



# our Orange County heroes





## OUR Heroes

To protect our freedom, they give up their own.

They leave their families behind.

They put their lives on the line.

They experience untold physical, mental, and emotional trauma.

They watch their friends die.

### **Then they come home.**

They are Orange County's military veterans. After fighting for our country and our freedom, they deserve to come home to a good job, secure housing, decent education, and help with the aftershocks of war.

While that is our goal, it is not yet the reality. In Afghanistan and Iraq, the longest wars in U.S. history have taken a huge toll on American service men and women. After coming home to Orange County, too many of our veterans experience anything but a hero's welcome. Instead, many encounter unemployment, homelessness, poverty and depression.

This we can, and must, change. This special report outlines the case for coordinated, county-wide efforts to give our veterans the homecoming they deserve.

### **In the county they call home.**

**“I fear they do not know us.  
I fear they do not comprehend  
the full weight of the burden  
we carry or the price we pay  
when we return from battle.”**

— *Admiral Mike Mullen  
Chairman of the  
Joint Chiefs of Staff  
May 21, 2011*

Cover photos: (bottom left) Furnishing Hope helps veterans set up a place to call home. Photo courtesy Cirina Catania; (bottom right) Reboot workshops help veterans transition to civilian life.



# Introduction

## After the homecoming...

For many veterans in Orange County, their toughest fight begins when they return home.

American veterans of wars before 9/11 faced huge challenges and made great sacrifices. The men and women who have served in Afghanistan and Iraq, however, have endured longer combat, completed more deployments, and carried a greater share of the burden of war than any previous generation. *Never before has America waged sustained warfare with so small a share of its population carrying the fight.*<sup>1</sup>

After two, three, or even four wartime deployments, Orange County veterans need more help than is currently available with **safety net** issues such as employment and housing, **health and wellness** services, and the **education** necessary for civilian jobs.

<sup>1</sup> *War and Sacrifice in the Post-9/11 Era*, Pew Research Center, October 5, 2011.

### Orange County has the third-largest population of veterans in California.

Orange County veterans—133,000 in total— have served in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, the Gulf, and peacetime... with the most recent combat veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. An estimated **1,500 Orange County veterans are homeless.**

California Department of Veterans Affairs;  
2011 Point in Time Count



Veterans often encounter prolonged unemployment that makes it difficult to maintain housing or achieve financial security.

#### SAFETY NET

**1,500**

HOMELESS VETERANS  
IN ORANGE COUNTY



Advances in military technology and medical expertise result in fewer fatalities, but more life-long challenges from head injuries and amputations—many requiring a lifetime of care.

#### HEALTH & WELLNESS

**45%**

OF POST 9/11 VETERANS  
ARE DEPLOYED 2, 3, OR 4 TIMES,  
INCREASING RISK OF INJURIES



Experience in loading missiles does not translate directly to jobs in the civilian workforce.

#### EDUCATION

VETERANS AGE  
**20-24**

ARE THREE TIMES MORE LIKELY  
TO BE UNEMPLOYED  
THAN CIVILIANS<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *The Employment Situation of Veterans: June 2013*, Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University <http://vets.syr.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Employment-Situation-July-2013.pdf>; California Employment Development Department (EDD) June 21, 2013 [http://www.calmis.ca.gov/file/lfmonth/oran\\$pd.pdf](http://www.calmis.ca.gov/file/lfmonth/oran$pd.pdf)



## OUR GOAL

Orange County veterans will achieve a successful transition from military service to a civilian life that offers stable employment, safe housing, and financial security.

### LIFE-CHANGING RESULTS

#### BEFORE REBOOT

**100 percent** of participants expressed **fear** of rejection, failure, the unknown, unclear protocols, lack of support and fitting in.

#### 90 DAYS AFTER REBOOT

**95 percent** are hopeful and optimistic about their **personal** futures.

**95 percent** were actively involved in new **social** networks.

#### BEFORE REBOOT

**80 percent** did not have a goal for the future.

**88 percent** did not know how to transfer their military skills.

#### 6-9 MONTHS AFTER REBOOT

**83 percent** were **employed** (with a \$44,000 average annual salary) or pursuing education.

Reboot is a real-life boot camp that helps veterans successfully transition from military to civilian life.

