



**JWB Jewish  
Chaplains Council**

a signature program of



**JCC Association  
of North America**

# PROJECT --- WELCOME --- HOME



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**Guide to Best Practices**



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**Serving Jews  
Who Serve**

# PROJECT WELCOME HOME



## Guide to Best Practices

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## Introduction

Project Welcome Home is an initiative of JWB Jewish Chaplains Council, a signature program of JCC Association. PWH encourages JCCs to express their natural generosity of the community towards those who have served our country. For nearly 100 years, JWB Jewish Chaplains Council has been supporting Jewish men and women serving in the United States armed forces by supplying key elements for Jewish life, including Jewish chaplains. JWB has provided resources such as kosher food and Torah scrolls to Jews stationed all over the world, in times of war and times of peace. Throughout its history, JWB published prayer books, provided copies of the *Tanakh* (Jewish Bible), gave information on Jewish holidays, created educational resources, and connected Jews in the military to other Jews, building Jewish community on bases and ships and on every continent.

**NO ONE returns from war unchanged.**

More than two million men and women have served in the U.S. armed forces since September 11, 2001. Thousands of these service members are part of the Jewish community. As they return home from their military service, they settle into new cities and begin to build their futures. Some are learning how to live with disabilities—visible and not, but most are trying to define who they are after their time in combat and years of service.



YOKOSUKA, Japan (May 17, 2015) Aviation Electronics Technician 3rd Class Zachary Rosen, the Jewish lay leader for the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS George Washington (CVN 73), opens a Torah donated to the ship by the Jewish Welfare Board in the ship's chapel.





Participants from the Katie and Irwin Kahn JCC, Veterans Day Parade, Columbia, SC.

Throughout its history, a primary focus of JWB has been advocating for and supporting active duty military personnel. As our nation's military goals change, so too does the response of the organizations that support those men and women. JWB Jewish Chaplains Council recognized that shift in mission and developed Project Welcome Home as a way to help the Jewish community, through JCCs, recognize the service of our veterans. Project Welcome Home launched in spring 2014 with six JCCs selected to participate in the pilot year.

Addison Penzak JCC of Silicon Valley, in Los Gatos, California

Robert E. Loup JCC in Denver, Colorado

Barshop JCC of San Antonio, Texas

JCC Northern Virginia in Fairfax

Katie and Irwin Kahn JCC, Columbia, South Carolina

JCC Chicago in Illinois

The JCCs are a diverse group, located throughout the country, in Jewish communities large and small. Each JCC felt that Project Welcome Home was an important program to undertake and understood the mission of connecting Jewish veterans to the Jewish community. The pilot JCCs committed staff time and energy to training, both in the JCC Association New York office and on site, by designating a staff person as the Veteran Services Liaison (VSL). Each JCC was expected to hold at least two programs to raise awareness of and reach out to veterans, one on Veterans Day and one on Memorial Day. Pilot JCCs were asked to connect with local veteran resources and military installations, if applicable. JCCs would offer membership incentives and benefits to veterans, lowering barriers to entry. VSLs would identify veterans and their families and serve as a resource within the JCC, helping with referrals to outside agencies if necessary and guiding veterans toward lay leadership in the JCC.

The 2014-2015 pilot year of Project Welcome Home was a successful pilot with the following outcomes:

- JCCs had an increase in the number of veterans that were engaged and joining JCCs.
- JCCs held programs focused on veteran outreach and engagement.
- JCCs built awareness about Jews in the military and veterans through speakers, presentations and other learning opportunities.
- JCCs helped veterans develop leadership roles in the JCC through the formation of advisory committees.
- JCCs connected with Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) and military installations.

The pilot year also had moments of learning for JWB. The definition of veteran and the mission of this program changed as the year progressed, helping JCCs serve a broader population of service members and veterans. Project Welcome Home is not one size fits all – it needs to be adapted to meet the needs of the JCC and the service members and veterans it is serving. Project Welcome Home is also being presented as a program to raise awareness about Jews serving in the U.S. military. This Guide to Best Practices is the first step in bringing the lessons from the pilot year to all JCCs and helping them find a way to acknowledge and honor Jewish men and women who serve our country.



Mark Lee Greenblatt, author of *Valor: Unsung Heroes from Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Home Front*, signs a copy of his book for a PWH participant after leading a talk at the JCC Author and Speaker Series

## Exceptional Practices

There were many successful moments throughout the pilot year. This section focuses three initiatives that took place during or resulted from the pilot year of Project Welcome Home.

