

Orange County Veterans Initiative

Final Report Program Summary February 2019



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Executive Summary and Background

The Orange County Veterans Initiative's (OCVI) objective is to help military veterans and their families transition successfully back to civilian life in Orange County. The Initiative formed in 2015 in response to the findings from a report commissioned by the Orange County Community Foundation (OCCF), [*The State of the American Veteran: The Orange County Veterans Study*](#). Based on the key issues identified in the report, the initiative's goal is to improve critical services for transitioning veterans and their families so that they:

- Know where to go in Orange County to get receive the services they need
- Develop trusting relationships with community providers
- Connect early and proactively to services they and their families need
- Obtain employment in career-oriented opportunities

Since its inception, OCCF in partnership with the Orange County Real Estate Industry (OCRE) and 18 other donors and funders have invested \$2.3 million to support 17 organizations that are providing services in the following five areas of need:

1. Improving assessment and referral services for veterans and their families
2. Making available transition support programs utilizing a peer navigation and/or case management model
3. Improving educational outcomes for student veterans
4. Improving employment support programs that assist veterans in gaining career-oriented jobs
5. Improving the physical and mental health for veterans and their families

To date, nearly 17,000 veterans, active duty military, and their family members have been reached with over 85 percent receiving deeper, holistic services from our grantees who work closely together to ensure that the needs for the veterans and their families are met efficiently and effectively.

The following program summary highlights the initiative's accomplishments through OCVI's Year 3, an analysis of partnerships formed among the grantees, as well as lessons learned. After 3 years, this report demonstrates the success of OCVI grantees and their partners in serving veterans and their families.



Grantees

OCCF, along with the OCRE Veterans Initiative Selection Committee, selected the following projects based on the nonprofits' innovative solutions and documented ability to sustain programming and scale services across the county:

Assessment and referral services for veterans and their families

- ❖ 211 Orange County received \$50,000 to continue to build the Military and Veteran's Central Clearinghouse for resources and referrals directed at veterans and their families, including a comprehensive, searchable database, a 24-hour telephone helpline, and facilitated referrals.

Employment support programs

- ❖ Easterseals Southern California received \$75,000 to support their Bob Hope Veterans Support Program in Orange County. This career advancement program provides participants with assessments, employment-related guidance, and comprehensive support from job specialists who are veterans.
- ❖ Working Wardrobes received \$60,000 for VetNet, an employment support program designed to serve veterans and their family members using a comprehensive approach that includes case management, peer navigators, social services referrals, mental health and legal services, and career training and placement.

Transition support programs

- ❖ Child Guidance Center received \$85,000 to expand its Strong Families, Strong Children (SFSC), a collaborative of five nonprofits (Child Guidance Center, Human Options, Children and Family Futures, Families Forward, and Veterans Legal Institute) that offer a coordinated, community-based approach to serving veterans and transitioning military families, including their children.
- ❖ Goodwill Industries of Orange County received \$75,000 to advance the outreach and case coordination efforts of the Tierney Center for Veterans Services where veterans will find support to achieve their goal of financial independence. Additionally, this funding is supporting emergency grants for student veterans.
- ❖ Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund received \$15,000 to support emergency grants for housing, transportation, childcare, and lodging needs as well as \$5,000 for their Veteran 2 Veteran (V2V) Program that empowers veterans to succeed in lives outside the military by providing assistance with education coordination, as well as direct support to further career, education, and transition goals.
- ❖ Volunteers of America Los Angeles (VOA-LA) received \$75,000 to continue to expand its Orange County Battle Buddy Bridge (B3) program which veteran peer navigators help local veterans connect to resources to assure their successful reintegration into civilian life in Orange County.
- ❖ zero8hundred received \$75,000 to support their Transition Assistance Program that helps active military members with their transition by providing intensive, peer navigation services who works with the individual to create and implement a strategic plan for reintegration into civilian life In Orange County.



Education programs

- ❖ The following colleges and universities received grants to provide support services to student veterans including scholarships, emergency grants, peer navigation, case management, mental health services, and employment support:
 - California State University Fullerton: \$75,000
 - Irvine Valley College: \$55,000
 - Saddleback College: \$55,000

Physical and mental health programs

- ❖ St. Jeanne de Lestonnac Free Clinic received \$50,000 to provide veterans with free dental exams, x-rays, cleanings, filling, extractions, and root canals at an average cost of \$125 per visit.
- ❖ Strength In Support received \$75,000 toward their individualized Peer-Mentoring program that provides new veterans and their family's mental health support.



