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For Amour Nixon, a Home Instead of Homelessness

Amour Nixon enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 2005, and served for eight years. A native of the Bronx, Amour trained as an aviation ordnanceman, responsible for the maintenance and handling of guns, bombs, torpedoes, rockets and missiles. Stationed in Washington State, she was deployed three times, and served on an aircraft carrier in Japan and Guam.

After leaving the service in 2013 Amour returned to Washington, where she lived with her two children, ages eight and six, and worked as a security guard and property manager. Tragedy struck in 2015 when Amour's parents, who still lived in the Bronx, suffered strokes within weeks of each other. With no one else to care for them Amour left her jobs and moved back to New York with her kids.

With full-time elder care and child care responsibilities, Amour struggled to find a job. Living with her ill parents while raising children proved untenable, but without a job she couldn't afford an apartment. Facing homelessness, Amour sought help.

Women represent about 20 percent of new enlisted recruits in the U.S. military. The transition to civilian life varies for every veteran, but many women lack access to reintegration services when they need them the most. These returning service members are at risk of homelessness and joblessness due to a number of factors - lack of accessible and affordable childcare, military sexual trauma, post-traumatic stress, low levels of social support, and challenges associated with being a single mother.

Amour heard about Easter Seals New York while attending a Veteran's Administration job fair. At Easter Seals she met Robert Lambert, an Employment Specialist /Case Manager with Easter Seals NY Veteran Programs. Robert, Amour said, "took her in."

Veterans repeatedly cite finding a job as one of the greatest challenges in transitioning to civilian life. Explaining how military experience translates into skills that are sought by civilian employers poses a significant barrier to employment for many veterans.

Amour was no exception. She had prepared several different resumes, but none conveyed the breadth of her experience or outstanding personal qualities. In addition to her work as an aviation ordnanceman Amour drove heavy trucks, operated fork lifts and performed numerous aviation-related tasks at the base's air terminal. She served with the U.S. Navy Honor and Color Guards, the meaning of which would be lost on many civilian employers. These highly prestigious appointments speak to the character and bearing of the service member, who is selectively chosen to represent a particular branch of the service.

Robert understood implicitly what Amour could bring to the workforce, as he listened to her describe her military service. Before the meeting was over he had arranged for a job interview. Within days Amour had secured a well-paying job with Allied Barton, as a security officer at La Guardia Airport, a job she holds to this day. "Robert helped me out like no one else had," she said.

Studies conclude that transitioning veterans and military families are best served by a peer-to-peer; client-centered approach, through a coordinated network of local services and supports. Significant gaps exist for women veterans in

federal programs that provide transition and readjustment services - largely because community-based care coordination that connects women veterans to VA benefits and local supports is often not readily available.

Robert worked with Easter Seals New York's extensive community partner network, including most of the area's veteran housing programs, to find appropriate housing for Amour. Housing is a significant challenge for many returning female veterans, especially those with children; over 60 percent of housing programs that serve homeless women veterans do not house children, and those that do often have restrictions on the ages or numbers of children.

Individual housing needs vary. Amour was clear that she did not want to disrupt her kids' lives with transitional housing; she wanted something more stable and permanent. With this requirement in mind, Robert was able to find an apartment for Amour in Brooklyn. Amour couldn't be happier, and hopes to be there long-term. Her kids are thrilled to have their own space and there is plenty of room for Amour's service dog.

Amour loves the idea of veterans helping other veterans. "Having older veterans there, ready to welcome you with open arms and to help you any way they can was really awesome."

Robert is thrilled when he's able to help a fellow veteran. So many people, not just veterans, live from paycheck to paycheck, he said; with all the additional barriers faced by veterans, a disruptive event like a medical emergency can push a family toward homelessness.

"It takes one to know one," said Robert, who served in the 1980s. "As a veteran I know the system because I have been through it."

Amour is currently applying to community colleges to study social work and criminal justice, and wants to work with juveniles. She advises other veterans facing homelessness and/or joblessness to take full advantage of VA services – that's what led her to Easter Seals New York.

"Joblessness and homelessness can happen very easily to a returning veteran," Amour said. "I was lost before I found other veterans at Easter Seals to help me. Knowing what services are available meant everything to me."