



Episode 5: Serving Veterans After Their Service – A Conversation with Nick Sunday

Audio Transcript

Joree Novotny 00:00:16 Hello and welcome to this episode of Just a Bite. This is Joree Novotny director of external affairs here at the Ohio Association of Foodbanks. And I'm really honored today to bring you a conversation that I think you'll find inspiring, informative, and sadly heartbreaking at times, a recent USDA report stated that 11% of veteran households were food insecure from 2015 to 2019. And that food insecurity is higher among disabled veterans, female veterans, and minority veterans. It's unacceptable from our point of view that anyone risks going without the nutritious food they need, of course, but it's particularly disheartening that those that have served our country so valiantly would struggle after returning from their deployments and from their service. So in this episode, you'll get to hear how one veteran has made it his personal mission to prevent his fellow veterans from going hungry or facing hardship. With Veteran's Day approaching and with his recent induction into the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame, we thought it was the perfect time to bring you this discussion on serving veterans after their service with our partner and friend Nick Sunday.

Joree Novotny 00:01:46 Well, we have a real treat for you this episode. I am so pleased to be here speaking with Nick Sunday, who has been the leader of an initiative called the Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Program. And that's how I've gotten to know him and learned so much from him and watched him make such an impact on local veterans and their families, but he has a storied career, um, leading up to that role. So I just like to give all of our listeners a picture of where Nick's come from, what his background is. Nick himself is a veteran who served in the Vietnam war. And after his service in the U S military, he continued his career in public service and leadership roles with the state of Ohio. He served with the Ohio Department of Development. And at one point was recognized as a state employee of the year by the Taft administration in 2005, he was also recognized multiple times as the Department of Development's employee of the month.

Joree Novotny 00:02:51 Um, he was honored to serve in critical advisory capacities at the national level and worked in a key leadership role for the state agency that oversees our home energy assistance programs, weatherization programs. And I know having spoken with and heard from his colleagues from his career with the department of development, that he made it his signature to really put clients first and make sure that his department and his staff were keeping clients in mind and in all ways in which they were conducting their business. And after his retirement from state government, he knew that he wanted to help his fellow veterans and that many of them were struggling to transition into civilian life. And he approached us at the Ohio Association of Foodbanks, um, about this dream. He had to use his time in retirement to connect local veterans with the support and services he knew would help stabilize them and get them on their feet.

Joree Novotny 00:03:50 And that's where the Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Program or VCAP was born. And I'm going to let Nick tell you a lot more about it in our conversation today, but just for scope for your understanding over the past, more than seven years, Nick has served about 3,200 veterans in central Ohio, helping them apply and connect for public benefit programs like

SNAP, Medicaid and home energy assistance, as well as providing them support with job coaching and job placement. And, um, many other services that we'll talk about today in order to provide them with the support they need to get on their feet, get stabilized and transition into civilian life in a way that can provide them the dignity that they deserve. I just feel really, really privileged to get to see and hear about what Nick does, but today is a special opportunity for us to take a closer look at that. So I'm pleased to introduce Nick to all of you. Hi Nick. Thanks for being here.

Nick Sunday 00:04:59 Yeah, thanks. Joree I appreciate it, my honor.

Joree Novotny 00:05:02 Oh, we're so honored, especially because Nick was also recently inducted into the 2021 class of the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame to recognize his storied career of public service. And in particular, his service to veterans over the past several years through the VCAP initiative,

[Hall of Fame clip]

Joree Novotny 00:06:15 So we're going to get into some good stuff in our conversation today. And, you know, I just want to start, if you wouldn't mind, tell us more about what drove you eight years ago to launch the Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Program. What was your motivation?

