Veterans' tech training group plans Canada-wide recruitment tour

September 5, 2021 by Trevor Oattes

After a year of successful socially distanced recruitment seminars, Coding for Veterans plans to begin a Canada-wide tour this fall.

The organization, which offers online retraining for veterans in software development and cyber security skills, managed to make the most of the pandemic by hosting pop-up "career caravan" recruitment drives throughout Ontario.

Just under 200 veterans have been through the program, which is run in association with the University of Ottawa. They learned skills that have assisted in the transition to civilian employment.

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Jeff Musson, the organization's executive director, expects this number will double within the year.

"They say that necessity is the mother of all invention," he said. "If not for COVID, we would have never set up the Coding for Veterans career caravan. That's how we've seen our numbers increase, and now we're able to go on a national campaign from coast to coast."

Prior to the pandemic, Coding for Veterans did much of its recruiting at Canadian Armed Forces bases. COVID-19 and the ensuing public health mandates removed those opportunities, which led the organization to strike up a deal with The Royal Canadian Legion. Since last fall, Coding for Veterans has occupied unused Legion parking lots in communities throughout Ontario, with pop-up tents and cargo vans acting as impromptu recruitment offices.

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Career Caravan

Musson, who owns a software company, said that Coding for Veterans started out of a desire to fill the personnel shortage in Canada's ever-growing tech industry with quality workers. The decision to pursue veterans came as a natural and mutually beneficial solution.

"In the tech industry, there's a projection of about 147,000 IT jobs that are likely to go unfilled in the next 12 to 18 months," said Musson. "When you look at the soft skills of someone from the military family—things like attention to detail, leadership, teamwork—[they] align perfectly with the soft skills that are required and present in the most successful employees and workers in the IT industry."

The program now also accepts reservists and family members of military personnel in addition to veterans. The software development and cyber security programs can be completed in less than a year, are certified with the University of Ottawa, and are industry accredited. According to Musson, those eligible for the Veterans Affairs Canada education and training benefit can attend the program at virtually no cost to themselves and come out of it with a stable, high-paying career.

"I've had members of my family that have served in the military, and [Coding for Veterans] is just a great way to give back to those who have served," said Musson.

The planned national tour will begin after Labour Day and is slated to wrap up on Remembrance Day in Ottawa.