### **Partnership between JCC and Jewish Family Services, Kahn JCC, Columbia, S.C.**

Many JCCs share their physical space with other agencies such as the local Federation or Jewish Family Services. Being in such close proximity can help in the creation of partnerships that benefit veterans. In Columbia, S.C., Jewish Family Services (JFS) shares space with the Katie and Irwin Kahn JCC,. It was a natural fit for the community to have the JFS director serve as the Veteran Services Liaison for Project Welcome Home. Working with JFS allowed Kahn JCC to help 24 veterans this year and four families of veterans. Veterans came to the JCC by way of referral from United Way. Several of the veterans were seen and referred to other organizations that would be able to help with specific needs. Most of the veterans came in need of food and were served by the onsite food pantry. Two families needing financial assistance were referred to Military One Source, a Department of Defense program designed to support and assist military families. A few months later, one of those families joined the JCC. They were back on their feet and looking to connect with the community that helped them.

### **Advisory Committees, spotlight on Barshop JCC, San Antonio, Tex.**

The creation of an advisory committee was not in the original plan for Project Welcome Home pilot communities. Yet half the JCCs in the pilot decided to develop advisory committees, meeting several times throughout the year to make recommendations, plan programs, and help with outreach.

The advisory committee at Barshop JCC featured members of the Jewish military community whose varied experiences greatly contributed to planning, outreach and programming. The role of the committee was to provide insight into the Jewish military identity, conduct outreach, contribute to planning programs and fulfill the role of hosts at PWH and JCC events.

The committee chair was a post-9/11 veteran, doctor and member of their JCC's board. The committee comprised a military lawyer, spouse of a military doctor, an Air Force chaplain, religious services lay leader at an army base, and two Vietnam War veterans who are active members of the Jewish community. The staff members responsible for Project Welcome Home also attended committee meetings. The committee met five times over the last year with more frequent meetings occurring during the first part of the year. Project Welcome Home was also acknowledged at the JCC annual meeting in May where the committee chair received an award for emerging leadership.

### **Creation of a staff position for Project Welcome Home, JCC of Northern Virginia, Fairfax, Va.**

Each JCC participating in the pilot year was asked to designate a staff person to be the Veterans Services Liaison (VSL). The VSL would be the primary point of contact for veterans at the JCC and serve as a resource to other staff members on issues pertaining military personnel and veterans. VSLs created programs, convened advisory committees, met with veterans, and spoke on behalf of Project Welcome Home. Each VSL for the pilot year added Project Welcome Home to their already robust portfolios and were able to dedicate, on average, 15 hours per month to this work. Some months required more time, if there was a program coming up. For most of the JCCs, this worked well. JCC of Northern Virginia decided that there were many opportunities for programming and outreach that needed to be handled by a separate staff member and created a part time, paid staff position dedicated to Project Welcome Home. The creation of this position is a first for JCCs, acknowledging that this work is a vital piece of community outreach and engagement.



## Learning Experiences

### Shifting the Mission

Project Welcome Home began as a way for JCCs to connect with veterans returning from the post-9/11 wars in Iraq and Afghanistan: Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation New Dawn (OIF/OEF/OND). This veteran population served in a different type of war, a longer war than any other group of veterans, and was faced with a different set of challenges and opportunities than ever before. They are men and women returning home, many with the battle wounds discussed by the media: lost limbs, traumatic brain injury, living with post-traumatic stress disorder. Still, many more returned home without those wounds and were looking for a new mission and ways continue their service to their community. Project Welcome Home was to be the Jewish community's response to the needs of returning veterans and a gateway to the Jewish community. The saying that **"veterans need other veterans"** holds true in the Jewish community, and should also include **"of the same era."** Project Welcome Home was positioned to be that point of connection for Jewish OIF/OEF/OND veterans.

Our mission expanded after a powerful interaction with active duty service members who wanted to find a place in the Jewish community and reminded us that they, too, though still in uniform were also veterans. They were veterans of long deployments to combat zones. They were veterans of multiple tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. They were serving in reserve and National Guard units and maintaining their civilian life alongside their military life. Where did they fit in Project Welcome Home and in the Jewish community? What about them? What about their families, enduring the time apart from their loved ones, living in areas without Jewish communities or very small Jewish communities?

