AMERICAN LEGION | Operation Comfort Warriors

Operation Comfort Warriors 2021 Annual Report

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legion.org/operationcomfortwarriors

Mission

Purpose

- Demonstrate to wounded warriors that those who have come before them will continue to stand by them in their service to our great nation.
- Support individuals and programs that help wounded warriors wherever they are and in whatever stages of recovery they are in.
- Provide items and events that empower wounded warriors and their families to face their difficulties and come out stronger on the other side. Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW) offers activities and delivers items to wounded, injured and ill servicemembers, Veterans and their families to support, empower and provide transition assistance. This OCW report provides an end-of-year review of 2021.

Authority

- Res. No. 3, of The National Executive Committee, August 2009 entitled "**Community Covenant**"
- Res. No. 12, of The National Executive Committee, October 2012, "**Consolidate Heroes to Hometowns Program into Operation Comfort Warriors**"

Qualifications

Individuals / Groups of Individuals

OCW assists wounded, injured, or ill service members and Veterans in military and Veterans' medical facilities, wounded warrior battalions, and warrior transition units, as well as those individuals transitioning back to their community from those medical facilities without distinction as to them being wounded, injured, or ill. There is also no distinction made regarding the component of service, such as Active Duty, Reserve, or Guard, for eligibility. Those eligible for an individual grant are those who have or are still serving honorably in the U.S. Armed Forces and have become wounded, injured, or ill.

OCW provides "non-essential" items not typically found as a budget line on government spreadsheets. However, OCW is not a program that was designed to provide assistance with an individual's rent or mortgage, utilities, vehicles, etc.

For Facilities

Facilities eligible for OCW assistance include Department of Defense (DoD) and VA medical facilities and clinics, wounded warrior regiments, battalions, or units, Soldier & Family Assistance Centers, or any other DoD medical care facility. State funded Veterans facilities are not eligible for this program. Other non-profit facilities serving Veterans or active duty service members, e.g., USO, Fisher House, etc., are considered on a case-by-case basis. OCW is not a program designed to provide facilities assistance with building construction, improvements, repairs or furnishings.

Brief History

OPERATION LANDSTUHL

Operation Comfort Warrior was born out of necessity. In 2007, then-American Legion National Commander Paul Morin toured Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. What he saw was broken television sets, a lack of personal belongings due to being transported from the battlefield directly to a military hospital, and a lack of recreational items. Morin returned to the United States with a mission: Raise $50,000 within six weeks to purchase comfort items for recovering servicemembers at the military hospital. The American Legion Family rallied to the cause, raising more than $257,000 in the short span of time. The money purchased television sets, stereos, long-distance calling cards, pool tables and other items to make the warriors' stay at Landstuhl as comfortable as possible.

OPERATION comfort WARRIORS

Hearing of similar needs at other military hospitals and warrior transition units, then-National Commander David K. Rehbein expanded the program's outreach in December 2008 and renamed it Operation Comfort Warriors.

In 2010, the people voted and the troops won. Operation Comfort Warriors beat more than 700 other charities in an online contest sponsored by Pepsi. OCW received $250,000 in the "Refresh Everything" campaign. The money was used to purchase comfort items for recovering servicemembers.

★ THE AMERICAN LEGION ★ OCW OPERATION COMFORT WARRIORS

During his time as National Command, James Koutz championed OCW as his Commander's program and accelerated it to the exceptional platform that it is today. He continues to fund raise on a regular basis and is widely know as "the face of OCW."

Today, OCW continues to provide comfort items, quality of life items, recreational experiences and more for those recovering in military hospitals and transition units as well as those that are now back home and out in their communities.

To date, the American Legion Operation Comfort warriors has raised over $4.5 million and distributed that through grants to improve the lives of the wounded, ill, and injured Veterans of this country.

2021 Grant Information

Impact

About 5,010 servicemembers and Veterans were directly impacted by Operation Comfort Warriors in 2021, either by participating in an OCW-sponsored event, receiving an individual grant, or receiving care at a grant-receiving facility. This number does not count their family members who have benefited through the grants given. This was an increase in Veterans and their family members impacted in comparison to the previous calendar year. Application submissions for OCW grants during the year greatly exceeded any previous year, with a total of 69 approved grants.