Nick Sunday 00:06:30 Well, I think Joree, when, you know, uh, one of the biggest things I saw being the director of the programs that you alluded to earlier that, uh, I saw a spike of veterans applying for our low income program. So, uh, I knew there was a, a very big need out there and veterans were transitioning to civilian and I just kind of reflect back when being a Vietnam veteran, a lot of these programs were not available or offered to us. And so, uh, I started, uh, my first six months, I started doing kind of a stakeholder list, any organization across, you know, 13 counties that this VA clinic oversees, uh, who helps veterans all the way from food to, uh, you know, utility assistance, clothes furniture. I mean, so I have, I came up with a stakeholders list and that took me about six months to, you know, where I could refer or help any veteran that called me.

Nick Sunday 00:07:22 So that was my big first initiative. And my second one was, you know, we didn't have these programs offered to us. So I wanted to make it a point that no wouldn't go without any type of service, especially, uh, I'm a big believer of veterans should not go without food or housing since they served our country. So, uh, that was my motivation. And then seeing those numbers rise, uh, were, uh, more critical because I think from 2008, two, I retired and then, uh, 2012, uh, there was almost a 300% increase in veterans applying for the various programs that we, you know, we, we can help them with. So that was, those were the two main things.

Joree Novotny 00:07:59 Was that something that was mandated for you to track whether they were veterans as they were applying or something you particularly wanted to look into?

Nick Sunday 00:08:07 Yeah, I, since I served as vice chair on the NEDA board is the national energy directors. Uh, we were in DC, uh, in, I want to say 2006. So we made a point for all the states to start tracking veterans. So it's in their databases, you know, whether they're disabled, uh, retired. Uh, so we started tracking numbers so we could see those numbers go up. And then a lot of states kind of took what we did, you know, uh, helping veterans, you know, especially if on, if they had a service connected disability from the VA, since we, these were block grants, you can tailor your federal money to around your state. So a lot of states took what we did and not count that income. So it made more veterans who are on service, connected disability, uh, get these programs. So that was probably those big needs right there. And then seeing the numbers.

Joree Novotny 00:08:58 Do you, did you find that there were additional barriers to veterans being comfortable asking for help or connecting to the health?

Nick Sunday 00:09:07 I experienced a really when I started, I hooked up with the VA clinic in Columbus and I have to really commend them. I mean, it's one of the better clinics and hospitals I've seen. I mean, they're really caring and everything. So, you know, uh, I worked out there three days a week, you know, and we would set up a table and people would come by and everything. One of the biggest things I saw and I always kind of made a point to tell are when I worked at the state, our local agencies that we would give money to, if we're working with veterans programs, have a veteran talk to a veteran because we can relate, you know, to one another, we've been through bootcamp together. If you've been in combat, whether it's, you know, Vietnam, Korea, Afghanistan, Iraq, you know, you can relate to all that. So I noticed that veterans open up more when they're talking to another veteran. So that to me was very critical for any program that you want to help veterans make sure you have a veteran talking to a veteran.

Joree Novotny 00:09:59 Yeah. I mean, I can completely understand because even just among the general population, unfortunately, so many of these critical safety net programs and public benefit programs are so stigmatized still and asking for help and, you know, being vulnerable can be difficult for anyone. And I know that you've spoken to me before about how sometimes our former military members find it a little bit more difficult for them to accept that help and ask for it.

Nick Sunday 00:10:29 Well, there's definitely a pride issue. I, you know, when I first started a lot of veterans, you know, they consider the old county, you know, the county offices now is the old wealth welfare offices. And they did not want to go in there as a pride issue. And they don't want to ask for help because they've been, you know, independent, you know, being in the military, everything was basically provided for you. And now they're faced with, you know, if they have a family, especially with needs, they have to do. And, uh, so there's a definitely a pride issue, but a veteran opening up to another veteran is really the key, I think.

Joree Novotny 00:11:00 Would you mind shedding some light for our listeners, from your perspective about some of the systemic reasons you think veterans are sometimes struggling with poverty and food insecurity? What is it that's putting them in that position?

