“After The Parade” Helps Returning NYC Vets Long After The Welcome-Home Banner Passes

Did you know there are more unemployed vets in New York City than there are yellow cabs? A new public-awareness campaign, “After The Parade,” highlights the unique problems faced by veterans returning to the city by appealing to New Yorkers’ everyday experiences.
The world’s #1 selling toy is on a quest to reinvent itself for today’s kids

BY ALICE KORNGOLD
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IN BAGHDAD
HE’S A HERO.

IN BROOKLYN
HE’S HOMELESS.

THERE ARE MORE HOMELESS VETERANS THAN FOOD CARTS IN NYC:

How do you convey the profound experiences and needs of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, and do so in nine words on a poster, or a 30-second ad?

That was the challenge facing Aaron Padin, head of art, and Drew Train, account director at marketing communications firm JWT New York, who led more than a dozen volunteers, including strategists, copywriters, photographers, and editors to create “After the Parade,” a public-service initiative for the veterans programs provided by Services for the UnderServed (SUS), a New York-based nonprofit.
“People think they understand, but they really don’t,” said Padin. “People are shocked to learn that 18 veterans a day commit suicide, and yet there are effective solutions. When my colleagues and I visited and saw the excellent services that SUS provides, we knew that we could support returning vets the way they deserve to be supported. People need to know and to help.”

The campaign is designed to build awareness and create calls for action, not just for Veterans Day, but all year long, year after year.

When JWT considered how to make veterans’ issues hit home, it did so by appealing to the everyday experiences of New Yorkers. The campaign includes print, radio, and television ads, many of which highlight the disparity between veterans’ vast professional and service experiences and the challenges they face finding civilian employment. “In Baghdad, He’s A Hero. In Brooklyn, He’s Homeless,” one poster reads, noting that there are more homeless vets in New York than there are food carts. Think about that the next time you stop for a hot dog.

“After the Parade,” developed with SUS, and ultimately approved by the SUS Board, includes an action plan as well. An SUS Veterans Service Fair is scheduled for Tuesday, November 15, from 11 a.m.-4 p.m. at Brooklyn Borough Hall. The fair will bring potential employers, veterans’ service groups, and government agencies together under one roof, creating a one-stop shop for veterans to access jobs, support, and services. This is an opportunity for employers as well.

“What the public, and particularly employers, need to know is that veterans are proven doers who are disciplined and thoughtful about whatever it is that they set out to accomplish,” said Yves Ades, senior vice president at SUS, during an interview. “Veterans think only in terms of succeeding. They’ve been taught to produce and to respect authority, which makes them very desirable in the workforce marketplace.”

SUS, which was awarded $1.8 million in city and federal funding from the Department of Veterans Affairs earlier this year to expand its comprehensive services for vets, which it’s been providing for 18 years, is convening a large-scale public/private partnership to create a blueprint for coordinated action to serve returning veterans in New York City.

Robert S. Kapito, president and director of investment-management giant BlackRock, has been hosting and personally participating in the meetings with national, state, and local leaders from the military, government, business, foundations, universities, and nonprofits.

“Veterans who have supported us around the world will be a big issue during this period of high unemployment,” Kapito said in an interview. “This initiative provides a means for us to give back to people who’ve done so much.”

SUS says that veterans face an array of challenges upon returning home, among them PTSD, readjusting to family life, and finding jobs—all of which will be brought into even starker relief as the last of the U.S. forces return home from Iraq by year’s end. “The time is now; there is urgency,” said SUS CEO Donna Colonna. “If we don’t get it right now, it will get harder and harder.”

SUS’s and JWT’s relationship began last year with what became an award-winning project called the “Cardboard Apartment,” a visual and mobile demonstration of SUS’s solution to homelessness. “Our enthusiasm from working on the Cardboard Apartment led us to offer to conduct a larger-scale, longer-term public service initiative for SUS, beginning with this veterans campaign,” explained JWT’s Train, who has also become a member and contributor on a committee of SUS’s Board of Directors.

The SUS and JWT alliance is an example of how leaders from the business and nonprofit sectors can leverage their diverse talents to build stronger communities. If you’d like to support SUS and “After the Parade,” click on “After the Parade”’s Facebook page to make a donation or get involved.

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