

★ TRANSITION ASSISTANCE ★

Standby...Execute



LIVE WELL
SAN DIEGO

THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO OFFICE OF MILITARY & VETERANS AFFAIRS IS THE VANGUARD FOR ENSURING MILITARY, VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES RECEIVE ASSISTANCE IN OBTAINING ALL BENEFITS THEY DESERVE AND ARE ENTITLED TO.

BY THE NUMBERS

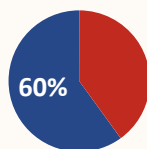


Out of **3.4 million** residents of San Diego County, **1.2 million** are associated with the military in some capacity (active duty, veterans, spouses, dependents, survivors)

Approximately **110,000** active duty military are stationed in San Diego County

15,000 active duty military transition out of service every year

San Diego is home to **60%** of the fleet in the US Navy



San Diego veterans are comparatively young; veterans between **18 and 35** account for double the national average



San Diego County has **249,807** veteran residents as of 2021

A 2017 San Diego County Military Impact Study showed that San Diego has the **highest concentration of military in the entire world**

35,000 women veterans live in San Diego County, also the highest concentration in the world



The military sector generated more than **340,000** of the region's jobs

Veterans account for **9%** of the population, versus 6% for California as a whole

NO TIME LIKE

the Present

by Raul Clement

How community outreach helps veterans in all stages of life get benefits

Each year in San Diego County, 15,000 active duty military personnel transition to civilian life. Many of these veterans are eligible for VA benefits. The difficulty, however, is making veterans aware of their benefits and steering them through the filing process.

This is where the County of San Diego Office of Military & Veterans Affairs comes in. With centers throughout the region and an extensive outreach program, the OMVA is the best resource for veterans and active military to receive help accessing their benefits.

"We take outreach very seriously," says Wilfred Quintong, director of the San Diego County OMVA. "We have what we call the VetConnect system in seven libraries. It's a computer workstation in a private setting. They can connect with a veteran service rep via video teleconferencing. They don't even have to come into our office."

In addition to libraries, the OMVA has a presence at veteran events such as the Miramar Air Show. They do briefings at the Vista Detention Facility and partner with the SDC Sheriff's Department to help incarcerated veterans reintegrate into the community. And perhaps most significantly, they collaborate with CalVet to hold monthly workshops as part of the California Transition Assistance Program, also known as CalTAP.

One reason the OMVA is so proactive is to make sure veterans file for benefits as soon as possible. While there is no time limit on receiving most benefits, it can be much simpler to access the necessary service and medical records if action is taken quickly.

This is especially important for disability benefits. "When a veteran is claiming disability we have to prove that it is service connected," Quintong explains. "The main way to prove that is through documentation when they were on active duty."

However, in certain cases it's enough to establish where and when you served. Thanks to the recent PACT Act, there is now a list of "presumptive conditions." These



Wilfred Quintong, director of the County of San Diego OMVA, says his office takes outreach efforts very seriously.
PHOTO BY CHARLIE NEUMAN

"All veterans could use the extra help. They just need to know it's out there."

WILFRED QUINTONG
DIRECTOR, COUNTY OF SAN
DIEGO OMVA

include illnesses caused by exposure to Agent Orange in the Vietnam War, contaminated water at Camp Lejeune, and the burn pits in the Iraq War.

"We've had Vietnam veterans who have just submitted their first claim. They heard they might qualify for Agent Orange exposure. As long as they can prove they were stationed within 12 miles off the coast of Vietnam, we can help them."

And of course, the sooner you file, the sooner you can start receiving benefits.

"All veterans could use the extra help," Quintong concludes. "They just need to know it's out there."

A FAMILY *Affair*

by Anh Nguyen

How a nonprofit can help transitioning military and their partners

Zero8Hundred is a nonprofit organization that, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Labor, provides no-cost transition support to military members 12 months prior to separation and up to 24 months post-separation. Their clients currently reside across the globe—at various military bases either in San Diego County or with plans to return there.

“Every client is very unique. Once that service member connects with our master social worker, we are going to help the service member identify their needs and establish a plan and goals with them,” says current Zero8Hundred CEO Ashley Camac.

