

## Reconnect Corner

Volume 8, Issue 3 July–September 2022

### VA Education Programs

As a veteran, survivor, or dependent you may have education programs available to you to not only help your education dream come true but help you do it without breaking the bank.

#### Some programs you may consider are:

- GI Bill
- Post 9/11 GI Bill
- Montgomery GI Bill
- \$600 buy up program

There may be assistance for dependents and surviving spouses as well, including survivors and dependents education assistance and the Fry scholarship.

#### To apply for education benefits you will want to have a number of documents available:

- Social security number
- Bank account information
- Education history
- Military history
- Information about the school or facility you want to attend or are actively attending

You can learn more and apply for VA education benefits online at [va.gov/education](https://va.gov/education). If you prefer, you can also apply through the mail, or in person. Once you apply you will not be able to make changes to your application, but if additional documents are requested, you can upload them online. You should have a decision roughly 30 days after your application is completed.

You may also consider looking into yellow ribbon schools. These schools help to pay for higher out of state, private, or graduate school tuitions that the GI Bill may not cover. The amount of funds can vary depending on what school you are going to, or degree you are pursuing.

Another program to consider is the post 9/11 GI Bill. One of the key eligibility criteria is serving after September 10th, 2001. Montgomery GI Bill is a benefit you can receive as long as you've served a minimum of 2 years in active duty and meet a number of requirements.

### IN THIS ISSUE

- VA Education Programs
- Get Your Budget Back on Track
- Back to School on a Budget

### PROGRAM LINKS

[recon.mmiuniversity.org](https://recon.mmiuniversity.org)

### CONTACT US

[Clearpoint.org/Reconnect](https://Clearpoint.org/Reconnect)  
[PLP@ClearpointCCS.org](mailto:PLP@ClearpointCCS.org)

And, for potentially more money through your GI Bill monthly payments, check out the \$600 buy-up program. This program allows you to have additional funds withheld to go toward your education payments. For example, a \$600 payment in this program could give you up to \$5,400.

Finally, there are education assistance options for surviving spouses and dependents as well. If you are a surviving spouse or the child of a service member who passed away, is missing, captured, or has a disability, this program could help pay for school or job training. If your parent or spouse passed away in the line of duty after September 11th, 2021, you may be eligible for assistance from the Fry scholarship.

---

## Get Your Budget Back on Track

As summer ends, your wallet may feel a little lighter. Here are some tips on ways to make extra cash to help offset your seasonal expenses:

- **Identify your financial values and spending personality.** You may fall into one of four categories:
  - ♦ **Frugal Spenders** typically focus on saving and following a budget.
  - ♦ **Status Shoppers** may spend money to keep up with friends and neighbors or to gain admiration.
  - ♦ **Resourceful Consumers** not only like to save, but also believe in using what they have and making sacrifices to reach their goals.
  - ♦ **Carefree Consumers** typically worry less about spending money, may use credit freely, and tend to not worry about getting into financial bind.
- **Do some cleaning out.** You may be surprised by how much extra cash you can make just by getting more organized and getting rid of the items you're no longer using. This can be a great opportunity to help pay down debt or start a savings account.
- **Consider picking up a second job or side gig.** Some side gigs, specifically, are extremely flexible so if you're looking to make some extra money but need a flexible schedule, you can work when it's convenient for you. Things like house sitting, dog walking, delivery services, and driving services all might be a great way to help offset additional expenses that pop up after taxes. For more information on this topic, check our [Easy Side Hustles With Low Startup Costs | MMI \(moneymanagement.org\)](https://www.moneymanagement.org/easy-side-hustles-with-low-startup-costs).



Thinking of paying down debt? The snowball method is often very effective. Essentially, you'll start by paying off debt in order of lowest to highest balance. Once the lowest debt is paid off, add that monthly payment to the next debt on your list, and so on, until all your debt is paid off.

Consolidation may be another debt reduction option, allowing you to transfer all your outstanding balances to a loan with a single payment and (ideally) lower interest rate. And, if you can, aim to pay more than the minimum due. This will help you pay down your debt at a faster rate while also lowering the overall amount of interest you'll pay.

Finally, a debt management plan (DMP) can be a great option. You can find more information on how DMP's can assist you on our website, [moneymanagement.org](https://www.moneymanagement.org). Generally, DMP's can help you consolidate and repay debt faster by offering reduced interest rates.

Regardless of the debt reduction method you choose, it's important to avoid taking on more debt. Take a hard look at your budget and identify what items are priorities and what items can be cut out, even temporarily. Creating a priority spending plan will help you find cash to pay down debt or increase your savings faster than you may have thought possible.

## For More Information

[recon.mmiuniversity.org](http://recon.mmiuniversity.org)  
[Clearpoint.org/Reconnect](http://Clearpoint.org/Reconnect)

## MSCCN

[msccn.org](http://msccn.org)

## NCHV

[nchv.org](http://nchv.org)

## TAPS

[taps.org](http://taps.org)

## Operation Homefront

[operationhomefront.org](http://operationhomefront.org)

## America's Warrior Partnership

[americaswarriorpartnership.org](http://americaswarriorpartnership.org)

## VETSEDU

[vetsedu.org](http://vetsedu.org)

The articles in this newsletter are provided for informational purposes only and are not intended as credit repair or tax advice.

If your goal is savings, here are some strategies that can help you get started:

- **Automate savings.** Set up an automatic savings deduction to help ensure you're saving regularly and consistently.
- **Save the change.** Some banks and credit unions offer round up programs, rounding charges to the nearest dollar and adding the change to a savings account.
- **Pay yourself first.** Treat saving as a priority expense and add it as a regular item in your monthly budget.

And remember, as with any change or new habit, when starting a debt reduction or savings program you may have setbacks. It's important to remind yourself of your goal and be patient.

---

## Back to School on a Budget

Back to school costs can really add up between the new clothing, school supplies, and other unexpected items. After summer vacation your budget may be feeling tight and any savings may be gone or dwindling. Going into a new school year, it's important to set a budget, set expectations, make a list, track your spending, and research the best prices and sales. Here are some tips to help make this back-to-school season successful:

- **Set goals and expectations.** Take time to identify the small steps you need to take to reach your overall goal. If you don't already have a budget, take steps to build one. Once you know where each dollar is going, you'll be ready to build a plan and set expectations with family members.
- **If possible, save for expenses throughout the year,** setting a strict budget and sticking to it throughout the year.
- **Involve the whole family,** including your children, when setting expectations. This will help to decrease any conflict over why they may not get all the items on their new school year list.

As a family make a list & review what the school is requesting for everyone and what additional items you need to purchase. If possible, purchase during sales or in bulk to decrease the overall cost. For example, if two of your three kids need the same school supplies buying value packs could help you save. It's also important to track your expenses. When making several purchases in a small period of time, it's easy to lose track of how much you have truly spent.

If money is tight, you may feel that using credit is your only option, but delaying a purchase, if possible, might be the best option. Here's an example to help you consider the true cost of credit. Let's say that you spend \$1,800 on credit to get all the school supplies for your family of four. Assuming the minimum monthly payment is \$48 with an interest rate of 16%, if you only make the minimum payment, it will take 4 years to pay off the debt and will ultimately cost you \$2,511. This is \$711 more than if you would have paid the balance in full. Consider using a credit calculator, like this one from [creditcalculator.net](http://creditcalculator.net) before making a purchase on credit, to help identify the true cost of the purchase and whether it's worth it to take on the debt.