

*Caring Transitions writer, Nan Hayes, had the privilege of working with families of wounded veterans this past month. This segment takes a look at the difficult home transitions many of our soldiers and their brave families experience on a regular basis.*

## The Homes of the Brave

Sometimes military families have a reasonable amount of time to prepare for a move and sometimes they don't. Sometimes they have a say in where they will relocate, but usually they don't. And rarely do you hear them complain.

"Like many elderly clients we serve, military families face a great number of unique challenges when it comes to moving," said John Buckles, President of Caring Transitions. "Both types of relocations often involve complicated logistics, physical challenges, tight time constraints, and in each instance, the move may be preceded by a stressful, life-altering event. Caring Transitions takes great pride in being prepared to manage both."



The average American moves **11 times** in his or her lifetime. Military families move approximately **every two years**.

**Little Advanced Notice:** Just as we are often called to help an older client who is being forced to move from their home or hospital to a nursing home, our military families often receive little advanced notification of a pending move; sometimes just weeks or months. This places undue stress on families, especially those with small children.

**Logistical Challenges:** Regardless of whether a military family is moving across the country or across the world, every move starts the same. First, start a moving list and begin organizing. Then, distribute valuable, but unwanted items through donations or sales. This is followed by even more organizing as items are sorted and labeled for packing companies. Some families opt to take this on themselves, adding to the stress and chaos of an already difficult transition. Finally, the family must clean and repair the home in preparation for the next occupants.

About 55% of all who actively serve are married, and slightly less than half of all servicemen have children. For these families, the moving process proves to be an even greater challenge, as parents must tend to their children's needs by alleviating their fears, keeping them occupied, arranging to change schools, requesting records and verifying enrollments – all the while hoping they will adjust well and make friends in their new school.

**Physical and Health Challenges:** VA and Census Bureau figures show the number of disabled military has jumped 25% since 2001, to 2.9 million. The Pentagon reports that 32,226 soldiers have returned from Iraq wounded, 20% of whom suffer from serious brain or spinal injuries. Reports also indicate 30% of U.S. troops develop serious mental health problems within 3 to 4 months of returning home.

For both our servicemen and aging populations, there is an increased need for temporary and adapted housing for the disabled, as well as physical therapy and psychiatric resources across much of the United States.

**Need for Specialized Moving Services:** Often times in a military family, the tasks of planning, organizing, moving and unpacking must be managed alone. The active-duty spouse may be moved in advance or have been shipped to a war zone, leaving the logistics to just one person who is also suffering from loss and anxiety. The military provides a number of financial allowances to help families cope with their moving projects and many resources are available for information. Approved transport companies, financial advisors and family services are required to understand the specific needs of their very important clients. The military community itself is a wealth of information, with the experienced spouses offering advice and support.

**Paperwork:** Like older adults who must have their medical records well organized prior to a move, military families must organize all their legal, medical and financial paperwork; track orders, home inventories, moving and shipment records and receipts; and complete all the right applications and documents required by the government.

There are more than 10 types of moves performed by the military, including Permanent Change of Station (PCS), Overseas and Local Moves, and each has its own set of required forms and entitlements.

**Transition:** Once the move is complete, the task of adjusting to a new home and community begins. Inevitably, there is a period of time spent fine-tuning the house, locating new stores, investigating clubs or hobbies, seeking religious services and finding new doctors; however, the most challenging part of any move, regardless of age, is navigating the emotional experience. Most people feel it takes six months or so to fully adjust and begin to feel settled.

Reaching out to others who have had similar experiences is one important step toward a successful transition. Prior to the move, it can help to reach out to the community via networks, chat, blogs and emails and allow children to spend time viewing the community map or pictures of their school and playgrounds online.

“The foundation of Caring Transitions has always been to provide services and support *before, during and after* each transition,” Buckles said.

As friends and neighbors of our military families, you are part of our support system. Beyond thanking our military families for their service, you have the ability to be of great assistance to them by providing valuable information about schools, events and jobs or by simply welcoming them into the community.

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## About Caring Transitions

As life changes, it may become necessary to leave a familiar home and part with personal belongings in order to downsize and relocate to a smaller home or retirement community. At Caring Transitions, we help our clients understand the process, evaluate their options and make informed decisions that suit their best interests. We are committed to making each client’s experience positive by minimizing stress and maximizing results.

Visit us online at [www.CaringTransitions.net](http://www.CaringTransitions.net).

Call Caring Transitions for a Consultation – (800) 647-0766

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