Nick Sunday 00:11:15 Well, obviously being self-sufficient, I mean, a lot of them come out and don't have a job. Okay. And that's, that's really a key indicator there. And also a lot of them, I find in these numbers have been pretty steady across the last eight years. Uh, they don't have transportation. You guys, you know, they have their license expired because they were overseas. And that happened to me. I had to take my driver's test over again. Cause I, you know, you don't pay attention to that. And so transportation is a key barrier. So if you're looking for a job or you have to go to the VA for disability, uh, that's really one of the main barriers, you know, motive is, you know, Hey, you know, if you're not gonna use your GI bill or go through the work program by the VA, definitely, you know, let's try to find you a job, whether it's part-time or full-time.

Nick Sunday 00:11:59 And luckily the last two years there has been a, you know, the COVID kind of set us back, but there's plenty of jobs out there and they can tell me part-time, full-time set down job, you know, whatever stand up. And usually we can find them a job. You know what I'm saying? And these are not low level paying, you know? I mean, they're probably, you know, right up right close to the 200 to 250% of the poverty, but that gets them back on their feet, you know, a little bit of pride that they're bringing income in and stuff.

Joree Novotny 00:12:25 Yeah. And are there other, you know, we think of traditional service connected disabilities and I, as a layman, know what you're referring to, but what about some of the other, the other fallout that veterans might be dealing with and coping with as they attempt to return to civilian life and some of the other ways in which you work to break down those barriers for them,

Nick Sunday 00:12:46 I'll engage them in the, you know, uh, try to get them to open up because what I found, if you're needing one program, whether it's food or utility assistance, you're in need of other programs and a lot of them are income based. So if you qualify for one, you, you know, you kind of wrap those services around and make sure that the veteran gets everything he's entitled to, because that's what I look at and say, Hey, if you're eligible for SNAP and you want to go outside the VA for healthcare, you, you qualify for Medicaid. Let's get you on a Medicaid plan where it has a dental program because the VA has a very weak dental program. And a lot of veterans want that cause it's very expensive. So we get that wraparound services. So we try to maximize all the programs that they're eligible for. And that way they're not, you know, shoved around from one spot to another cause that, that people just veterans just fall out like any low-income household.

Joree Novotny 00:13:38 And I mean, yeah, you really serve like such a robust case manager and friend to these veterans. And I know that you also have a real unique partnership with some of the special court dockets and, and helping them expunge some of their records. Can you talk a little bit about some of that as well?

Nick Sunday 00:13:55 Yes. I think that started in New Jersey and, uh, courts were trying to, especially any veteran who had a, uh, a criminal record. You know what I mean? In some cases up to felonies, I mean, not hardcore criminal offenses, but, uh, I see a lot of domestic violence since, uh, veterans are deployed more than once, you know, and you can't adjust. I can tell you this, you cannot adjust from military to civilian back and forth. It takes you a good year, year and a half. And some of these people, I talked to have been deployed two or three times in a year. So you see a lot of that. You see, uh, you know, uh, I hate to say this, uh, OVI, drug possession and stuff, and Franklin county started this, I'm going to say in 2012 or 2013, uh, they picked up what was being done in New Jersey.

Nick Sunday 00:14:42 And a lot of counties across the country are doing it. So what happens if you want to get your record expunged, which is really critical. If you're looking for a job, they go in front of a special judge, it's called a MAVS docket, M-A-V-S, and the judge hears you and he offers you a way to expunge your record. It might be 10 weeks of going through counseling for domestic violence on and on. And if you complete that, the court will expunge your record, which is really critical. So if any veteran wants to get their record expunged, you know, I kind of refer them to the MAVS docket and the one judge hears those veterans.

