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### Capstone Volunteer Project

#### **Introduction**

This semester I volunteered with the Yellow Ribbon Support Center in Cincinnati, OH to help make an impact on the veterans and active-duty members of our community. The Yellow Ribbon Support Center is a non-profit organization that was started in 2004 by Keith Maupin when his son, SSG Matt Maupin was taken captive by Iraqi insurgents. The purpose of this organization was to send care packages to active-duty members overseas with essential items such as health, nutrition, and entertainment that they do not have access to in foreign countries. On these boxes, the Yellow Ribbon placed labels displaying Matt's face in hopes that someone would recognize him and help bring him home (Maupin 2004).

Sadly in 2008, Matt's remains were found and brought home where the community held a funeral service for him at Great American Ballpark. Since then, Keith and the Yellow Ribbon have continued to support the military through their care package initiative and new additions such as their Let Us Never Forget scholarship fund that raises money to award scholarships in the name of fallen heroes, and their active community involvement to raise awareness for those overseas and veterans at home. Keith and the Yellow Ribbon have adopted a new motto, "Till they all come home" as they strive to continue to support those who fight for our freedom overseas. As a volunteer, my focus was to find a way to bring value to Keith's organization and make an impact with my time there. This focus shifted to the needs of helping the Yellow

Ribbon assess current products, revamp their inventory operations for their warehouse here in Cincinnati, OH, and help with the set-up of their yearly scholarship fundraiser.

### **Literature Review**

To support my mission to help the Yellow Ribbon revamp its inventory system I conducted research on Excel inventory management to digitize its active warehouse supply and I also found resources to help support the products they are shipping overseas. Before revamping their inventory, I wanted to ensure the products being accounted for are effective in the Yellow Ribbon's goals to provide nutrition and health items to troops overseas. To evaluate what products are beneficial or not, the information provided by Dr. Tze-Cheg Kao indicated that active-duty military members often take daily supplements to help keep their bodies in shape and improve performance. "Those with active physical activity and a healthy diet had the highest prevalence rate (25.7) among all other combinations of activity and diet. (Kao, et al. 2021, p. 31)" From this research, in order to maximize active-duty member's health benefits from these supplements, they need a healthy diet and active lifestyle. Based on this information to maximize the support the Yellow Ribbon strives for, products such as food, need to support health such as nutrition bars and other non-perishable nutrition. Additionally, products that support active and healthy lifestyles such as articles about working out or small exercise tools can be beneficial to helping active-duty members maintain their health.

To revamp their inventory operations, research was conducted on how to manage these levels properly. "Capacity and inventory management are fundamental topics of operations management, as they concern the planning and control of the supply or processing side of matching supply and demand." (Song et al. 2020, p. 36)" In order to maintain an effective operation, I wanted to ensure that I was creating a system that would support active inventory

management and work cohesively with shipment planning so they could manage their progress and track upcoming shipments. To effectively do this, my research concluded that Microsoft Excel had the appropriate tools to support this vision. “A range of analytics techniques—including Excel Pivot tables and charts, regression trend lines, and linear programming—are combined into an integrative project.” (Grenci, 2022, pg. 190) Not only could I create a working excel sheet, but the data could also be organized into tables and charts to display trends and analysis on the products they were receiving and shipping. This process would allow Yellow Ribbon to interact with their inventory and obtain more in-depth visibility on the donations they are receiving and the products they are purchasing to send overseas. This process would support their vision to reach shipment goals and strategically plan their supply to maximize donations.