Final Report

OCCI grantees exceeded initial estimates to address gaps in services for veterans. For the third year of the program, the cohort collectively reached a total of 7,581 veterans and active duty military service members.¹ Of those, 5,664 (along with 377 of their children and 228 spouses/partners) received a holistic range of services. Of the veterans served, approximately 72 percent were male and 28 percent were female. More specifically the grantees reported:

Assessment and referral services for veterans and their families

- ❖ 211OC provided services to 1,917 veterans and their family members
- ❖ The top three requests were referrals for housing (1,590), basic needs (540), and financial assistance (468)

Employment support programs

- ❖ 539 veterans received employment support
- ❖ 295 of the veterans who received job placement assistance were placed in full-time career employment

Transition support programs

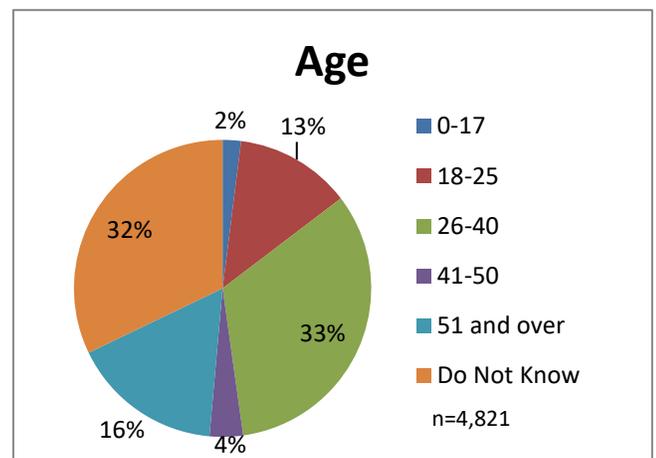
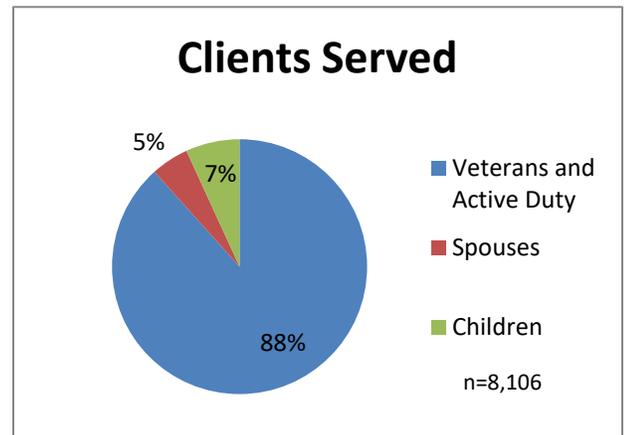
Key to transition support, OCCF encouraged programs that utilized a peer navigation or case management model.

Peer navigation connects veterans with individuals who have lived experience in the military and skills learned in formal training to assess the situation and coordinate services across all areas of need (e.g. mental health, substance abuse, legal, housing, employment, education, etc.). Grantees reported that during the third year:

- ❖ 3,911 veterans have been connected with a peer navigator

Case management is defined as assessing, securing, coordinating, and monitoring the appropriate services and interventions for veterans and their families necessary for successful transition to civilian life. Grantees reported that during the third year:

- ❖ 2,517 individuals have received case management



¹ There is some duplication of numbers of individuals served due to coordination of services by nonprofits



Highlights by Grantees

While the collective progress of the grantees is impressive, highlighted below are each individual organization's accomplishment to date for the third year of the OCVI:

Assessment and Referral, Transition, Employment and Health Highlights

2-1-1 Orange County (211OC)

- Facilitated 384 referrals to peer navigators
- 35% of veterans who contacted 211 were doing so for the first time
- Beginning in January 2019, 211 will be the front door conducting intake and warm handoffs to peer navigation partner at the HUB at the Tierney Center

Child Guidance Center, Inc. (Strong Families, Strong Children)

- Provided evidence-based family treatment to 185 children and their families
- Of the families served, 75% improved in Family Interactions, 100% improved in Child Well-Being and 75% improved in Parent Capabilities

Easterseals Southern California

- Placed 74 veterans in career-potential employment positions with an average hourly wage of \$23.00
- Over 55% of all referrals for services come from other veterans

Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund

- Served 84 Orange County veterans with emergency financial grants and 1:1 case management support
- Cultivated relationships with and/or referred veterans to other veteran-serving OC nonprofits

Lestonnac Free Clinic

- Successfully treated 91 veterans via 569 dental appointments
- Recruited nine, new veteran-serving agencies to their Community Referral Network, a web-based collaborative referral system that facilitates relationships between Southern Californian clinics, nonprofits and social service agencies