**This interaction, and others that followed, EXPANDED THE GOAL of Project Welcome Home.**

While it began as a way to serve veterans, Project Welcome Home quickly became a way for JCCs to connect with veterans and military personnel and their families. Based on their locations, JCCs adapted Project Welcome Home to meet the needs of the population. JCCs with military installations nearby created programs for service members and their families around holiday times, designed to combat some of the isolation often felt by these families. They looked for ways to support families during deployments and made sure there were spaces for them at community Shabbat dinners. JCCs demonstrated that they were willing to welcome all who needed a way to connect with the Jewish community while serving in the military.

**Project Welcome Home is for all who serve our country.**

It's about making JCCs places that military personnel seek out each time they move to another location, a part of the Jewish community that understands what it means to serve as a reservist, or in the National Guard, knowing you may get called up and a place that veterans turn to when they begin life as civilians. We welcome them home, again and again.

### Opportunities for Raising Awareness

Project Welcome Home does more than provide programming and services to military and veterans—it can be a vehicle for building community awareness about Jews serving in the military and their experiences. A major learning experience of the pilot year was to see how JCCs create programming and a veteran-friendly culture in locations that did not serve a large veteran population. One JCC developed a poster campaign to teach about secular holidays, such as Veterans Day and Memorial Day. Another JCC welcomed an author of a book on the military experience, a program open to the entire JCC. JCCs developed programs for school-age children for Veterans Day, creating powerful moments of connection for children and veterans. Project Welcome Home was presented at staff meetings and board meetings, explaining the need for this program as a way to build awareness and help reduce the stigma in the Jewish community often associated with serving in the military.



Project Welcome Home is an opportunity for JCCs to be the leader in the Jewish community for raising awareness about Jewish men and women serving in the military. While some JCCs are in areas with military installations or are hubs for returning veterans, most are not. For those JCCs, Project Welcome Home will be about awareness and advocacy for Jews in the military and Jewish veterans. JCCs can honor all veterans, listen to the stories of veterans from past wars, and ensure their legacy by continuing to honor the service of today's military personnel and veterans.

## Moving Forward

### Best practices for programming

#### School-Age Children

##### Speakers:

Invite service members and veterans in your community to speak with school-age children attending your programs. Invited speakers should be prepared to speak about their service, their jobs in the military, where they served, then take some questions. Facilitators should have a few questions prepared to begin the discussion and explain the program to the children prior to the presentation.

##### Ceremony of Recognition:

Hold a flag raising ceremony and recognize people in the community and family members of the children who served in the armed forces. Families can share information on parents, grandparents, and other loved ones who served.

#### Military/Veterans Community

##### Shabbat/Holiday dinners:

If your JCC holds monthly Shabbat dinners or annual holiday dinners, consider designating one as a time to show appreciation for veterans in your community. Offer reduced rates for veterans and their families and introduce military families who are new to the community to civilian families.

##### Family Hanukkah party:

Hanukkah and the winter holiday season can be a time when the feeling of being away from family and friends increases. Holding a Hanukkah party for military families helps them connect with each other and see that the Jewish community cares.

##### Veterans Day programming for military and veterans:

Whether it is featuring a veteran as a speaker on this day or holding a pool party for veterans and their families, recognize the service members and veterans in your community. This program should be created in consultation with veterans.

##### Creating workshops for veterans:

Have an art studio or a writing class? Create sessions specifically for veteran. Is your JCC known for its theater productions? Consider hosting a performance written by and for veterans.

## General Awareness

### Jewish learning:

Jewish texts have a wealth of information on military service and the veteran experience. Use our tradition to teach about what service means today. Resources that include Jewish texts are being developed and will be available to JCCs. Bring a Jewish chaplain to speak at your JCC, inviting him or her to share their experiences.

### Authors/films:

Include books and films about the military and veteran experience in book and film festivals, community reading programs, and author series.

### Sharing the mission:

Dedicate time at staff meetings and board meetings to explain Project Welcome Home and encourage all staff and lay leaders to think about the contributions of service members and veterans.

### Poster/art campaigns:

Addison Penzak JCC created a poster campaign for Independence Day, Veterans Day, and Memorial Day, featuring quotes from veterans and national leaders to raise awareness about veterans and military service. Posters were placed in their lobby, seen by all who walk through the building. This type of experience can be replicated and added to with artwork by veterans.

