



THE AMERICAN LEGION



How departments, districts,
posts and you can help



Filling a gap

OCW provides valuable items that help warriors recover

Few programs illustrate The American Legion's commitment to wounded military personnel more than Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW). It is a prime example of the organization's dedication to care for those who are recovering from injuries or illnesses sustained while protecting America.

For those servicemembers who have suffered physical or psychological wounds, OCW assistance helps supplement the high-quality care provided at military hospitals in the United States and abroad. OCW donations play important roles in the rehabilitation and quality of life for wounded troops.

For example, sports equipment helps boost servicemembers in adaptive therapy programs by helping them regain strength and rehabilitate injuries. Items such as softball and golfing equipment, pool tables, electronic dartboards, and fishing gear entertain and build camaraderie among patients.



Geoffrey Quevedo, an Afghanistan war veteran who lost his leg and most of his arm, appreciates OCW. "It feels good knowing that people like the Legion will step in, knowing that they don't have to. It's not mandatory. It's nice to see how they appreciate us and we certainly appreciate them."

How to help

Monetary donations are vital to OCW, as most military medical centers are not equipped to store large quantities of care packages. Individuals from throughout The American Legion Family can donate online or by mailing a check. No contribution is too small.

Donations can also be made via departments and posts. Additionally, departments and posts are encouraged to contribute to this effort by holding fundraisers. Posts can contribute individually, or team up with an Auxiliary unit, Sons of The American Legion squadron, Legion Riders chapter, church group or charitable organization to raise funds for OCW.

Visit www.legion.org/donate to make a donation.

You can also mail checks to: **The American Legion,
Operation Comfort Warriors, PO Box 361626, Indianapolis, IN 46236**

How the program works

Legion staff evaluates the need, then uses donation funds to purchase comfort items, which get distributed to warriors

Operation Comfort Warriors purchases and distributes items considered “non-essential” and therefore not normally provided by the government. Before that happens, though, the Legion’s National Headquarters staff verifies the need and authenticity of the claim.

Most often, the Legion contacts officials at military hospitals, VA hospitals, warrior transition units and surrounding communities to obtain lists to determine which items are needed by wounded servicemembers. Once a need is identified, the Legion orders the items and delivers them.

Generally, there are two types of purchases made:

UNIT GRANTS: These go directly to a facility, where multiple servicemembers benefit. For example, a transition unit might need exercise equipment for those who are rehabbing injuries. Or a facility might request entertainment products, photography equipment or sports gear.

INDIVIDUAL GRANTS: These go directly to a recovering warrior. The recipient does not have to be a Legion member but the case must be reviewed and approved by a Legionnaire who can vouch for the need and confirm the applicant’s veteran status. For example, the Department of Minnesota has used OCW funds to purchase iPads to assist a recovering servicemember.



Forming a lasting bond

Posts and districts that engage their local military hospitals regularly provide support to injured servicemembers

Throughout the year American Legion Family delegations visit warrior transition units to provide gifts to the patients. These items are purchased through donations to the Legion's Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW) program.

Did you know?

100 percent of donated funds go directly to purchasing items and providing recreational activities for recovering warriors. All of OCW's administrative and marketing expenses are covered by membership dues received by the Legion.

Departments, districts or posts work with the Legion's headquarters staff and officials at the warrior transition unit on logistics such as setting up the event, what gear to purchase and other details.

Some Legion Family groups - like District 22 in San Diego - regularly provide assistance at their local military hospital.

For years, District 22 has organized special barbecue lunches for wounded servicemembers at the Naval Medical Center San Diego. Volunteers representing The American Legion Family in the Department of California prepare and serve the meal and dish out complimentary OCW merchandise at the quarterly events.

"We go to the hospital many times throughout the year," District 22 Commander Tony Stewart said. "We join with other groups and remind them that 'mutual helpfulness' means something to us. Because we are all bound by service. It's a day that we do some real actual good deeds, then walk away, feel good about it and get ready for the next one."





Share your story

Don't hesitate to promote your event, before and afterward

Operation Comfort Warriors is just one example of how The American Legion Family gives back to veterans and active-duty servicemembers. It's a story worth sharing in your local community and beyond.

