

Healing Through Physical Therapy

Some veterans can benefit from the therapeutic, equine-assisted activities at R.O.C.K. (Ride On Center for Kids). Their Horses for Heroes program works with physician-referred active duty service members and veterans who have PTSD, traumatic brain injuries, amputations, burns and/or neurological impairment. The goal of therapeutic riding is to improve the functions of the participants' motor and cognitive systems.

Activities and Self-Expression

Once a veteran's basic needs have been met, he or she might still be looking for a way to express his or her experiences and facilitate the healing process. VSA Texas gives veterans the chance to explore art and express themselves artistically while potentially making some money. They offer professional development classes and workshops in visual, literary and performing arts, as well as dance. In addition, their gallery showcases and sells veterans' work, netting the artist 70 percent of the profits from each sale.

How You Can Help

Learn more about how you can support these organizations' efforts by contacting them directly. Or a gift to them will make a difference in the life a veteran and their family.

For example: At the Red Cross of Central Texas \$25.00 buys an MP# gift card for a deployed service member. \$50.00 provides a "comfort kit" filled with phone cards, a robe, toiletries and other essential items for a service member or veteran in the hospital.

\$75.00 delivers an emergency message about a birth, death or other emergency from a family member to a deployed service member.

At the Samaritan Center:

\$25 will buy one acupuncture treatment or 3 Yoga / Tai Chi classes

\$100 will buy 3 acupuncture treatments and a medical massage

\$500 will buy five individual or family counseling sessions

\$1000 will buy an 8 week integrated treatment package of counseling, acupuncture, massage & Yoga

To Learn More

Central Texas Veterans Health Care System: <http://www.centraltexas.va.gov/>

City of Austin Veterans Services Office: <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/military/>

Texas Veterans Commission: <http://www.tvc.state.tx.us/about/overview>

Travis County Veterans Services: http://www.co.travis.tx.us/veterans_services/default.asp

community needs

spotlight

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July 2011



CONVERSATION ON

Services for Veterans:

Thursday, July 28, from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m.
First Floor Community Room | 98 San Jacinto Blvd. Austin, Texas
\$10 includes lunch. RSVP at www.ilivehereigivehere.org

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Surprisingly, Austin is home to a large military population. According to the American Red Cross of Central Texas, there are about 61,000 veterans in Travis County, and more than 130,000 veterans in the Austin metro area. In addition to being heroes, Austin veterans are our neighbors, our friends and an important part of our community. Even heroes need a little help sometimes – and help is out there.

Today's servicemen and women face more challenges than ever when they return to civilian life. Unlike in previous wars and military operations, many have experienced multiple deployments to areas of conflict. This takes a heavy toll on veterans as well as their families. *The New England Journal of Medicine* reports that longer deployments result in more depression, anxiety and other mental health problems for families of deployed service members. Even off the battlefield, there has been a devastating impact over the last several years:

- According to the **Department of Veterans Affairs**, 18 veterans a day – or 6,500 a year – commit suicide.
- A 2008 *Rand Study* revealed 1/3 of all soldiers have severe depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and/or traumatic brain injuries.
- *National Council Magazine* reports 70 percent of homeless veterans have a substance abuse problem, and 45 percent have mental health issues.

Several Austin nonprofits are working – often in collaboration – to address the issues returning soldiers face. They provide much-needed services to veterans and their families, including counseling, post-military job placement and transitional housing.

Case Management, Housing and Job Placement

When a soldier returns from deployment, he or she may feel overwhelmed by immediate needs- from employment to childcare to access to health care. Because of this, the **American Red Cross of Central Texas** is actively reaching out to veterans through a program called Operation Outreach.

The local chapter is partnering with the **City of Austin**, the **Veterans Affairs Office**, **Goodwill Industries** and more than 30 additional government and nonprofit partners on Operation Outreach. So far, Operation Outreach has provided 800 veterans with information and referrals for job placement, housing, health care access, education and financial assistance. Through Operation Outreach, the American Red Cross of Central

Texas also greets veterans returning from combat through Yellow Ribbon and Stand Down events, recruits veterans as volunteer case managers and works to reduce and prevent homelessness among female veterans.

Unfortunately, homelessness remains a reality for many veterans. **Green Doors** – an organization that works to prevent homelessness in Central Texas – estimates there are 600 homeless veterans in the Austin area. They have created a Transitional Veterans Re-Entry Housing program, which currently provides transitional housing, case management, support services and referrals to 60 veterans.

Once housing needs are met, there remains the challenge of finding a job in a difficult economic climate. Veterans who are looking for job placement assistance can turn to programs like **Goodwill Industries'** Veteran Outreach and Employment Services Program. Through this program, veterans, their spouses and their dependents can receive one-on-one job coaching and placement services. They can also find help with resume building, job leads, technical skills certifications, and referrals to other resources.

Mental Health Services & Integrative Medicine

Mental Health support is crucial for many veterans along with their families. Unfortunately, a 2008 study by the Department of State Health Services determined that veterans are not getting the services they need. This is because of a combination of the stigma associated with seeking care, a lack of effective evidence-based treatment, few services being available for family members and a lack of care coordination by providers.

To address this unmet need, the **Samaritan Center** – a private, nonprofit counseling center that serves over 2,000 Central Texas adults and children every year – has a Hope for Heroes program. This program provides free individual, couple and family therapy for veterans and their families along with peer-to-peer groups, children's play therapy, and integrative medicine. The Hope for Heroes program is the first civilian program in the nation to offer this combination of therapeutic treatments. They also hold workshops for mental health professionals working with veterans, provide behavioral health planning and advocacy efforts.

Divine Canines therapy dogs are a medium for stress management and other diagnoses such as depression, brain injury and PTSD in veterans. The Occupational Therapy Department at Ft. Hood launched the program to promote social interaction and assist in relieving symptoms of stress for soldiers with multiple diagnoses. The bonding and communication with both the therapy dog and its handler assists in improving the quality of life for soldiers. Soldiers who go weeks without speaking or smiling relax and converse without expectation in the presence of a divine canine.