Joree Novotny 00:15:17 It's so interesting because from like a more macro perspective in the world of hunger and poverty, um, you know, we see higher rates of depression and anxiety and suicidal ideation and higher rates of, of many of those mental health issues, um, for people struggling with poverty and food insecurity and that's, you know, cause and effect both ways I think, right? I mean, if you're struggling, day-to-day to keep a roof over your head to put food on the table for your kids, whatever it may be, that's going to contribute to exacerbating. What's difficult for all of us to just cope with day-to-day, especially, um, over the past couple of years with the pandemic. So it's so discouraging to think about a veteran feeling, um, isolated or feeling, you know, uncertain that they'll be able to make ends meet. And I'm just so grateful that they have someone like you to turn to. I wonder if you would, if you could design the ideal way that a military member, um, a member of our military exiting service or currently deploying, and then coming back home, like you were talking

about were to be serviced in a wraparound way by the, by their government. If it didn't depend on someone who cares so much like you, but what could it look like at a macro level for more of our veterans across the country to get the help they need?

Nick Sunday 00:16:39 Uh, one thing I experienced up this is when, uh, the national, uh, director of the VA's, uh, they were having problems for veterans getting seen in a timely manner. And they came out with a veteran's choice card where you could go to a doctor outside where the VA could not get you in, you have to apply for, but, uh, when that was going on, uh, and this is under the Obama administration, the director was making rounds across the country to look at the specific VAs. And he happened to stop at the VA clinic in Columbus here. And I was out there that day. And of course, you know, he had reporters around him and everything and he stopped at my table and he said, so what do you do? And I explained what we're doing and you know, I'm a veteran.

Nick Sunday 00:17:23 And he said, uh, is this being done anywhere else? And I said, no, but I said, it could be very easily done by a veteran at any VA. And he said, that's really a good idea. So I knew we were, we were right on track and everything. And we were getting ready to set up the Dayton VA. But I had the veteran I had who had ended up getting lung cancer. So he did not fulfill that, but so there's definitely a need out there. And if you can get somebody that has, you know, a veteran and it can work around the state programs, if you get set up at a VA or any clinic, I mean, all the veterans are probably coming in there because I have to say now, when I got out there, wasn't a lot, you know, things available. They didn't tell you about that.

Nick Sunday 00:18:04 So, and I think they're doing a better job when somebody is discharged, what's, you're eligible for housing and all those programs. So, uh, I think the more it could be done as people come in and not make it, uh, a kind of a hindrance, uh, cause I think most of veterans feel that they're cut off. I mean, cause they'd been away from civilian life, some cases 10 years, four years, two years, even if they're doing multiple deployments because I see a lot of reserves being used, you know, and especially Afghanistan and Iraq. And so, uh, I think they feel cut off, you know, and they don't know how to, uh, readjust in when I was in, they called it battle fatigue, but now they caught it post traumatic stress cause they found out a lot about that. And I'm very sensitive to that because that's why I keep my phone on twenty four seven, uh, cause I'm always worried about suicide because I lost a cousin who committed suicide coming back from Afghanistan. He was only 22. So, uh, and they've done a lot to adjust that. So there's a toll free hotline where they can talk to somebody. But I always worry about, you know, you, when one thing impacts you and like you were alluding to everything impacts you, you're starting getting depressed. You know, I can't provide for my family and you know, it just drives you down where, you know, you just don't, you can't deal with it. And that's what scares me more than anything

Joree Novotny 00:19:22 I know and can hear your heart for it. And I completely agree. It's just, it's unacceptable that we let anyone feel that way when we have built in services and safety nets that are designed to help insulate folks from feeling that despair. So thank you so much for, for you just go the extra mile times a hundred more really? You do.

Nick Sunday 00:19:47 Well, I, you know, I, I enjoy talking to veterans because I actually learn, you know, I thought I knew about everything I needed to know about the VA and everything. But as you start talking to veterans, you learn, you know, uh, what maybe needs that we don't help with like furniture or business attire if they got a job. So, you know, and that stakeholder list has been really key because I can tell them here's where you can go or I can call and refer them there and it gets them, you know, what they need, you know, for whatever circumstances. So that was really a key, I think, you know, it took me six months to do it, but I found there was a lot of programs out there and

they're all just enjoined, you know? I mean, so if you don't have transportation, you're taking a public transportation. If you have it in your city to one place to the second place at the third place. So those wraparound services being at the VA, I think that all kind of came together where you could help veterans, you know, right there.