## Build Your Team – Developing Advisory Committees

Project Welcome Home needs collaboration from different people at your JCC—executive leadership, programmers, lay leaders, community members. Half of the pilot communities organized advisory committees for Project Welcome Home. The advisory committees varied based on location. One successful committee was led by veteran and composed of active duty service members (including a Jewish chaplain), veterans of past wars who are active in the local Jewish community, active members of the JCC and JCC staff. The committee informed the staff on the needs of the local military and veteran population and helped with outreach to the active duty service members and their families. Other committees included interested staff, board members and veterans. Having service members and veterans involved in the team helps JCC staff members understand the best ways to engage and support military personnel and veterans.

Successful advisory committees include the following people:

**Veterans:** Returning and from past wars/eras

**Current military personnel:** Where available

**VSL and other lead JCC Staff**

**JCC lay leadership**

Ideal size for a committee is eight to 10 members. It was helpful to have a committee chair person to help keep the committee to its mission and serve as a point of contact beyond the JCC staff.

## Membership incentives for military personnel and veterans

Extending membership incentives and benefits to military personnel and veterans is more than just offering a discount. Many companies and organizations routinely offer 10 percent off a purchase, or a military rate for service members and veterans with valid military or VA identification, as a way of saying “thank you for your service.” It is, above all else, a way to show appreciation. There may be military families that have a greater financial need than others, but are unsure about asking. Having membership incentives available removes many of the initial barriers service members and veterans may feel about participating in JCC programs or services.

### JCCs participating in the pilot year offered the following membership incentives:

- The community service professionals rate.
- **Free individual membership**, or deducted the individual membership from the price of a family or couple membership, to military personnel who have been: deployed during the past three wars and are currently on active duty / have served in last three wars and been honorably discharged within the past two years.
- **50 percent off** regular rates to active military
- A **military rate of membership** and gave a **three month trial membership** to Project Welcome Home participants.

JCCs also stated that financial aid could be offered on a case-by-case basis. The incentives listed are examples from JCCs. Not all have to be offered and JCCs can create their own options. Other options for incentives may include offering service members and veterans the member rates for programs, waiving one time joining fees, or extending the most recent membership discount offers to military families and veterans, even if the time for that offer has passed.

## Eligibility

### Membership Incentives

Two questions developed out of this area:

- 1) Should JCCs offer this benefit to veterans who are not Jewish?
- 2) Should JCCs offer this benefit to veterans whose separation from the military was not considered “honorable discharge”?

After discussion with JWB team members, professional staff, and members of the JWB Committee on Services to Jewish Military Personnel, **it was decided that the decisions for these issues ultimately lie with the JCCs**, their professional and lay leadership, in determining best practices for their JCCs. JWB Jewish Chaplains Council can offer guidance in developing membership questionnaires and policies for veterans who have a dishonorable discharge status.

## Outreach and engagement strategies for military personnel and veterans

Reaching out to service members and veterans is more than just offering a program. It takes patience, trust and tenacity. One of the most successful tools for getting veterans involved has been word of mouth—

especially from other post-9/11 veterans. It also means asking veterans where and how this program should be advertised. Connecting with chaplains at nearby bases, staff at local VA hospitals, and knowing about the state veterans' services and other veteran service organizations, is a good start.

Engaging service members and veterans and asking what they need from this program is crucial to a successful program. The types of programs and services offered may change based on the needs of the service members and veterans at your JCC. Ask the veterans in your community to take an active role in program development and implementation, encouraging them to use their leadership expertise from their years of military service.

Veterans need to see that your JCC knows how to appropriately acknowledge service. This means that membership staff knows what incentives and benefits are available for military personnel and veterans. Staff members know there is a VSL and can connect veterans with that person. JCCs can have brochures with information readily available at their welcome desks and signs that indicate they participate in Project Welcome Home. JCC staff should receive training on how to appropriately acknowledge service members and veterans, learning that even saying "thank you for your service" can be meaningful.

## What's Ahead for Year Two?

### National Days of Honor and Remembrance

Project Welcome Home Pilot JCCs were asked to hold two signature programs during the year – one on Veterans Day and one on Memorial Day. JCCs developed programming that met the needs of their community and appropriately acknowledged service members and veterans. Based on the programs developed by JCCs, JWB will be releasing materials and fully developed programs for use by all JCCs.