## Rebooting for a fresh start

Since 2010, one innovative nonprofit has helped nearly 600 California veterans land on their feet... without combat boots.

Through personalized REBOOT Workshops™, National Veterans Transition Services helps veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan master the challenging shift from military combat to civilian self-sufficiency. As they transition from regimented, communal, dangerous life in a war zone to unstructured, independent, civilian living back at home, veterans often struggle to regain equilibrium. In REBOOT workshops, veterans examine their talents, identify their goals, and define their next steps. REBOOT staff helps with career planning, resume writing, interviewing, and job search skills.

A \$200,000 OCCF grant brought the San Diego-based program to Orange County in 2012, allowing 80 service members to complete the innovative workshop. Orange County veterans are grateful. After years of living by the military mantra of mission first, service members in REBOOT learn to make their own life transition top priority. Many veterans say the program's in-depth focus on personal introspection, lifestyle adjustments, and career skills is a total game-changer.

## With a victory at the end.

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## YOU CAN HELP

Support local veterans organizations

Post a job on the REBOOT job board

Employ a veteran

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## OUR GOAL

Orange County veterans get the help they need to attain optimal physical, mental, and emotional health and well-being.

### THE COST OF WAR

More than 2 million U.S. service members have deployed to fight the War on Terror. 810,000 have deployed two, three or four times.<sup>1</sup>

In the United States, 22 veterans commit suicide every day—that's one every 65 minutes.<sup>2</sup>

At the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, nearly 600,000 of 850,000 claims for benefits have been pending for more than four months; many are held up for years.<sup>3</sup>

More than half of U.S. veterans who seek treatment for mental health conditions receive "minimally adequate care."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Combat to Community report, Swords to Plowshares, January 2011.*

<sup>2</sup> *Suicide Data Report, 2012, Department of Veterans Affairs, January 2013.* <http://www.va.gov/opa/docs/Suicide-Data-Report-2012-final.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> *What's Up at the VA?, Time, April 22, 2013.* <http://nation.time.com/2013/04/22/what-the-hell-is-going-on-with-va/>

<sup>4</sup> *Combat to Community report, Swords to Plowshares, January 2011.*

### Healing the wounds of war

Some wounds of war are obvious: amputations, burns and lacerations leave unmistakable evidence of injury and trauma. Other wounds, just as crippling, are completely invisible. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury can make it difficult, sometimes impossible, for veterans to take care of themselves and their families. Adding insult to the injury, many veterans experience an intolerable gap between their return from combat and their access to VA health benefits.

To help fill that gap for Orange County veterans, the Mariposa Women and Family Center offers a range of affordable, supportive services to veterans and their families. More than 93 percent of Mariposa's clients, including many veterans who are waiting for VA benefits, would not be able to afford private counseling at full price.

The skilled professionals at Mariposa help veterans and their families untangle the tight knots of depression, anxiety, grief, substance abuse, anger management, domestic violence, and parenting difficulties that are common after tours of duty involving active combat and extreme trauma.

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### YOU CAN HELP

Support mental health organizations

Volunteer with veterans' families

Contact the Orange County Community Foundation

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**"Roughly half of post-9/11 combat veterans have already applied for disability benefits—a far higher rate than in any previous conflict. The average number of conditions for which disability payments are being sought has averaged 3.89 per World War II veteran, 6.16 per Vietnam veteran, and 9.72 per Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation Enduring Freedom veteran... likely due to multiple deployments, improved medical technology that led to higher rates of survival in severely wounded warriors, increased education, improved outreach by VA, and better support and advocacy by (Veterans Service Organizations)."**

*What's Up at the VA?, Time, April 22, 2013.*



## OUR GOAL

Orange County veterans will receive meaningful assistance to achieve their educational goals.