Additional research was conducted to support new initiatives for the Yellow Ribbon. As active-duty members return home, they face the challenge of reintegration. “The consensus view of participants was that civilian reintegration was a particularly vulnerable period for veteran families. The families that were perceived to be under the most pressure were those for whom the veteran had suffered service-related physical and psychological trauma, and for whom the sequelae of unresolved trauma had persisted over a prolonged period of time.” (Maguire, et al, 2022, pg. 1) This can be difficult for veterans to do alone. The Yellow Ribbon has started helping veterans reintegrate within society and can take this one step further by utilizing the business partnerships they have been forming with local companies such as TQL to help veterans find work and hit the ground running as soon as they return home. This research suggests that the most common issues are planning and gaps in service provision. Using these partnerships, the Yellow Ribbon will be able to fill those gaps and assist with post-service planning and offer veterans the opportunity to form a new career path. In addition to this, veterans who seek to

further their education upon return have opened up another need as they are not receiving enough aid to cover tuition. For example, “The costs for veterans attending medical school were high despite VA scholarship support, with only 45% of tuition covered and out-of-pocket costs more than \$27 000 annually.” (Graves, et al, 2018, pg. 1) The Yellow Ribbon hosts a “Let Us Never Forget” scholarship fundraiser every year on April 8<sup>th</sup> to provide scholarships in the name of fallen heroes. Using these estimates, I can help the Yellow Ribbon allocate those funds to maximize support for veterans who are seeking to further their education and need help covering those costs.

### **Volunteer Role and Responsibility**

My role as a volunteer at the Yellow Ribbon was mainly focused on revamping their inventory management systems. In addition to this, I also helped with the set-up of their yearly scholarship fundraiser. During my experience, I spent the bulk of my time innovating their inventory management for their Cincinnati, OH warehouse as their current process was done by notebook. I created an Excel spreadsheet that provided fields for important details such as barcode number, item description, skid number, and brand. This Excel spreadsheet provided the flexibility to digitize all inventory and use reports and filters to quickly analyze data and strategically plan shipments. To add to this, I downloaded Microsoft Scan-It and created a custom form that would fit within the parameters of the spreadsheet I created. This app allowed team members to scan items as they come in, enter the information on their phone, and click send which would input all of that data automatically into the excel spreadsheet. This set-up streamlined inventory operations to improve time management, productivity, and organization.

To conclude my time with the Yellow Ribbon, I trained each team member on how to use the application and demonstrated how it worked. I helped them convert all of their current active

inventory over to the Excel workbook, so they had a foundation to build upon for when new supplies come in. I also dedicated some time to working on decorations for the Let Us Never Forget Scholarship on April 8<sup>th</sup>. This experience gave me the opportunity to refine my problem solving skills and develop a system that could greatly benefit this organization. The most significant thing I learned about the Yellow Ribbon during this time was how truly involved they are in the community to try to make the lives of veterans and active-duty members better. These team members spend hours each day trying to give back to those who fight to protect our freedom. It is inspiring to see organizations like these, no matter how large or small, make a difference in the world.

### **SWOT Analysis**

The below SWOT analysis details the elements of the positive and negative outlook for the Yellow Ribbon Support Center

#### **Strengths**

The Yellow Ribbon Support Center has two key strengths that help drive its organization. These strengths include a strong volunteer base and a strong mission with community support. The Yellow Ribbon has a core of several volunteers that have been with the organization since its start in 2004. These volunteers have stuck with Keith and helped with operations and events for the past 19 years. This strong support system ensures the Yellow Ribbon is properly staffed and always has the manpower to keep the organization running. The Yellow Ribbon also has a strong mission that is backed by the community. The Yellow Ribbon's mission is to help veterans and active-duty members appeal to the patriotic nature of our community. Their mission statement "Till they all come home" is powerful and gives their team members something to rally behind as they work to support active-duty members across the world. The Yellow Ribbon

participates in several events throughout the year to help raise money for their scholarships and care packages. These events include motorcycle gatherings at restaurants and local fairs. These have been very successful for the Yellow Ribbon as the community always shows their support at these events. When Keith's son Matt was brought home, his funeral was held at Great American Ballpark where the stadium filled up with those in the community praying for Keith and his family. The community support surrounding this organization gives it the fuel it needs to keep providing support to those in harm's way.