Joree Novotny 00:20:39 Would you mind telling us a story or two of, some of the veterans that you've met recently, how they, what they've been facing, how you've helped

Nick Sunday 00:20:49 A lot of the veterans, you know, uh, I thought after maybe four or five years, uh, my numbers would kind of hit a plateau, you know, because I'd be saw all the new veterans I could see. And basically that's not the case. So I've been tracking, you know, veterans reapplying or applying for the first time and what I'm finding, we're still seeing about 70% of the veterans that we're serving that are new veterans. So they're still being discharged, are still coming back, obviously Afghanistan, war closed down. Uh, so there'll be more veterans coming back, you know, to the states and everything. Uh, so that was, that was a big one, you know? And so, you know, you try to, I mean, promote anything that's available to them because like I said, if you're eligible for SNAP or HEAP, you're eligible for a lot of other programs in serving in the state role.

Nick Sunday 00:21:37 I know that, you know, so we try to get them as much as we can and not send them around four or five different locations and one story that really it's really a success story. And it's really not me. It's kind of a combination of partners. This has been about two years ago. And, um, a veteran called me, he lived in Lockbourne, he did 10 years and I think the air force and he came back and he has no family here. And so, uh, he had a stroke and the paramedics, uh, nobody answered the door. So they had the bus, the door in, uh, to get to him because he had a panic alarm and, uh, he, we were talking and so he was telling me that and I said, okay, well, you know, once you get out of the assisted living the therapy, we'll make sure, you know, we get back and get the programs.

Nick Sunday 00:22:20 Well, he got back to his house after six weeks and somebody went in there and took all the metal for drugs or whatever. So he had nothing to go back to. So this was a combination of Habitat for Humanity. I'm going to say Home Depot and a couple other veterans, we kind of rehab his house for him, so he could move back. And that was really a sensitive, I mean, he was crying and I mean, this guy was like probably 10 years old or I, and I'm not a spring chicken anymore, but, but I felt bad because, you know, he had nobody here. Uh, and he had a house who was maintaining and it was unfortunate. They broke the door down because they came in, which, you know, they saved his life basically. But, uh, he lost everything. So over about six to 10 weeks, we, while he was in the, uh, rehab place, we brought partners in and they we've kinda refurnished his house so far as I know, he's still living in there. So that's really good. And a lot of veterans will call me back just to say, you know, thank you. You know, I know you don't work for the county or whatever, but thanks for helping me do that. And so, you know, it's kind of a, uh, I don't know, it's not really kind of a job to me. It's kind of something more of a passion than anything. So being a veteran, I can tell you that. So

Joree Novotny 00:23:31 I definitely know that about you and that is why you're so successful at working with veterans and all of the partners around here. And they can sense that you genuinely care about them. And sometimes it can be sorely lacking in how we treat one another just generally. So, um, you know, it's really inspiring. Um, you know, we talked about this a little bit, but I, I wonder if you wouldn't mind shedding some light about how you feel some of those federal safety net programs that we talked about, like HEAP, SNAP, and Medicaid, what those mean for veterans and their families? Cause sometimes people have some sort of, you know, traditional idea of who is

participating in SNAP, Medicaid. HEAP, and they may not realize that a lot of our veterans are relying on those programs.

Nick Sunday 00:24:22 Well, you know, it, and I had, this was kind of, uh, something was put out there when I worked at the state for the low income programs, a lot of, uh, people who did not use those programs would always say, Hey, this is a generation thing where if your dad or mom are on so-called welfare, you're going to be on welfare. And that's really not the case. People I think, want to improve their lives. I mean, there's very, very few that just are out there to get what they can get, but most of them really want to improve their lives. So, you know, that's, to me is really, uh, I had somebody tell me one day, well, why should we, you know, uh, help this veteran when he's paying for a cellphone? And I said, well, that's how you communicate nowadays. I mean, uh, so don't consider yourself, you know, have a need and uh, somebody needs a phone because that's how you communicate.

