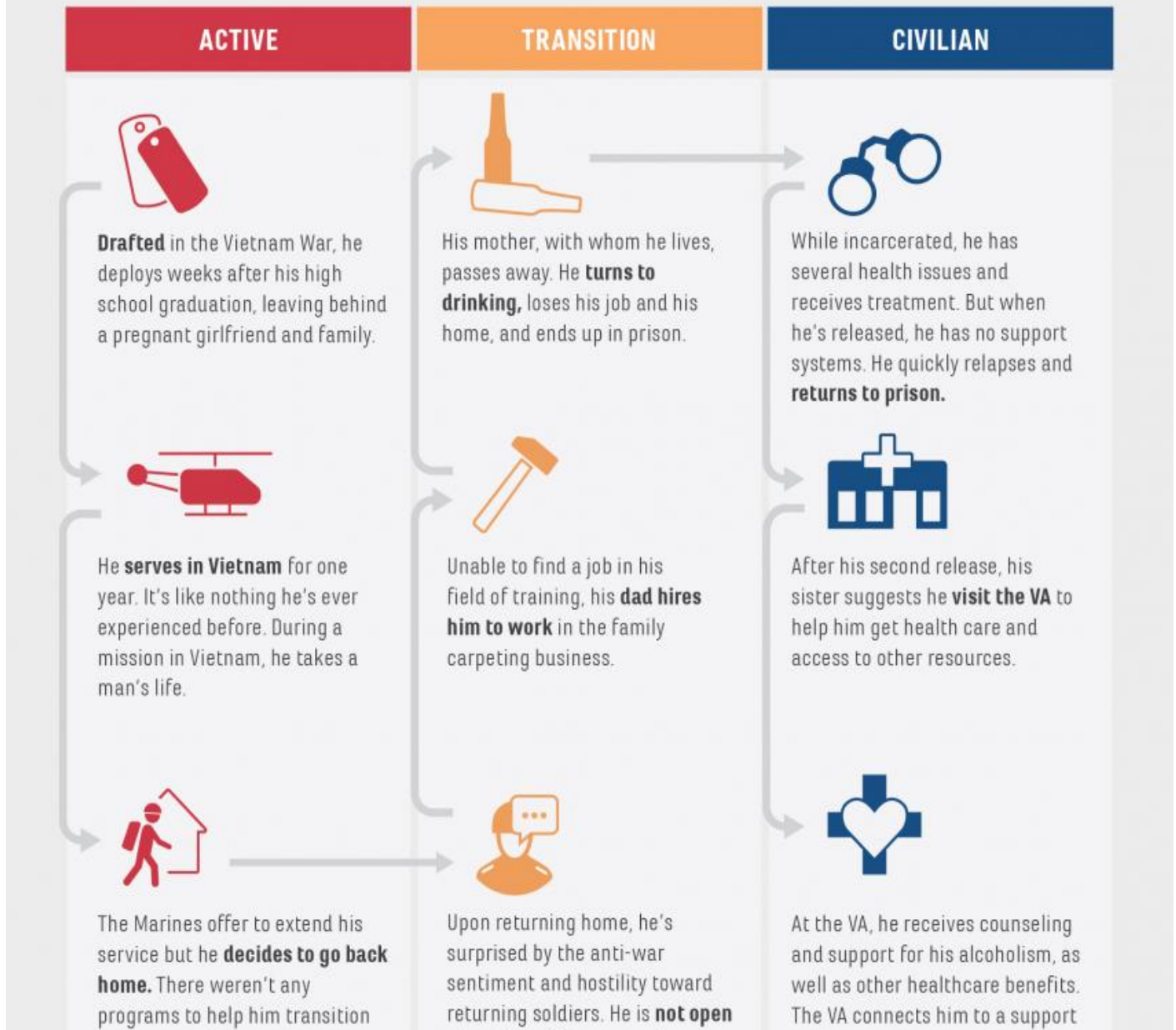
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Darryl's Journey: Vietnam War vet finds support for invisible wounds

HIGHLIGHTS

Darryl is a Vietnam War vet who has difficulty transitioning home and into civilian life. He is incarcerated twice and eventually gets life back on track with the help of the VA.