The team at Zero8Hundred is proudly made up of trained peer navigators with lived military experience themselves. The organization received the 2022 Nonprofit of the Year Award from Senator Tony Atkin, according to Camac.

“Our resource specialists are master social workers, who work with clients to complete a full needs assessment that helps establish goals that each client can work through individually,” Camac says.

In order to enroll with Zero8Hundred, one should plan to live, work or go to school in San Diego, Imperial,

Riverside or Orange counties; be an active duty service member; be the spouse of an active duty service member; or be a Reservist or National Guardsman or their spouse. Enrolled members can receive individualized support up to a full year prior to military separation and up to two years post-military.

“We recognize that the transition process for a service member can be a whole family experience, so we help military spouses create goals that are independent to them, and we would support them just the same as we do our transitioning members,” Camac says.

The organization serves all ranks in the military and supports any discharge status. They outreach directly with the Command Navy Region Southwest headquartered in San Diego and through the Department of Labor.

“Our program is presented to the students that are attending TAP, the official Transition Assistance Program with the military,” Camac says. “Through an Employment Navigation Pilot Program and when the Department of Labor briefs in the 21 locations around the world, any service member who identifies as coming

“Every client is very unique. Once that service member connects with our master social worker, we are going to help the service member identify their needs and establish a plan and goals with them.”

ASHLEY CAMAC
ZERO8HUNDRED CEO



Ashley Camac, Zero8Hundred CEO, says most service members and their spouses prioritize employment and higher education as they return to civilian life.

PHOTO BY CHARLIE NEUMAN

back to Southern California will be introduced directly into the Zero8Hundred enrollment team.”

Camac says the majority of their clients’ primary goals are to seek employment and higher education opportunities, and to translate military skills to civilian sectors.

“Our team is the best of the best,” Camac says. “They are truly dedicated to serving the population that we are here to serve.”

★ To learn more about Zero8Hundred, visit Zero8Hundred.org.

TRANSITION SERVICES

Zero8Hundred offers direct services in specific areas to the transitioning service members and their families. They categorize their resources into five pillars.

EMPLOYMENT:

assisting with resume writing, job seeking and translating military skills to civilian skills

EDUCATION:

connecting directly to schools, universities and training opportunities for certifications and licenses

BASIC NEEDS:

connecting to resources for emergency food, housing, material goods, transportation, utilities, financial services and legal aid services

HEALTH AND WELLNESS:

connecting to resources such as health and mental health support

COMMUNITY CONNECTION:

organizing social events, support groups, social development, self-care and personal enrichment, and military family support services

YOUR *Next Move*

by Gail Allyn Short

How the REBOOT program helps US service members and their families make the switch to civilian life

The U.S. Department of Labor reports that 200,000 people leave U.S. military service every year. Many are left to ask, “What’s next?”

“When you’re in the military, you’re in a community, an ecosystem, with defined customs, traditions and a culture that’s not necessarily like the civilian world,” says Maurice Wilson, president and executive director of the nonprofit National Veterans Transition Services.

The civilian world requires you to direct your own affairs—making decisions, for example, on buying a home or choosing a career, Wilson says. Moreover, 86% of transitioning service members polled say they want careers different from the jobs they held in the military.

To help, the NVTS operates a program called the REBOOT Workshop that supports service members, veterans and their families as they look forward to post-military life.

“REBOOT is the reverse of boot camp. It helps people make that psycho-social transition. That’s not as simple as just taking off the uniform

and now you’re a civilian,” says Wilson. “It doesn’t work like that.”

During the first week of REBOOT, facilitators show participants how to build new identities outside of the military, he says.

“The second week, we help them find their purpose and passions,” Wilson says.

To do all that, REBOOT uses a curriculum that takes participants through several modules that promote self-efficacy and self-direction and explains the mind’s decision-making process.

During week three, facilitators assist participants in discovering their “career DNA” using an AI-powered job-matching tool that lists more than 650 competencies.

They also use psychometrics to identify participants’ psychological characteristics.

With the data, participants review all possible career options, and REBOOT works with 2,500 employment partners, Wilson says.

One REBOOT grad, a Navy chief, pivoted from air traffic

controller to becoming a facilities manager in San Diego.

“He’s now making \$80,000 a year,” Wilson says.

The workshop classes even helped him and his wife open lines of communication to heal their marriage, he says.