Strength in Support

- Vet Mentors/Peer Navigators have reached over 500 veterans and served 162 with 1:1 support, group and individual counseling
- Expanded presence and counseling services at community colleges that do not provide in-house mental health counseling for veterans

Tierney Center for Veteran Services Goodwill of Orange County

- Served 200 veterans with employment with an average starting wage of \$25.00 per hour
- Provided 55 student veterans with financial aid in the forms of rental assistance, textbooks, school supplies, and auto repairs
- Increased case coordination with partner agencies by co-location of VOA-LA and zero8hundred in the Tierney Center



VOALA - Battle Buddy Bridge

- Provided peer navigation support to 371 veterans and active duty service members
- Relocated to the Tierney Center for Veteran Services providing for case coordination
- B3OC outreach efforts successfully established partnerships with 13 colleges in Orange County

Working Wardrobes for a New Start

- Placed 60 veterans in career-potential employment positions with an average hourly rate of \$16.75
- Outreach and recruitment efforts included continued weekly presence at Camp Pendleton as well as new partnerships with other OC military installations, schools and nonprofit agencies

zero8hundred

- Enrolled 58 transitioning service members and their families for up to 21 months of personalized transition support
- Connected 49 veterans to peer navigators

Educational Institution Highlights

Colleges and universities received grants to provide services to student veterans. Collectively they provided 24 student veterans with scholarships ranging from \$500 - \$2,800 to bridge the education, cost gap after the exhaustion of their GI benefits as well as to cover the cost of sending transitioning veterans to a “college boot camp.” Emergency grants ranging from \$250 to \$2,200 (average: \$1,010) were awarded to 78 student veterans. Additionally, 82 students received gas or grocery cards. Education accomplishments by grantees for the third year of the OCVI include:

California State University, Fullerton Veterans Resource Center

- Provided 15 scholarships to student veterans who had exhausted or nearly exhausted their GI benefits and would have been unable to continue paying for their education

Irvine Valley College

- Provided education support to 856 veterans and active duty service members
- Reported a 53 percent decrease in students reporting depression since 2015
- Formed a women veterans’ support group thus increasing mental health services to their female veterans population

Saddleback College

- Provided 63 emergency grants and 82 gas or grocery cards to veterans
- Reported that 89 percent of at-risk veterans remained enrolled through Fall 2018

Warrior-Scholar Project

- Served 10 student veterans and active duty to summer intensive, immersive, academic boot camps in partnership with top-tier colleges and universities across the US



Collaborations & Partnerships

We know that veterans have a myriad of needs. While many organizations provide a variety of comprehensive services, the reality is no one organization can meet all the needs of every veteran and their family. OCVI grantees have learned that in order for relationships amongst the cohort to be productive, there needs to be intentional commitment and time devoted to building these connections. Grantees reported a tremendous improvement in these commitments and feel the cohort is becoming an invaluable resource to each organization's ability to deliver services more effectively and efficiently. One clear and typical example comes from the HUB at Goodwill's Tierney Center for Veteran Services (TCVS):

The co-location of several organizations at the HUB created the opportunity for deeper partnerships among the nonprofits. VOALA's B3OC and zero8hundred, both offering peer navigation services to OC veterans, are now physically located at TCVS. At the same time, 211OC and B3OC partner to provide specialized intake (211OC) and peer navigation (B3OC) services for veterans. With more than 2,300 inbound calls from veterans and their families to both TCVS, and 211OC each year, it became clear that working more closely together with these other partners at TCVS would improve the process of client intake (via phone or technology), referral to best-suited, vetted service providers, real-time case coordination, follow-up and finally, evaluation of impact.

In June 2018, The HUB began an 18-month facilitated planning process and pilot project. The next steps helping the partners (211OC, Goodwill of Orange County, zero8hundred and VOALA's B2OC) to assess how they can organize their work for veterans into a collective impact framework. A collective impact framework would mean that the partners implement a shared vision, measurements, decision-making and accountability, mutually reinforcing activities, and structures in place to manage the collective work of the HUB, ensuring all their work is veteran-centered and data-focused.

During the pilot project period, the co-located HUB partners are continuing to provide the services they have successfully delivered in the past and are implementing a coordinated approach with collective intake and case management practices. In addition, the HUB partners launched and manage a Veteran emergency fund. After the programmatic and operational framework is complete, The HUB will begin to assess the results of the collective efforts to inform, connect, and navigate veterans, and their family members, to the services best suited for them to thrive.