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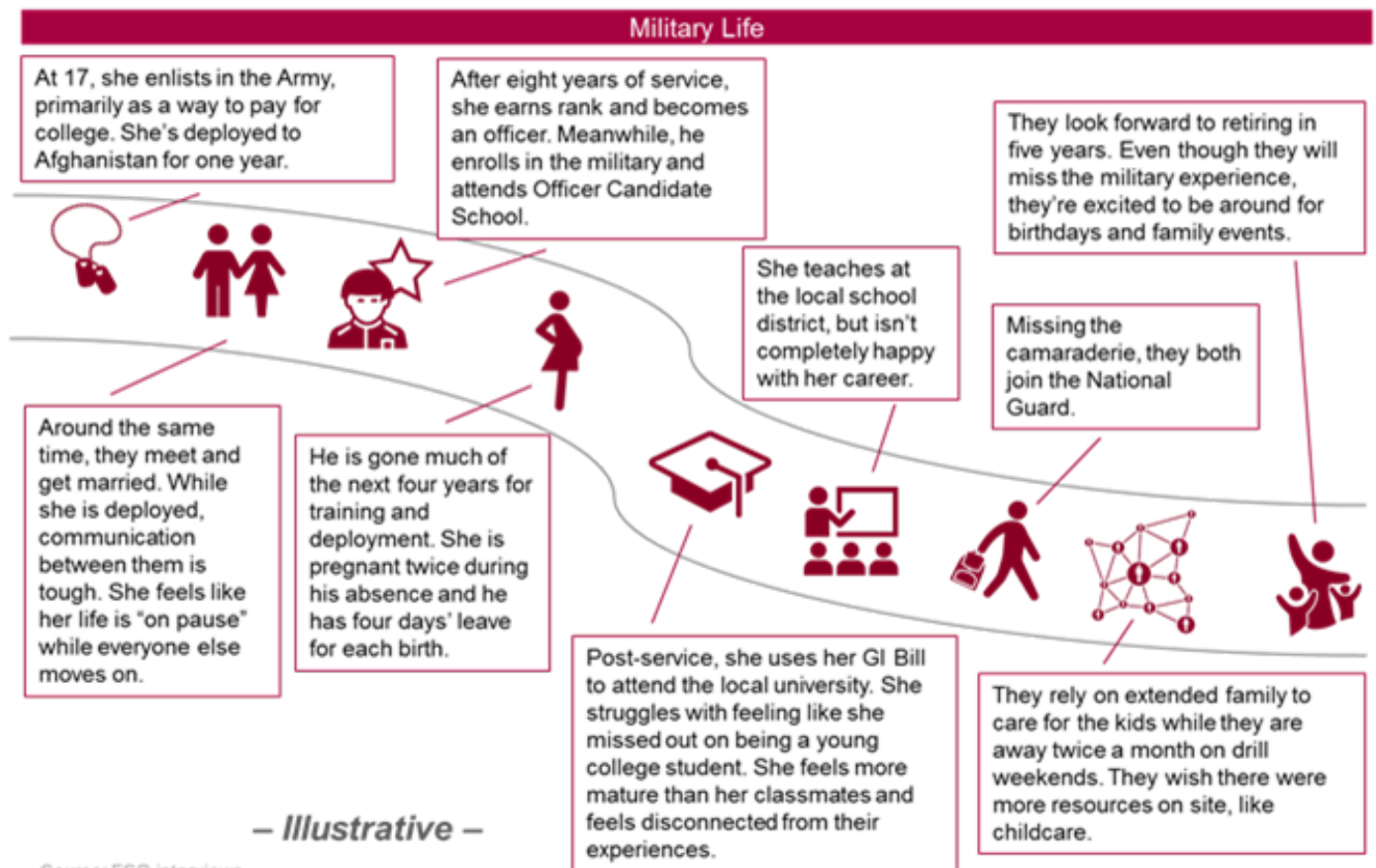
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What types of partnerships would be required to support him effectively?

What different perspectives and ways of thinking are at play here?

Leticia and Josh's Journey: National Guard family straddles the military and civilian worlds



Source: FSG interviews

What Is the Process for Creating a Journey Map?

While applied specifically to veterans and military families in this case, this tool could be used by organizations hoping to better understand any community.

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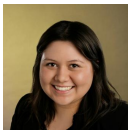


- **Consider interview logistics.** Advanced planning and preparation create the best experience for the interviewee and the interviewer. Think about what could be a comfortable locale for the interviewee, if you need an interpreter, or if providing compensation (e.g., a gift card, transportation reimbursement, etc.) would be appropriate.
- **Design an interview guide.** Draft a set of 3-4 broad questions to guide your conversation. A less detailed interview guide will allow the interviewee to share the parts of their story that are most top of mind and important for them. Our interview guide for veterans and military families was as simple as the following:
 1. Please tell us about your military background.
 2. How would you describe your experience transitioning out of the military into civilian life?
 3. How would you describe your experience as a civilian with veteran status?
 4. Can you tell us about a time that you visited a library or museum recently?
- **Conduct interviews.** During the conversation, allow time to build trust and rapport with your interviewee. Ask permission to take handwritten notes, focus on active listening, observe their non-verbal cues and how they may be feeling as they share, and encourage the interviewee to share however much they felt comfortable. Don't forget to mention that the story will be shared anonymously.
- **Create the journey map.** From your notes, craft a journey map of the individual's story that highlights the key moments and experiences. Don't expect completely linear stories; perhaps consider creating composite stories that aggregate similar experiences of many interviewees for illustrative purposes.

[Learn more about journey mapping here >](#)

[Learn more about the Community Salute Initiative to support veterans and their families >](#)

[Explore more systems thinking tools and resources >](#)



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