Every year, 360 people participate in REBOOT, and Wilson says he has met veterans who lament the time and money they wasted because they did not participate in a REBOOT transition program.

But that is not the job of the military or the VA, he says. “It’s the job of the community to help these individuals find their way back home.”

★ To learn more about REBOOT, visit www.nvtsi.org and click on “Enroll in Workshop” to get started.

“REBOOT is the reverse of boot camp. It helps people make that psycho-social transition. That’s not as simple as just taking off the uniform and now you’re a civilian. It doesn’t work like that.”

MAURICE WILSON
PRESIDENT AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF NVTS



Maurice Wilson (center), president and executive director of NVTS, says it’s the job of the community to help transitioning military members and their families return to civilian life.

PHOTO BY CHARLIE NEUMAN

REBOOT YOUR LIFE

Transitioning from a life in the military to civilian life is often a time of stress and uncertainty. But the National Veterans Transition Services’ REBOOT Workshop tackles five transition domains so participants gain confidence and practical skills.

EDUCATION: how to make decisions and embrace self-discovery as the first steps on the journey to future economic success

EMPLOYMENT: choose the career path that is the right fit for not only themselves, but for their families as well

ENTREPRENEURSHIP: discover their passions and purpose and, perhaps, even start their own business that will make a meaningful difference in their communities

WELLNESS: promote wellness by building a healthy mind and body

FAMILY: support families through home ownership and financial prosperity

Successful

RE-ENTRY

by Anne Stokes

Stanley Beason, contract transition manager for the Fleet and Family Support Center, says the unemployment rate for military personnel in their first year of civilian life used to be a staggering 25%.
PHOTO BY CHARLIE NEUMAN



How a DoD program known as TAP can help Navy veterans find a new career—and is slashing unemployment rates

Change can be hard. But for Navy personnel transitioning back into civilian life, there is help. At the Fleet and Family Support Center, sailors and their families can get support and information on how to find gainful employment after their military service ends.

“The staff here at the Fleet and Family Support Center are transition counselors and they’re able to work in one-on-one scenarios and they’re able to facilitate transitioning service members in a classroom environment as well,” says Stanley Beason, contract transition manager for the Fleet and Family Support Center. “The goal is ... not just finding a job, it’s finding gainful, meaningful employment, whether you want to continue to use the skill sets you acquired in the military or if you want to go in an entirely different direction.”

The Department of Defense’s Transition Assistance Program, also known as TAP, arms transitioning service members with the knowledge and skills they need to enter the workforce. Facilitated by the Fleet and Family Support Center, the program offers workshops, career counseling, referrals and job search support for sailors and their family members up to a year before their separation date.

WORKSHOP OPPORTUNITIES INCLUDE:

- **My Education:** How to find the right higher education program, how to apply and how to pay, including VA education benefits
- **Boots 2 Business:** How to start your own business and available grants
- **Vocational certifications**
- **My Employment:** For those going straight into the private or public sector workforce

THE FLEET AND FLEET SUPPORT CENTER OFFERS ADDITIONAL WORKSHOPS THAT COVER:

- Government employment
- Resume writing
- Winning interview techniques
- Job search strategies

In addition, service members and their families can get help with personal finance management and understanding and accessing their VA benefits. The center also has an electronic job board with postings from federal, state, county and city employers as well as private sector positions. The center can refer to community organizations and agencies to assist with additional career needs and skills, all of which are at no cost.

Beason points out that in the past, the unemployment rate for all military personnel in the first year after transitioning was a staggering 25%. Today, it’s similar to civilian rates, something he credits with making classes mandatory.

“You’re being informed about what is your responsibility to yourself and making sure you have a successful transition, but also making sure you’re aware of the benefits that should be coming to you, because your benefits are something that you’ve earned,” he says. “Be strategic about it, start early and don’t wait until you’re 30 days away from your transition date. ... Give it the same type of effort and concentration that you would if you were trying to find your next duty station.”



For more information or to sign up for workshops, visit sandiego.navylifesw.com or call 1-866-923-6478.

“The goal is ... not just finding a job, it’s finding gainful, meaningful employment.”