Outside the initiative, partners have reported successfully bridging relationships between public and private entities. Goodwill of Orange County, for example, reported a strong relationship with the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment program at the Veterans Administration (VA). Strong Families Strong Children is working with the court system as well as the Long Beach VA for referrals. Easterseals also cited an improved business climate for veteran employment and a large number of employment partners.

The OCVI cohort has been an effective catalyst for communication and there is an intentional collective effort toward achieving real outcomes together. The value in being a cohort member is in the relationships, shared vision and values, accountability and the successes that build trust amongst members to reach out and truly work together for the benefit of the veteran. In the spirit of this collaboration, in June 2018, OCVI partners launched OC's first ever, online Giving Day focused entirely on veterans. Ten veteran organizations came together for "Stand and Salute" a Giving Day to support OC Veterans. They collectively raised \$91,395 from 288 donors to support their programs in the county.



Challenges and Lessons Learned

OCVI grantees are actively addressing the challenges they experienced in meeting their annual goals by creating innovative solutions. Some of the program challenges that have been identified include:

- Veterans remain reluctant to access services due to an associated fear or stigma. This can lead veterans to avoid preventive or early intervention services.
- The needs of veterans evolve and what a veteran requires today may change in the future
- The ability to maintain adequate staff to meet the demand for services and staff turnover remains a challenge and can complicate partnerships between organizations.
- Lack of an active military base in OC makes it difficult to proactively identify transitioning service members.
- Obtaining unduplicated counts of individuals served within organizations as well as among the OCVI cohort members is difficult due to the decentralized nature of case management and the various reporting requirements by diverse funders.

Lessons learned include:

- Completing a more comprehensive intake form at the initial contact with a veteran and/or family member leads to more appropriate referrals and thus success more quickly.
- Training staff on military terminology to provide resources helps to better address needs and build trust.
- Making tweaks to language can increase veterans' interest. For instance, a grantee found that the term "emergency" grants stopped some student veterans from applying because they did not believe their situation was an emergency. Since they dropped "emergency" from the name, there has been an increase in veterans applying for the financial assistance for which they are eligible.
- Assuring that flexible hours are available so families can obtain services and benefit on their schedule.
- Reviewing the patterns of referrals and tracking data on clients who do not enter or complete programs deepens the knowledge of veterans and families' needs, as well as provides information on why referrals were not acted upon or programs completed.
- It is imperative to have open and honest dialogue about fears and non-negotiables as organizations to advance the collective mission of helping veterans in order to move forward.
- Engaging National Guard/Reserve units to capture those in transition is another outreach strategy that is growing. Since many active duty service members continue their public service in the National Guard and Reserves, providing briefs at these Orange County area units has helped capture those in transition from mobilization but has also started to spread the word through those channels to their former active duty colleagues who may be planning to make Orange County home post-service.

In addition, OCVI cohort members shared that Orange County veterans and their families are facing the following challenges:

- Student veterans are in need of support to provide for their families while they attend school (i.e. childcare).
- Mental and physical health demands continue to weigh on veterans.
- Veterans need industry-specific job training that matches the high demand of local industries
- The high cost of living continues to be a burden on at-risk families.



Success Stories

Not to be forgotten amongst the data are the lives of veterans and their families who are profoundly impacted by the support from OCVI. While it is impossible to highlight every journey, these few stories were selected to illustrate how veterans lives are positively impacted by OCVI grantees. OCCF is especially excited to share the growing collaboration among cohort members to assure that the needs of veterans and their families are met efficiently and effectively. OCVI partners housed at the Tierney Center have been able to leverage the collaboration to address the complex needs of veterans and their families.

Recently, a Marine Corps veteran, who is a single father of two daughters, was referred to the Tierney Center by Battle Buddy Bridge for case coordination. The veteran, whom has a 100% service connected disability rating, served our country with five deployments and was deemed unemployable by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The family was homeless and living out of their vehicle. The veteran was desperate and to the point of considering giving up his children to Child Protective Services. The Tierney Center in collaboration with Working Wardrobes, assisted the family with 2 weeks in a motel while the Tierney Center and Battle Buddy Bridge ensured linkage to Supported Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) funds through Volunteers of America Los Angeles (VOALA). The family was linked to permanent housing in the City of La Habra through VOALA and is currently being assisted financially for rental assistance. Once the family moved into their new unit, the Tierney Center coordinated a referral to Strong Families Strong Children for peer navigation and counseling services and are thus actively engaging in behavioral support services through their program. Furthermore, the Tierney Center and Strong Families Strong Children collaborated to provide them with several Christmas gifts for the children, as well as a decorated Christmas tree, so they could celebrate the holiday in their new home, together as a family.