Media & Communications

OCW received recognition in The American Legion's print magazine and digital website 12 times during 2021, and this approach continues in 2022. This coverage included articles in 4 issues of the Legion Magazine, 5 digital Dispatch editions and 3 digital website articles throughout the year. OCW was also directly mentioned in American Legion Department newsletters throughout the year after delivery of grants within those departments.

Articles across the various means of communications in social media and traditional print media have been favorably received throughout the Legion family and is being used by our department's membership committees in their revitalization efforts as examples of Legion assistance to our fellow Veterans. OCW staff also works closely with departments and posts to mobilize local media and provide local representatives to discuss the OCW program within their communities.

Financials

	2020	2021	Difference
Total Donations	$171,760.93	$230,788.74	$59,027.81
Disbursements	22 Grants	69 Grants	47 Grants
Amount Disbursed	$201,559.30	$259,013.18	$57,453.88

2021 grant disbursements finished higher than 2020, which allowed OCW to reach a larger number of Veterans and their families. In total, there were 22 Facility/Event grants that impacted the lives of 4,963 Veterans and 47 Individual grants.

Facility/Event Grants

Department of Alabama

- Birmingham VAMC - $14,000 in comfort items for homeless Veterans.
- Heroes Listening Post - $2,300 in food for homeless Veterans.
- Operation Iron Ruck - $3,500 to support a suicide prevention and PTSD awareness hike.
- Tuscaloosa VAMC - $700 in comfort items for Homeless Veterans.

Department of Alaska

- Anchorage VAMC - $3,750 in food for Wounded Warriors.

Department of California

- Los Angeles - $20,000 to StackUp.org to support their suicide prevention efforts in the disabled Veteran online community. Presented by all 5 National Vice Commanders.

Department of France

- Landstuhl Chaplain's Clothing Closet – $6,600 in clothing for Wounded Warriors.
- Landstuhl Fisher House and USO – $24,200 in comfort and recreational items.

Department of Georgia

- Atlanta - $2,800 to support a PTSD and Veteran Suicide Prevention Hike for 250 people.

Department of Illinois

- Quincy Veteran's Home – $6,200 for recreational therapy items.
- Chicago Veteran's Home – $8,300 for iPads and headphones to communicate during pandemic.
- IL Post 79 - $3,700 to host a BBQ for 250 Wounded Warriors.
- IL Post 79 - $550 to host a fishing retreat for 50 Wounded Warriors.

Department of Indiana

- Indianapolis - $6,200 to support a PTSD and Veteran Suicide Prevention Hike for 300 people.
- Indianapolis – HVAF - $17,000 in comfort items for Homeless Veterans.

Department of Maryland

- Post 26 - $3,000 for a Caregiver retreat for Caregivers and their disable Veterans.

Department of Missouri

- Missouri Post 230 - $2,600 to host fishing tournament for 150 Wounded Warriors.

Department of New Mexico

- Albuquerque, Warrior's Oasis: $26,300 in recreational items for a camp catering to Wounded Warriors. Presented on the Legacy Run by PNC Oxford.

Department of Ohio

- Cleveland Rowing Foundation - $5,000 to sponsor a regatta and $27,000 to purchase a rowing scull for 8 disabled Veteran rowing teams. Presented by National Commander Dillard. This sponsorship grant is in perpetuity and will continue for the foreseeable future.

Department of Virginia

- Warrior Retreat at Bull Run - $10,000 to support a retreat for Wounded Warriors. Presented by PNC Reistad.

2021 OCW Initiatives

In addition to continuing to connect with these Veterans in VA Hospitals by teaming up with the Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Division and their System Worth Saving (SWS) Task Force visits, OCW is also working directly with department headquarters and leaders across The American Legion to provide grants to Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) hospital systems and their individual veteran patients in their states.

The OCW program manager continues to develop OCW grants that will be released in conjunction with the Divisions at National Headquarters and with support from Department Headquarters.

OCW has developed and maintains a positive partnership with the American Legion Riders (ALR) program to coordinate ALR events with OCW grant disbursement.

The OCW Program continues to look for more ways to partner its grant deliveries in conjunction with other American Legion programs around the country as a means of achieving more veteran awareness of the grants.

AMERICAN LEGION

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