STANLEY BEASON
CONTRACT TRANSITION MANAGER, FLEET AND FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER



OTHER SERVICES

While the Fleet and Family Support Center can help prepare service members and their families for employment after their military service ends, **the center can also connect them with even more.**

- Mental health and counseling services
- Deployment readiness and support
- Disaster preparedness
- Financial counseling and management
- Life skills
- New parent support
- Ombudsman programs
- Relocation assistance
- Retiree support
- Sexual assault and prevention response

TRANSITION



by Gail Allyn Short

How a program prepares Marines for new lives in the civilian world

The idea of leaving the military and deciding what to do next with your life can be scary, even for the toughest Marine.

But Dave Baril, program manager for the Transition Readiness Program at the Marine Corps Air Station at Miramar, says he and his team are ready to help.

“TRP gives military members who are getting out the skills they and their families need to succeed in their post-military civilian life,” Baril says.

The process starts with TRP counselors meeting with service members for an overall assessment of each service member’s background, goals and needs.

Next comes pre-separation counseling, a two-hour class where service members learn more about the transition readiness process and the benefits and opportunities available to them after the military, from VA healthcare to tuition assistance.

“We also talk about the timelines for the service-connected disability process, because they can start a disability claim through Veterans Affairs prior to getting off of active duty,” he says.

Participants also complete a series of assessments to determine which track they will follow going forward: employment, education, entrepreneurship or the career and credential exploration.

Those on the employment track learn tips for job-hunting, resume writing, as well as rehearse for job interviews and salary negotiations.



Attendees on the education track learn about the college application process and how to pay for school through the GI Bill.

Baril says one TRP graduate, a corporal, went on to earn a degree and became a foreign service officer with the U.S. State Department.

Meanwhile, the Boots to Business course, presented by the U.S. Small Business Administration, teaches budding entrepreneurs about business ownership.

Those who are unsure of their career path can take assessment tests to determine their interests, values, skills, the jobs they are best suited for and the required degrees, credentials or training.

Afterward, all participants must complete the Capstone Review where TRP facilitators review their cases to see if they need additional services like housing or mental health care.

Marine commanders sign off on each case before service members separate or retire.

“Service members who are leaving, but not retiring from the Marines, should start the TRP process 12 to 18 months out before separation. For retirees, it’s 12 to 24 months,” Baril says. “We want to make sure they get to us in a timely fashion so they can get the information with enough time to make decisions.”

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DAVE BARIL
PROGRAM MANAGER, TRP AT MIRAMAR
MARINE CORPS AIR STATION

TRP SERVICES

The Transition Readiness Program gives Marine Corps service members the support they need to successfully separate or retire from service and build new lives as civilians, via three key pillars.

THE TRP PROCESS – CONSISTS OF FIVE STEPS:

1. Individualized Initial Counseling
2. Pre-Separation Counseling
3. Transition Readiness Seminar
4. Capstone Review
5. Commander’s Verification to make sure service members are prepared

MARINE FOR LIFE CYCLE:

Career and educational exploration throughout their career to ensure that they meet the Career Readiness Standards before leaving or retiring from the military, including attending a Transition Readiness Seminar and other events for personal and professional development

CAREER SERVICES AND ADVISING:

Instruction and advice regarding jobs and employment opportunities, entrepreneurship and education, and career technical training

A *Bright* FUTURE

by Edgar Sanchez

How a former Marine is helping others to start over with confidence

After a distinguished 20 years as a U.S. Marine, Michael Walker entered the private sector and became a successful businessman in Southern California.

He attributes his transformation partly to transition readiness training he received at the Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton before retiring from the elite force as a major in 2005.

Today, Walker is back at Camp Pendleton—this time as a civilian federal worker, helping a new generation of Marines about to pivot to civilian life. In a reversal of roles, the 58-year-old, who once received invaluable transition training at Camp Pendleton, now provides it, overseeing a personal and professional readiness program for Marines nearing the end of active duty.

“We want to give Marines who served their country every opportunity to be successful in their transition to their new lives,” Walker says.

Besides creating career paths, his program tells soon-to-be-former Marines about an array of benefits that will be available to them as civilians, and how to apply for them. Benefits range from health care and disability payments

to education assistance and zero-down-payment home loans, with some assistance designated for vets’ families.

