

Military Spouses Moved by Defense Contractors  
By Kathie Hightower and Holly Scherer  
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### ***TRAINERS NEEDED IN JAPAN!***

*Dynamic U.S. Government Contractor seeking part time Career Transition Trainers at U.S. military bases in Japan. Trainer will provide 1-2 training seminars per month for military personnel entering the civilian job market. **Excellent opportunity for spouses of Military or DOD personnel.** Must have knowledge of U.S. labor market and experience in job search techniques. Previous experience in Training, Career Counseling, or HR desirable. Military experience strongly desired. Training topics include: skill assessment, career decision-making, resume prep, interview techniques, job search strategies, etc. Email resume to [ssauntry@namsinc.org](mailto:ssauntry@namsinc.org) or fax to (703) 821-3680.*

How often do you see a job announcement that includes “excellent opportunity for spouses of military” in the description. This recent job announcement is an example of one path that savvy military spouses consider as they search for a mobile career. Working for military contractors or becoming a contractor yourself is a good fit for many. With more military services being contracted out these days, it’s certainly worthy of consideration.

Army spouse Karen Ridley has managed to move her career specialist role with an Army contractor for 14 years. She’s progressively moved up without facing job searches or breaks in service with each move. She has worked on the same Army contract, providing job search counseling through the Army’s ACAP offices, first with Right Associates Government Services at Ft. Bragg and then in Germany and DC. Although her actual employer switched from Right Associates to Resource Consultants Inc. (RCI) and later to Serco (who purchased RCI) Ridley continued on in her job in a relatively seamless manner.

Her experience of a change of employers is common in contract work. Marine Corps spouse Anna M. Jones experienced the same thing as an Education Program Analyst for Headquarters Marine Corps working under two different contractors, NAMS and INDTAI, in a three-year period. “The transfer was almost seamless,” she says, “same coworkers, same place of employment — although we did have to renegotiate our salary and benefits.” This contract renewal aspect of the work is a challenge for many spouses.

Army spouse Erin Melton is a FORSCOM Family Readiness Group (FRG) Assistant at Ft. Lewis, currently employed by SRI who recently took over the contract from RCI. “It was a new experience for me,” she says. “Waiting to see if your contract is funded for the next year (‘will I have a job?’) and then if the companies change, adjusting to new rules and regulations.”

Many contracts run for three years, and it’s important to know the status going in. Ridley warns to be aware of “contingency job offers,” where you are offered a job but it is contingent on the contractor getting the contract. There are other things to be aware of.

Throughout 15 years and 10 relocations, Marine Corps spouse Deborah Mayberry has worked as a government employee and a contractor. Her contract positions include Career Counselor, Exceptional Family Member Program Coordinator, Project Manager, and Program Manager for contractors such as ESI and Zeiders Enterprises. She now has her own consulting firm, DMI, providing project management and strategic planning services to prime contractors.

“Know that contracting is not the same as government employment,” Mayberry says. “Contractors typically hail from the corporate sector where employment law applies and is different from government HR policies. Whereas government usually has set compensation schedules, contractors may not and a military spouse must be prepared to negotiate pay and benefits.”

Army spouse Janet Farley, author of *The Military-to-Civilian Career Transition Guide, Jobs and the Military Spouse*, and the *JobTalk* column in *Stars & Stripes* newspapers worked for RCI for many years and many moves doing career counseling. She advises you research benefits carefully.

“If you plan to work overseas,” says Farley, “make sure you are not subject to host nation taxes and that you are paid in US dollars. If you work for a defense contractor overseas and earn US dollars, you are eligible to earn that salary federal tax free up to a certain point.” Contract positions can offer other benefits you might not find in GS positions.

Navy spouse Marcia DeFalco is the Military Strategic Communications Director for Ceridian, working primarily on the Military OneSource and Military Severely Injured Center programs. She came to this job from a position with another military contractor, Axiom Resource Management, working on their Tricare contract.