Nick Sunday 00:25:10 So they was still these traditional thoughts. And I think from people who've never experienced, uh, these hardships and what I've seen since COVID hit, um, which I started working from home in last March 2020. Uh, and, uh, a lot of these, uh, people calling that I get referred to by the caseworkers at the VA have never went through this before. So they have no idea how to apply what's out there at the county and, uh, the other programs and everything. So I think, you know, it, you kind of have to be a mentor for a while with them, you know, and maybe talk to them more than once. And so that's kind of build the relationship, but also it gives them an idea what's out there for them because they've never experienced a lot of this. I, like I said, a lot of them telling me I've never done this before.

Nick Sunday 00:25:58 You know, I feel kind of ashamed apply for SNAP. And I said, don't feel ashamed. You know, you're entitled to that. You know, you got to maintain your, you know, your household and especially you have a family which we see a lot of veterans with family. So you get over that stigmatism with them and everything and say, look, you know, let's see what we can get you up for. And I mean, there's a lot of things you can talk to them about, you know? And, uh, uh, I have to say this VA clinic in Columbus has some really good caseworkers that care. So housing, they have, I think they get the most HUD VA vouchers. And those are a special voucher that the federal government gives VA organizations for housing, which is a big need now, especially when you're getting out. And, you know, and so either they'll subsidize your rent or, uh, offset your rent, you know, by a certain amount with that HUD VA voucher, which has been very so, uh, you know, housing is a big issue, you know, I mean, and there's, I hate to say it there's limited housing out there with organizations, so

Joree Novotny 00:26:50 Limited housing in general, especially in the city and yeah, the way, the way living costs are going. So, I mean, you're right. Just like we talk about every day in our line of work that this, this isn't just hunger, just, just food access. This isn't just housing. This isn't just affording that utility bill. It's everything all at once. I mean, that's not how we work as people and as budgets in his household. So what you do in a wraparound way is really the ideal model. I wish that everyone, um, you know, throughout the country veteran or not had access to that, that's really the, the gold standard. Let me ask you this. If there's a veteran listening right now who might need some help and are hesitating, um, what might you tell them? What would you want them to hear?

Nick Sunday 00:27:36 Well, the, the first thing I would make sure is to go, if you're located in one of the 13 contiguous county is a county Franklin county, uh, in central Ohio is to go to the VA clinic to get your VA card, because that gives you immediate access to healthcare, uh, and caseworkers. And then from there, I can kind of pick up if you need to apply for programs. And that's what happens.

The caseworkers will email me say, I have a veteran who wants to apply for SNAP or Medicaid or heap, and I'll just go ahead and do it. And it's been very good because I can do it remotely, which is sets off that transportation barrier for a lot of it, low income. So I, the first thing I'd advocate is get your VA a health card, because that gives you access to the VA, all the programs that they offer, you know, they have a workforce, uh, program that will just you back to a new career in civilian life.

Nick Sunday 00:28:29 So a lot of those programs were new since, you know, I was in, uh, example, the GI Bill. I, I, you know, it was given to me, I had 10 years to use it or lose it. Now you can pass it onto your wife or your children, which I thought was great. You know what I'm saying? And I see a lot of veterans that never use their GI Bill. It kind of drives me nuts. I said, you know, I don't care if you want to be a chef or what use it, you know, cause it's money guaranteed and you can get a career job out of it. So, uh, I try to advocate for all those programs and stuff. So, but the biggest thing is get signed up at the VA because that entitles you, not just to my, what my health cause they can call me, but all the other services that VA, uh, organizations provide. And a lot of them do not do that because they've had a bad experience. I hate to say that, or it reflects back to, you know, the Vietnam because that was not a very popular war when I was in. So they still kind of hold that thought, you know, but I'm saying, you know, go in takes you 10 minutes, they can pull down your DD two 14 and issue a VA card to you right on the spot. And that gives you access to all the programs that the VA organization offer.