Camp Pendleton, one of America’s largest Marine Corps bases, transitions about 9,000 Marines to civilian status each year. Service members begin the five-step transition training 18 to 24 months before their separation day.

The first step involves one-on-one counseling, during which a Marine shares with a counselor a self-designed plan for life after the Marines. The counselor provides suggestions.

Step 2, pre-separation counseling, in a group setting, is usually in a classroom.

Step 3 is a five-day transition-readiness seminar, jointly taught by the U.S. Department of Labor, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the transition program. This component lays out the benefits, entitlements and privileges that await Marine Corps vets and their



Michael Walker, civilian coordinator at Camp Pendleton, is passionate about helping fellow Marines figure out civilian life.

PHOTO BY CHARLIE NEUMAN

“The program gets better year after year—we have many, many success stories.”

MICHAEL WALKER
CIVILIAN COORDINATOR OF TRP
PROGRAM AT CAMP PENDLETON

families. Marines planning to join the workforce participate in mock job interviews, followed by constructive comments. Also covered: preparation of potent resumes and powerful LinkedIn profiles.

In Step 4, every Marine’s transition plan is reviewed by a counselor and further customized for efficacy.

In Step 5, the Marine outlines the plan to his or her active-duty commander, who verifies it has solid goals.

“The program gets better year after year,” Walker says. “We have many, many success stories,” adds Walker, whose service included a five-month deployment to Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom. “It’s hard to focus on just one.”

TRP STEPS

Marines nearing the end of active duty at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton go through five transition-readiness steps, commencing 18 to 24 months before their separation day.

ONE-ON-ONE COUNSELING during which a Marine unveils a self-designed plan for civilian life and a transition expert makes suggestions

ADDITIONAL PRE-SEPARATION COUNSELING in a group setting

A FIVE-DAY SEMINAR, conducted in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs where speakers explain the privileges, entitlements and benefits afforded to Marine vets and their families (mock job interviews occur; so do lectures on writing impressive resumes and eye-catching LinkedIn profiles)

EACH MARINE’S TRANSITION PLAN is reviewed by his or her commanding officer and further customized for efficacy

ACTIVE-DUTY COMMANDERS examine each Marine’s plan to confirm its strength

PUTTING *Food* ON THE TABLE

by Anne Stokes

How the San Diego Hunger Coalition helps veteran households make ends meet

In a land of plenty, no one should go hungry. Unfortunately, for many veterans, active-duty service members and their families, food insecurity is a real issue. According to a U.S. Department of Agriculture study, veterans were 7.4% more likely than non-veterans to go hungry, while at the same time less likely to make use of programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. Also known as CalFresh, SNAP provides extra money that boosts households' food budget.

"I believe only 10% of eligible vets are enrolled in CalFresh right now and I know that some of that is (due to) stigma," says Anahid Brakke, president and CEO of the San Diego Hunger Coalition. "I know some of that is not knowing they're eligible, and I know some of that is because they think they're taking it away from someone else. The thing I would like to communicate out to veterans and military families is you're not taking food away from somebody else when you enroll in CalFresh."

Through collaborations with other providers and nonprofits, the San Diego Hunger Coalition addresses the issue of food insecurity throughout its community. It is in fact a wealth of information, including where to find assistance and help with applying for CalFresh benefits, which can be a complicated and daunting task.

"We've made it very shameful in this country to not be able to make ends meet, but we have an economy that has about a third of our population struggling and most of those people are working," says Brakke. "These are really

"It's hard to ask for help, especially when you took on a role as protector of our nation."

ANAHID BRAKKE
PRESIDENT AND CEO, THE SAN DIEGO
HUNGER COALITION

Anahid Brakke, president and CEO of the San Diego Hunger Coalition, works to connect food-insecure households, including veterans and active-duty service members, with providers and programs like CalFresh to help make ends meet.

PHOTO BY CHARLIE NEUMAN

systemic issues and the more we acknowledge the fact that wages haven't kept up with the cost of living in our nation, the less shame people will feel. As a country, I hope we can be a little more accepting of the fact that this not a series of individual failures, these are people who are working very hard and falling short."

Veterans struggling with food insecurity should know they're not alone. Every month, the San Diego Food Bank provides for 45,000 veteran households and serves 18 nonprofits that solely support active service members, veterans and their families. Together with those nonprofits, they distribute 4.5 million pounds of food.