### VETERANS RESOURCE CENTERS IN ORANGE COUNTY

- California State University Fullerton  
[fullerton.edu/veterans](http://fullerton.edu/veterans)
- Coastline Community College  
[military.coastline.edu/veterans](http://military.coastline.edu/veterans)
- Fullerton College  
[veterans.fullcoll.edu](http://veterans.fullcoll.edu)
- Golden West College  
[goldenwestcollege.edu/veterans/vrc.html](http://goldenwestcollege.edu/veterans/vrc.html)
- Irvine Valley College  
[ivc.edu/student/veterans](http://ivc.edu/student/veterans)
- Orange Coast College  
[orangecoastcollege.edu/student\\_services/Veterans](http://orangecoastcollege.edu/student_services/Veterans)
- Saddleback College  
[saddleback.edu/vets](http://saddleback.edu/vets)
- Santa Ana College  
[sac.edu/StudentServices/VRC](http://sac.edu/StudentServices/VRC)
- University of California Irvine  
[veteran.uci.edu](http://veteran.uci.edu)
- Vanguard University  
[veterans.vanguard.edu](http://veterans.vanguard.edu)

### Embracing a new mission

As Orange County veterans come home from war, they face a new mission: the successful transition from military life to civilian career. Many need to cross an educational bridge before landing a good job, but entering college after combat is no easy charge.

Most military service members bring to class exceptional skills, experiences, and resilience. Having faced war, trauma, and death, some veterans can also bring deep scars and dark memories. The past always has the potential to derail the future.

At Orange County colleges and universities, Veterans Resource Centers are helping student veterans stay on track. Staff skilled in academic advising, financial aid, VA benefits, peer support, and more help veterans move successfully from application to graduation to employment. After service members adjust to new ways of living and learning on campus, they are equipped—both educationally and psychologically—to move forward with confidence and strength.

### Mission accomplished.



### Jacob's Story

After losing his best friend in combat in Afghanistan, 23-year-old Marine Corps veteran Jacob Lampe returned to Orange County without employment, income, or a home. Struggling with grief and depression, Lampe distanced himself from friends and family for a year. A turning point came with his enrollment at Saddleback College. "As soon as I walked on campus, I was met by a veterans representative. He grabbed my hand and said, 'We're going to take care of you,'" Lampe recalls. In the Veterans Resource Center on campus, Lampe found space to find help, study hard—and, with the camaraderie and support of fellow veterans, breathe easier. After serving as a student leader of the Veterans Association on campus, Lampe will pursue a bachelor's degree in sociology.



Veterans connect on campus, in the classroom with guidance and support from Veterans Resource Centers at Orange County colleges and universities.

## YOU CAN HELP

- Provide internship opportunities to student veterans
- Mentor a veteran pursuing a career in your field
- Post a job in Veterans Resource Centers and college career centers



# A Call to Action

## The long road ahead

Given the daunting challenges that Orange County veterans face every day, the goals we have to help them seem modest by comparison.

With extraordinary leaders, abundant resources, and an outstanding history of public/private partnership, Orange County can make sure our veterans come home to a strong safety net, good educational opportunities, and excellent health and wellness services.

Nothing we do can adequately repay our veterans for their service and their sacrifice. But everything we do will reflect our respect and our gratitude for their selfless contributions to our nation, our people, and our freedom.



## OCCF's Veteran Services Initiative

Created by a group of donors committed to veterans, the Orange County Community Foundation Veteran Services Initiative (OCVSI) helps returning service members transition successfully to civilian life.

OCVSI partnered with Brandman University and Cox Communications to bring the successful National Veterans Transition Services Reboot program to Orange County. In 2012, the Community Foundation and several donors contributed \$200,000 to fund Reboot workshops for 80 veterans. *See story page 4.*

In the coming months, OCCF plans to conduct a comprehensive study to better identify the needs of local veterans and their families. To learn more, please contact the Orange County Community Foundation.

Photo: The Newport Beach Field of Honor featured 1776 flags throughout Castaway Park in Newport Beach in May 2013; courtesy Vanguard University.

### THE ISSUES ARE CONNECTED. THE SOLUTION INVOLVES YOU.

**LEARN** about key issues veterans and their families are facing and real-life solutions at [www.ConnectOC.org/veterans](http://www.ConnectOC.org/veterans).

**FIND** organizations leading the way on the ConnectOC Nonprofit Central database at [ConnectOC.org/find](http://ConnectOC.org/find).

**SHARE** your own stories and ideas at [Facebook.com/OCCCommunityFdn](https://www.facebook.com/OCCCommunityFdn).

**ACT** on your passion for our community today. Call OCCF at **949-553-4202** to learn how you can make a difference.





**ConnectOC.org** shares local knowledge vital to the county's well-being—and suggests strategies and opportunities to make life better for all of us who call Orange County home.