This story from Irvine Valley College shows the difference that a mental health professional can have on veterans who suffer silent wounds, suicidal thoughts, and feeling of unworthiness. The engagement of mental health professionals to counsel veterans highly increases their success in transitioning to civilian life.

One of our male veterans who has struggled with alcoholism since his discharge from the Marines over 2 years ago had received two DUIs and has numerous court appearance. We were finally able to convince him to connect with support groups and start making appointments with Dr. Miatta Snetter. He has always stated, "I don't need this help". Finally, he agreed after his second court mandated appearance, came in to see Ms. Montgomery, and expressed his gratitude with our VRC using "tough love" to get him moving in his life. He now receives counseling with Dr. Snetter weekly, is attending his AA meetings, and told me he has been sober for almost 11 months in December. This is a huge accomplishment, as he never wanted to admit he had a problem with drinking. He is now enrolled in Vet Tech (Veterinarian School) and will graduate in 2 years with his goal to work with animals. Without Dr. Snetters easy access for mental health services on site at IVC this young man may have struggled the remainder of his life he is headed toward a career and a life of positivity.



OCVI understands that for a veteran to thrive their whole family must be doing well. Thus, Strong Families Strong Children (SFSC) continues to assure that all the OCVI grantees apply a family lense when serving veterans. The following shares how the SFSC partnership continues to address the needs of the whole family:

Jamie, an honorably discharged Army combat veteran, reached out to Strong Families Strong Children (SFSC) for assistance in 2018. He was struggling to provide for his family and felt discouraged trying to navigate VA services, all while in the midst of a difficult custody battle of a child from a previous marriage. Jamie and his SFSC team identified primary areas of focus for the family and developed an action plan. Working closely with his team, Jamie was successful in re-engaging with VA services, eventually increasing his disability and access to education benefits. He was now able to provide a stable life for his family and family members continue to make progress in areas of family communication and relationship strengthening.

The transition from active military to civilian life remains critical to veteran's success as well as the relationship between a veteran and their peer navigator as this story from zero8hundred highlights:

"John", a married, active duty Marine, first contact with a Peer Navigator (PN) in May 2017 and separated from the military in January 2018. An Orange County resident, John started out with positive results. He earned a coveted spot as a trainee in the Los Angeles City Fire Academy. Regular check-ins by his PN showed things were progressing in a positive manner until April 2018. John emailed his PN and revealed he had lost his temper at the Academy. John then informed his PN he had a diagnosis of combat related PTSD and that he had stopped taking his medications so he could "stay sharp" during his training. His PN used her clinical social work skills to ease his stress and together they decided the best course of action was for John to look at other career options in case he was dismissed. John shared with his PN that he had always had an interest in the field of nursing. John later found out he was disqualified from the L.A. Fire Academy and decided to enroll right away in one of community college nursing programs the PN identified. In regular follow-up check-ins, John reported he was doing well in school and had a part time job in a nursing related program. In addition, his PN helped connect John and his wife with a VA caregiver program to help provide further financial support as well as help John's wife with training and provide her with emotional support. In November 2018, John's PN followed up with him and learned that he recently obtained his CNA certification and is going to start working through a staffing agency to gain experience and hours. Finally, John's PN helped him with resources and information to appeal his initial 70-80% disability rating, which has now been increased to 100%. The compensation John and his wife will now receive from this 100% disability rating alleviated a great deal of worry and concern and John reports he is feeling stable and things are finally going well.



Get Involved

The Orange County Veterans Initiative is a collaborative fund of the Orange County Community Foundation. The impact of this program is the result of many leveraging their knowledge and charitable giving. Please contact the Orange County Community Foundation if you or your funding organization would like to join this collective effort. Some ways you can be part of this effort include:

- Become an Orange County Veterans Initiative funding partner
- Sponsor or attend the [OCRE Luncheon](#) on April 18, 2019
- Explore where your funding priorities align with veteran needs
- Attend a Funder/Nonprofit Convening
- Stay abreast of the opportunities, gaps, and needs identified by OCVI
- Connect with one of the nonprofits members of the OCVI
- Provide employment, mentoring, or internships, opportunities to veterans and their family members

About OCCF

The Orange County Community Foundation's mission is to inspire a passion for lifelong philanthropy, to faithfully steward our donors intentions and catalyze sustainable community impact. Since 1989, the Orange County Community Foundation has granted more than \$510 million to dreamers and doers motivated by their passion for a wide range of causes and issues. Simply put, we help people support the causes they care about most by working with individuals, families, and businesses to match charitable interests to community needs.