"It's really hard to transition to civilian life. ... This is a national issue, it is not a 'just in our house' issue," she explains. "It's hard to ask for help, especially when you took on a role as protector of our nation. That is not your personal failing, we have a very tough economy right now for people."

★ *For more information on how the San Diego Hunger Coalition can help, visit www.sandiegohungercoalition.org or call 619-501-7917 to find resources near you.*



ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM

The San Diego Hunger Coalition works to get to the heart of food insecurity by addressing its systemic causes.

"We act as a force multiplier for the hunger relief sector in our region," says Anahid Brakke, president and CEO of the San Diego Hunger Coalition. "Our mission is to lead coordinated action to end hunger supported by research, education, and advocacy."

TRAINING NONPROFIT HUNGER RELIEF

providers and social service agencies to better serve their clients facing food insecurity

GATHERING DATA AND DEMOGRAPHICS—

who needs help, where and how—so that other organizations can support those in need as efficiently and effectively as possible

LEADING TASK FORCES

that combine the knowledge, experience and resources of local hunger relief nonprofits and organizations such as school district nutrition services, local food banks, nonprofit providers and government agencies to find real-world solutions

ADVOCACY WORK

on local, state and federal levels to make hunger relief efforts easier to provide and for people to access

A LIFETIME *Process*

by Raul Clement

How CalTAP and local partners offer veterans ongoing support

"Transition is a lifetime process."

This is how Keith Boylan, deputy secretary of the Veteran Services Division of CalVet, describes the philosophy behind the California Transition Assistance Program. CalTAP, as it is known, is a program that started in 2017 and is administered by CalVet, along with its hundreds of partners at both the state and local level. It aims to help active-duty service members and veterans understand the benefits available to them at all stages of their lives.

While transition assistance is not a new concept, the resources prior to CalTAP were limited. There was a TAP program administered by the Department of Defense, but it was narrow in scope and follow-through.

"It didn't include much else other than employment readiness training and resume development," Boylan says. "It was focused on transitioning their employment needs, whereas the goal of CalTAP was to introduce exiting service members to a community-based system of care."

The phrase "community-based system of care" comes up a lot as Boylan discusses CalTAP. In order to reach as many service members and veterans as possible, CalTAP must rely on local infrastructure. To that end, they've partnered with community colleges, military installations like Camp Pendleton, and Veteran Service Offices like the San Diego OMVA to hold frequent seminars on subjects ranging from mental health to home ownership to financial

literacy. This approach has allowed CalTAP to host an impressive 277 Transition Assistance events at military installations and 635 more at community colleges in just four years. Along the way, they've aimed to not just educate veterans and their families, but also their partners who make up this "community-based system of care."

"It's not just educating service members upstream before they get out," says Lindsey Sin, Deputy Secretary of Communications for CalVet. "It's not just being available to veterans as their needs change. It's also educating those community service providers and bringing them to the table so that everybody understands what this network looks like and that there are resources to tap into."

These resources are extensive and can be hard for veterans to wrap their heads around. This is exactly why it was necessary to establish a program like CalTAP aimed at focusing on veterans' evolving needs.

"I think we've not only been able to help veterans understand the world of benefits and services, but also help them understand these different phases of transition."

**KEITH BOYLAN, DEPUTY SECRETARY
VETERAN SERVICES DIVISION OF CALVET**



To learn more about CalTAP or to find upcoming webinars, visit <https://www.calvet.ca.gov/VetServices/Pages/California-Transition-Assistance-Program.aspx>

"I think we've not only been able to help veterans understand the world of benefits and services, but also help them understand these different phases of transition," Boylan says.

Keith Boylan, deputy secretary of the Veteran Services Division of CalVet, strives to connect veterans to a 'community-based system of care.'