These materials will include:

- Guidelines for developing Veterans Day and Memorial Day programs, and other patriotic days for school-age children
- Ready-to-use ceremonies for Veterans Day and Memorial Day
- Discussion guides for teens through adults
- Text-based learning units
- Information about connecting with speakers and authors on military and veterans issues



JCC senior adult members, guests and veterans celebrate Veteran's Day with a festive lunch and patriotic music



These resources will be available to JCCs as printed programming guides as well as in digital form on [JCCA.me](http://JCCA.me), an online resource center for JCC professionals.

JCCs will also receive assistance from [Rabbi Abbi Sharofsky](#), JWB deputy director for programming, on creating and implementing programs for Veterans Day and Memorial Day.

### Ongoing Education for JCCs

The six JCCs that participated in the pilot year were invited to participate in a two-day intensive training course on military and veteran experiences. This training brought JCC staff responsible for Project Welcome Home to JCC Association to hear experts on veteran issues, meet representatives from leading veteran organizations, and work together on the first steps of Project Welcome Home. In the next phase of Project Welcome Home, that educational component will continue through more training opportunities, resources and webinars based on the experiences of the pilot JCCs.

Topics for webinars and training include:

- Introduction to the Military and Veteran Experience
- Veterans Day and Memorial Day Programming
- Building a PWH Advisory Committee
- Military Families – How to support them during deployments? What does it mean to be a caregiver?
- Connections with Jewish Family Service organizations
- How JCCs can work with these organizations to benefit military and veterans

A two-day training conference will be available for all JCCs that choose to participate in Project Welcome Home 2015-2016. This training will utilize the best practices developed by the pilot communities and provide an in-depth look at how JCCs can meet the needs of service members and veterans. The training includes sessions with experts on the experiences of Jews in the military and veterans' issues.



Resources

JCC Association

JCCs interested in learning more about Project Welcome Home and creating programming to raise awareness about Jewish military personnel and veterans can contact:

Rabbi Abbi Sharofsky  
JWB Deputy Director for Programming  
212-786-5137  
[abbi@jcca.org](mailto:abbi@jcca.org).

For information on contacting Jewish military and VA chaplains, please contact:

Janine Acevedo  
JWB Program Associate  
212-786-5090  
[janine@jcca.org](mailto:janine@jcca.org).

Military resources and support

Military One Source.....[www.militaryonesource.mil](http://www.militaryonesource.mil)  
A Department of Defense program that provides comprehensive information on every aspect of military life at no cost to active duty, National Guard, reserve members, and their families.

National Military Family Association.....[www.militaryfamily.org](http://www.militaryfamily.org)  
An organization supporting and advocating for military families. Provides information on many aspects of military life, including transitioning from military to civilian life and supporting caregivers of wounded service members. A mobile app, [MyMilitaryLife](#), is also available.

A Color Guard, Honor Guard, military bands, and speakers may be requested for events. If your JCC is located near a large military base, contact the public affairs officer for that base. JCCs can also contact the public affairs office for the National Guard for their state.

JCCs can reach out to local bases or the National Guard in their state to connect with chaplains of all faiths and make them aware of programming at your JCC for Jewish service members.

National Veteran Service Organizations

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA).....[www.iava.org](http://www.iava.org)  
Jewish War Veteran.....[www.jwv.org](http://www.jwv.org)  
Wounded Warrior Project.....[www.woundedwarriorproject.org](http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org)  
Got Your Six.....[www.gotyour6.org](http://www.gotyour6.org)  
Student Veterans of America.....[www.studentveterans.org](http://www.studentveterans.org)  
American Legion.....[www.legion.org](http://www.legion.org)  
AMVETS.....[www.amvets.org](http://www.amvets.org)  
American Gold Star Mothers, Inc.....[www.goldstarmoms.com](http://www.goldstarmoms.com)

These are only a few of many organizations dedicated to helping veterans and their families.  
For more comprehensive lists, visit the National Resource Directory.....[www.nrd.gov](http://www.nrd.gov)



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Rachel Rustin, Director of Jewish Journeys

Maya Siler, Coordinator of Adult & Senior Adult Services

JCC Chicago

Alan Sataloff, General Director/CEO

Abby Ashkenazi, Jewish Educator

JCC of Northern Virginia

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Laurie Albert, Director of Community Engagement

Katie and Irwin Kahn JCC, Columbia, SC

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