



AmeriCorps & Returning Veterans

SPOTLIGHT ON VETSWORK



Service is a substantial word that means different things to different people.

Initially, Eli Smith thought that service meant military service. He joined the Army when he was barely 18, because he, like millions of other kids, had seen the Twin Towers fall. He was only six years old on 9/11.

His service in the Army was important to him. No matter what he was doing, it mattered. If he was walking 12 miles with 65 pounds of gear on his back, it wasn't for nothing; it was preparing him for being able to survive in 130-degree weather, with 3 layers and a 50-pound ballistic vest on. If he was tracking Field Artillery Fire, he was protecting his fellow soldiers on the ground. If he was sleeping without heated shelter in minus 10-degree weather, he remembered that he wasn't in it alone. No matter how difficult all of the training was, he knew that he was serving to protect those at home. He's still serving in the Army National Guard.

Transitioning from military to civilian life can be hard, but for Eli, learning that there were other forms of service here at home made the transition easier. It gave him the same sense of purpose that he had in the military.

When Eli became a Mt. Adams Institute VetsWork AmeriCorps intern with the Forest Service, he saw another side of service. VetsWork is an eleven-month career development program for veterans like Eli who are interested in natural resources management, public lands work or a career in environmental work. Those who serve in VetsWork are placed at local, state and federal land management agencies like the Forest Service and provide project support while they learn about different career paths.

More than 23,500 veterans serve in national service programs across the country, and national service is helping them make the transition from military life into civilian life.

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Whether I'm carrying a rifle for my country, or I'm carrying a fire hose to a wildfire; whether I'm in the desert in 130 degrees for the army, or in the mountains of Virginia for the Forest Service, I believe that my service is helping to keep America the best country in the world.

- Eli Smith -