PHOTO COURTESY OF CALVET

CALTAP PATHWAYS

California Transition Assistance Program is designed to connect veterans of all eras to their earned federal and state benefits. It also provides continued support as their needs change over time. The five unique pathways are:

CORE CURRICULUM:

Veteran 101, California benefits, financial literacy

EDUCATION:

Selecting a school, educational benefits, UC and state universities

EMPLOYMENT:

Apprenticeship, job search, state employment

ENTREPRENEURSHIP:

Business centers, business resources

SERVICE PROVIDERS

Attorneys, employers, primary care, supportive housing

Success STORY

How a Chula Vista husband and father made a successful transition from the Navy to a civilian job he loves

by Edgar Sanchez



Mike Camac navigated a sea of emotions as his memorable 23-year career with the U.S. Navy neared its end. "After serving in the military for so long, I knew where I had to be every day; I knew exactly what my duties were," Camac, 42, of Chula Vista, says.

He also knew that once out of uniform, he wanted to live in or near San Diego, where his last duty station was. But the thought of finding an unfamiliar new job and "starting over" as a civilian was "scary" for this chief petty officer—a prospect that also made him "excited, nervous and anxious."

In March 2022, after retiring from the Navy as a 100% disabled veteran who walks gingerly due to service-related injuries, Camac experienced a new feeling: frustration. He knew he wasn't cut out for his first post-Navy job, a human resources position with a private San Diego firm.

"I realized I didn't like human resources,"

Camac says, stressing that he

"Understand that sometimes our plans fail. It's OK to pivot and find something you truly love!"

**MIKE CAMAC, FORMER NAVY SONAR TECHNICIAN
ANALYST/ENVIRONMENTAL EXPERT,
THOR SOLUTIONS, LLC**

pursued that ill-fated opportunity on his own, not at the Navy's urging.

He resigned after six weeks. A month later, he righted his transition trajectory.

Using skills he learned as a sonar technician on Naval submarines, Camac became an analyst/environmental expert for Thor Solutions, LLC, a Navy contractor at Naval Base San Diego. In this civilian, highly classified job, he supports the Navy's Ship Anti-Submarine Warfare Effectiveness and Measuring Program.

Without going into details, Camac says the program prepares the Navy to combat enemy submarines by certifying the efficacy of sonar systems onboard Naval vessels.

Serving the Navy as a civilian is truly "a dream job" he would "love" to keep doing for decades, Camac says.

"In this job, I use science and math along with oceanography, engineering, electronics and computers every day," he says, calling it a perfect fit.

He found his current job with the help of his wife Ashley Camac, CEO of Zero8Hundred, a San Diego nonprofit that provides transition support to military members reverting to civilian status. (See page 3.)

In his former job, involving HR, Mike appeared to be stressed, but was vague, Ashley Camac says.

"When I asked Mike how his new position was going, he would say 'It's going OK, it's different,'" she says.

Finally, he told her he disliked HR. Her nonprofit steered him toward Thor Solutions.

Before leaving the Navy, Mike Camac had received guidance from a Transition Assistance Program at Naval Base Point Loma. TAP's partners, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and the U.S. Department of Labor, also imparted solid tips, he says.

Camac, who enlisted at age 19 in Philadelphia, draws disability benefits and other aid. In addition, tuition benefits help his daughter, Kayla Marie, 23, seeking a master's of science degree in data science from National University in San Diego, and son Michael Jr., 20, studying computer engineering at Grossmont Community College in San Diego. Camac is grateful for these benefits.

His advice for service members about to return to civilian life?

"Have a plan and start early," he says.

"Understand that sometimes our plans fail. It's OK to pivot and find something you truly love!"

Mike Camac's successful transition to civilian life had its challenges, with an HR job he didn't like, but eventually he found his dream career.

PHOTO BY CHARLIE NEUMAN

A Benefits GUIDE

by Anne Stokes

Veteran service representatives can help navigate the VA system

The VA provides benefits that help millions of veterans and their families, but navigating the federal bureaucracy can be daunting. At the San Diego Office of Military & Veterans Affairs, experienced veteran service representatives know how the system works and what it takes to get veterans and their families the benefits they've earned.

Many veterans just don't know about the help that's available to them. VSRs can determine what you're eligible for, what documentation you need and how to get that documentation to the right place.

And it's not just veterans: Dependents can be eligible for educational benefits,

such as the Cal-Vet tuition fee waiver and Chapter 35 assistance. Surviving spouses may be eligible for Dependent and Indemnity Compensation.

VSRs can also make referrals to other service providers and connect veterans and their families with county services, housing, job training and more.

Along with teleservices at area libraries, the LiveWell Mobile Office Vehicle, provided by the county's Health & Human Services Agency, brings services to veterans, particularly those without access to transportation and technology.