Joree Novotny 00:29:35 You deserve it, you earned it tenfold. So couldn't, couldn't agree more. Um, well, I I'd love if we could in closing, just have you talk a little bit about what it was like to be inducted recently into the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame. What did that experience mean to you?

[Hall of Fame clip]

Nick Sunday 00:30:38 Oh yeah. It's, you're honored by your peers. I mean, uh, after I got nominated by Joree, I got, uh, almost 10 endorsement letters from the, uh, the staff at the VA, you know, supporting that. And that means a lot to me because, you know, I'm, I'm working with peers that are actually career veterans or veterans themselves, you know? Uh, so, uh, that meant a lot to me, you know, and then be, you know, be inducted in that, you know, that's something we'll be around after I leave this earth, but, uh, that's something, you know, which is kind of, uh, kind of a nice, nice reward for what we're doing and everything. So that was kind of a very neat event and, uh, got to talk to the governor, which I recognized through the voted administration. So, uh, uh, so we talked a little bit and pictures and everything, so yeah, it was, it was great. And I kept those endorsement letters. Cause those are a lot of them are very moving to me. You know what I'm saying? So now we're not just looking what we're doing now, but some of my background and my other work that I did at the state or what I'm doing now and stuff. So yeah, it was just, you know, you're always, you're always rewarded and your peers recognize you. So that was the big thing.

Joree Novotny 00:31:40 Well you've embarked on almost every form of public service. There is, I suppose, there's still time for you to run for public office. But aside from that, having served us heroically overseas to serving your, our, our state government at the highest level and serving a lot of Ohio and through that work and then, um, through your additional public service to the local community and the veterans here, we just can't say enough wonderful things. And we thank you so much for your time today, given us some insight into what's going on in veterans lives.

Nick Sunday 00:32:12 Well, I, I appreciate that because that means a lot to me and everything. And again, I want to say, if anybody's listening out there and you're a veteran, if you not seek out the VA, uh, get your VA car, cause that'll entitled, it'll open up the doors for you for all the programs, you

know, whether I do them or a caseworker does him. So, you know, don't be ashamed to go in cause they're out, that's what they're out there for. And they've involved a long way since the Vietnam war. So they're, they're more, um, human, I want to say human interest or they take, they take pride in their work and everything. So just go in where no matter what age you're in, just get your VA card and then you can start applying or talk to people, counselors or whatever. So to me that's very critical and I thank you for taking time to, so this has been really enjoyment.

Joree Novotny 00:32:58 Yeah. Awesome. Thank you, Nick.

Joree Novotny 00:33:07 There's also unfortunately widespread food insecurity among current military and military families and this issue hits home for us even more so since the Ohio National Guard deployed to help our foodbanks keep up with demand during the height of the pandemic surveys, show that, uh, as a high percentage of military households struggle with food insecurity and there are some efforts and efforts that have been going on for a while at the congressional level to address this problem. For example, the basic allowance for housing for military families is currently counted as income when determining a family's eligibility for snap. And we along with many national and local advocates, believe that that needs to be changed. We need our military families to have access to that critical line of defense against hunger during their service. And there's also, um, a significant push being undertaken right now for a military basic needs allowance.

Joree Novotny 00:34:13 Um, because you know, the reality is that our, some of our lowest income military families don't have enough to get by on even while they and their families are serving our country. So that's being taken up and considered by the relevant committees. And I encourage you to check the show notes on our podcast page to learn more about those evolving conversations and how you can get involved in addressing this particular issue for our moderate military families and our veterans. And I'll just leave you with this thought from Josh Protas, vice president of public policy MAZON, a Jewish Response to Hunger, who recently said simply, "How many hungry military families are acceptable?" That's some food for thought that I'll leave you with today. And we look forward to talking with you next time.