“Some contract positions will offer more vacation more quickly than with the government,” DeFalco says. “Some offer lucrative bonus programs and flexibilities such as telecommuting opportunities.”

Army spouse Susanna Meeks is a telecommuter. A Project Control Analyst for Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC), she started with them in Kaiserslautern Germany working on Air Force contracts, took a Leave of Absence with one move and now works for them on civilian contracts. She works three weeks a month from her home near Ft. Hood Texas and spends one week each month at SAIC offices in Washington state.

“SAIC is very open to telecommunications set ups,” she says. “They have an official telecommunications agreement and provide the laptop, telephone and fax required to do your work.” Meeks uses an electronic time card system to log in daily, recording her time charged to numbers for the different clients she supports.

DeFalco points out another benefit to contract work. “If you choose you can do some moving around based on your skills and interests, often more than on a GS track.”

Marine Corps spouse Mary Craig expands on that idea. She left her position as Section Head for Marine Corps Family Team Building at Marine Corps headquarters (a job she got because of many years experience volunteering for Marine families) and started her own firm, currently coordinating military content for the educational materials and website of Military OneSource. “I needed more flexibility in my life,” she says, “and I wanted to focus on the favorite parts of my job.” Her firm focuses on writing, curriculum development and project management to help military families.

“I’ve known military spouses who have used working for a contractor to get a NAF or GS position and vice versa,” she says. “It occurs to me that the beauty in contracting work — especially if you are the contractor or doing part time contract work — is similar to volunteer

work. There is flexibility in the work you choose, and you can always find work that conforms to the current situation in your life. In both cases, the more different arrangements you try, the better off you are because of the connections you make and the skills you add to your portfolio.”

So, how do you find opportunities in the contracting world?

Tap into the Internet. A Google search for “top Department of Defense contractors” turns up a list of the top 100 contractors, companies like Lockheed, Halliburton, SAIC, CSC, and others, with a breakdown by service. Most contractor websites include job listings. SAIC’s job opportunities, for example, are searchable by location and by job type.

“Define what it is you want to do, what skills you want to develop and what field you want to learn about,” advises Mayberry. “Then find out what companies hold the contracts aboard your base — the contracting office or business performance office should have this information.”

Many spouses turn their interest in helping military families and years of volunteer experience into paid contract work. Melton credits her volunteer time with FRGs in getting her current position. Marine spouse Eileen McCallum is a Key Volunteer Program Coordinator/Trainer in Hawaii, working for Professional Performance Development Group (PPDG). “I was a volunteer with the program,” she says. “When the woman who held this position PCS’d, I applied.”

Remember traditional methods in your job search. Once you know the names of contractors, watch for job announcements and job fairs. Meeks found her first job through an ad in the Kaiserslautern post paper. DeFalco found hers by noticing the fine print of “spouses welcome” in an announcement of a Military Officers Association (MOA) Job Fair.

And of course networking is key. As Craig says, “Continually ask others how they got involved in what they do.” Almost every spouse interviewed mentioned networking as essential in finding jobs, for finding additional opportunities as you move, and for finding information.

As Farley says, “Research the particular contractor you’re interested in so you can better relate how you can be an asset to them. Have a good feel for what they do, how they interact with other agencies in their great community and where they are, reputation-wise, in the food chain. How? Talk informally to employees of the company, talk to those who are their competition for contracts, talk to those in uniform to get a feel for how the contractor’s employer feels about them as well.”

Want information on the job announcement at the beginning of this article? Marine spouse Kim A. Ealy has one of those positions. As she says, in addition to the benefit of flexibility and good pay for part time work, there’s one more thing. “It keeps me connected to the working community and current with future job search and employment skills I plan to use full time once the kids are older.”

Kathie Hightower and Holly Scherer are military spouses, speakers and coauthors of the recently released *Help! I’m a Military Spouse — I Want a Life Too: How to Craft a Life for You as You Move with the Military*. Information at [www.militaryspousehelp.com](http://www.militaryspousehelp.com) Both have worked as contractors.