PHOTO COURTESY OF COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO OMVA



WHERE TO FIND HELP

MILITARY VETERANS RESOURCE CENTERS

offer a one-stop-shop where veterans can get help with VA benefits and connect with other community resources.

OMVA HEADQUARTERS

NORTH CENTRAL MILITARY AND VETERANS RESOURCE CENTER

5055 Ruffin Road, San Diego
858-694-3222
Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

NORTH INLAND MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS RESOURCE CENTER

649 W. Mission Ave., Escondido
760-740-5573
Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

SOUTH REGION MILITARY & VETERANS AFFAIRS RESOURCE CENTER

401 Mile of Cars Way, Ste. 300, National City
619-731-3345
Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

NORTH COUNTY COASTAL MILITARY & VETERANS AFFAIRS RESOURCE CENTER

1701 Mission Avenue, Ste. 110, Oceanside
442-262-2701
Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY LIBRARIES

At San Diego County libraries, veterans can connect with VSRs for help with paperwork and filing claims. Certain locations offer VetConnect video conferencing and monthly in-person assistance.

JULIAN BRANCH

1850 Highway 78, Julian
Vet Connect appointments: Thursdays (858-694-3222)

ALPINE BRANCH

1752 Alpine Blvd., Alpine
Vet Connect appointments: Thursdays (858-694-3222)

POWAY BRANCH

13137 Poway Road, Poway
Vet Connect appointments: Wednesdays (858-694-3222)

BORREGO SPRINGS BRANCH

2580 Country Club Road, Borrego Springs
VSR walk-in appointments: Wednesdays, 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Vet Connect appointments (858-694-3222)

VALLEY CENTER BRANCH

29200 Cole Grade Rd., Valley Center
Vet Connect appointments (760-749-1305)

IMPERIAL BEACH BRANCH

810 Imperial Beach Blvd., Imperial Beach
Vet Connect appointments (619-424-6981)

RAMONA BRANCH

1275 Main St., Ramona
VSR walk-in appointments: 4th Wednesdays of the month, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

RANCHO SAN DIEGO BRANCH

11555 Via Rancho, El Cajon
VSR walk-in appointments: 2nd Thursdays of the month, 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

EL CAJON BRANCH

201 East Douglas, El Cajon
VSR walk-in appointments: 2nd & 4th Mondays of the month, 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

PINE VALLEY BRANCH

28804 Old Highway 80, Pine Valley
VSR walk-in appointments: 3rd Thursday of the month, 9:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.

CHULA VISTA PUBLIC LIBRARY

365 F St., Chula Vista
VSR walk-in appointments: 3rd Wednesdays of the month, 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

SAN DIEGO CENTRAL LIBRARY

330 Park Blvd., San Diego
VSR walk-in appointments: 3rd Tuesdays of the month, 1 to 4 p.m.

FORMS AND DOCUMENTATION TO HAVE

Having the right documentation can help get your claim process started quickly. However, even if you don't have complete records, VSRs can help you obtain them. When working with a VSR, it's helpful to have:

- ✓ DD 214
- ✓ MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE
- ✓ BIRTH CERTIFICATES
- ✓ AVAILABLE MEDICAL RECORDS
- ✓ MILITARY RECORDS
- ✓ BANK INFORMATION (SOME PROGRAMS MAY REQUIRE DIRECT DEPOSIT)

★ CLAIM *Your* BENEFITS ★



RECEIVE SUPPORT FROM YOUR PEERS

If you are at risk of or experiencing homelessness, or are struggling with other issues, the Office of Military & Veterans Affairs is an important resource for veterans and their families in San Diego County. To receive benefits counseling, follow-up with a claim or acquire housing—or to determine what benefits you are owed and how to acquire them—give OMVA a call at [858-694-3222](tel:858-694-3222).

- Military veterans, active service members and their loved ones can receive even more support from 2-1-1 San Diego. Upon contacting the 24/7 confidential helpline, callers reach a Peer Support Specialist who is dedicated to making their very first call productive and fulfilling. Find solace in the staff of veterans that are able to empathize and assist from direct experience.



Call [2-1-1](tel:211) for support or email support@211sandiego.org for more information.