### **Weaknesses**

The weaknesses that the Yellow Ribbon currently has are limited warehouse space and streamlined transportation. The Yellow Ribbon owns a warehouse in Cincinnati, OH where they store all inventory and route their transportation. The issue is the warehouse is starting to fill up with the current limited capacity. If packages are not shipped faster than inventory comes in, the Yellow Ribbon will run into overstock issues and have to turn the product away. In an organization that relies on donations, its goal is to never turn away incoming inventory. The second weakness that ties into this is their method of transportation. The Yellow Ribbon facilitates the transportation of their packages to international carriers such as UPS by using a truck at their facility. This method of transportation is unstable to help the Yellow Ribbon scale its care package efforts beyond the capacity of their truck and limited warehouse space.

### **Opportunities**

There are a couple of opportunities the Yellow Ribbon can utilize as they aim their focus on future growth. The first opportunity is gaining exposure to offering increased veteran support in the United States. With active duty coming home from serving overseas, reintegration poses a great challenge that the Yellow Ribbon can support. Reinforcing this initiative can help the

Yellow Ribbon add to their mission's momentum and can also open up other opportunities through business partnerships as they seek to connect veterans to local jobs within Cincinnati. Another opportunity is the constant presence of U.S. troops throughout the world. The United States has bases present across the world. This presence provides the opportunity for the Yellow Ribbon to achieve stability in their care package operation by routinely sending packages throughout these bases.

### **Threats**

Even with a strong mission and community support, there are a few threats that can harm the Yellow Ribbon's operations. The elevation of online care package organizations around the United States has increased over the years. These online initiatives make this space competitive for donations and can slowly diminish outside support for the Yellow Ribbon as people become divided supporting organizations from around the country. These online organizations also have an advantage with ease of use and online advertising that can overshadow the Yellow Ribbon's current internet presence. The other threat to this organization is inflated shipping costs. As inflation continues to rise across all industries, shipping costs are affected and can make a negative impact on the available cash flow the Yellow Ribbon has allocated to shipping. This can harm the number of care packages they are able to send at one time and can make it difficult to meet their monthly goals.

### **Recommendations**

Based on this analysis I would recommend a few changes to operations to help improve upon weaknesses and compete with threats to the organization. I would recommend that the Yellow Ribbon continue to utilize the new inventory management system to fully maximize limited warehouse space. With this space filling up quickly, utilizing this streamlined process

can help the organization quickly assess inventory and use reporting and trends to strategically plan their packing schedule to ensure the input and output of inventory is balanced. In regards to inflated shipping costs and transportation challenges, I would recommend the Yellow Ribbon invest in a delivery vehicle to maximize the number of boxes that can be sent out at one time or establish a working partnership with UPS or FedEx to facilitate monthly pick-ups. These large organizations are generous to charity work and may provide some services free of cost to help support the Yellow Ribbons cause and reduce the negative effects of rising costs. The last recommendation I would suggest is to launch a marketing campaign through website design and search engine optimization to increase traffic to the organization's website and boost donations to compete with other online care package organizations. With technology constantly evolving, utilizing the tools that other companies are using can give the Yellow Ribbon the same competitive edge in promoting their mission and cause. These recommendations to the Yellow Ribbon will help the organization continue to elevate operations and support their mission "Till they all come home".

## **Conclusion**

Overall, this experience was beneficial to both myself and the Yellow Ribbon Support Center. I was able to upgrade and provide services to the Yellow Ribbon to set the organization up for success as they aim to continue to grow their operations within the community. This experience helped me get a real-life perspective on the organizations in my community that are working to make a difference. Additionally, it gave me warehousing experience which is an aspect of the logistics industry that I have not been exposed to before. As I pursue further education in Supply Chain Management, my experience with logistics management and sales combined with this new experience in warehouse management will provide a great foundation to



build upon. On top of this, I know a local organization I can stop by to support with any free time along the way.

## Works Cited

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