Here are some suggestions:

- Before hosting an OCW event - either a donation drive or a gift distribution - contact the local media with a phone call and/or press release. Newspapers and broadcast outlets are often looking for good news and these by publicizing these events through local media, you are engaging with your community.
- Sometimes external groups select OCW as the beneficiary of their fundraiser. For example, a group of antique tractor owners in Nebraska have collected donations during their annual cross-state rides. The Department of Nebraska and National Headquarters appeared throughout the rides to feed, support and thank the farmers for helping the cause.
- Communicate with National Headquarters (ocw@legion.org) before and after your event so that staff members can assist and promote it, as needed.

Share success

If your post has a successful Operation Comfort Warriors fundraiser, we want to hear about it.

Post your success story at legiontown.org.

It would be helpful to include information about what made it a success. For example, how did you market it? Did you form an alliance with a church, or other nonprofit organization? Were other members of the Legion Family especially helpful in coordinating the event, or raising funds?

Every penny counts

Include the whole Legion Family in fundraising efforts

Traditional post fundraisers - fish fries, barbecues, motorcycle rides, golf outings, walkathons, etc. - are ideal for generating donations to OCW. Posts may also want to consider restaurant dine-ins, fundraisers in which restaurant owners agree to donate 10 percent or 15 percent of money spent by customers who show an OCW flyer on a designated night.

Posts are encouraged to include the Legion Family - SAL squadrons, Auxiliary units and Riders chapters. They can help promote an event and generate more involvement. Units or squadrons may also establish their own OCW fundraiser, which a post can support.

OCW helps the healing

Sgt. Adam Sturdevant, a member of Legion Post 593 in San Antonio, is recovering from his injuries at Brooke Army Medical Center. He enjoyed an OCW-sponsored day at Six Flags San Antonio with his wife and two children. "It's not only good for me and for all the warriors, but also for the families. We've gone through rehab together, and it's a great morale boost that all of us can be here together."

Recently, the Department of New York Auxiliary raised money for OCW. Their efforts included a penny held drive during Girls State. At the conclusion of the drive, more than \$72,000 was counted, collected and donated to OCW.

Similar drives are conducted by posts, units and squadrons. Remember that every penny counts - and goes to helping wounded service-members.



In their words

Joint Base Lewis-McChord: Gifts will 'pep them up and cheer them up'

The Warrior Transition Battalion (WTB) at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington state is among dozens of facilities that have received OCW donations from The American Legion.

A cache of Amazon gift cards, adaptive sports equipment and other items were provided to battalion officials, who were grateful for the donations.

Battalion Logistics Officer Capt. Chris Licking said, "We were very thankful for The American Legion's support because through official military channels, we have a lot of rules we have to follow to maintain the way things are given as far as gifts and things – we can't quite do what we'd like to do.

The American Legion was able to give us a lot of assistance. ... We're receiving various and sundry things from The American Legion that will help these guys get active, get out, get some fresh air, get into their community, as well as some things that will just pep them up and cheer them up."



For example, Chip Townsend, WTB transportation coordinator, cited four golf carts donated by OCW. "(Those) are really going to assist us in augmenting what our original transportation piece used to be," Townsend said. "... We'll be able to use them here in the footprint to get soldiers around when they move from building to building; be able to help with the building folks when we have work orders to be done – moving supplies around and whatnot."

The gifts truly resonate with servicemembers, WTB outreach coordinator Woody Stone said, because of the bond warriors share with Legionnaires.

"You have people who actually understand what these soldiers – whether they're here because they're combat-wounded, whether they're injured in a training accident, or whether they've become ill and are trying to recover – those soldiers have been through a number of different experiences that our Legionnaires are really able to connect with," Stone said. "And soldiers appreciate that. They sense that there's somebody who really understands what they've gone through."

In their words

Fort Gordon 'grateful for the community spirit and kindness'

OCW donations often assist servicemembers by providing them with rehabilitation equipment and social activities. One such successful effort helped the Warrior Transition Battalion (WTB) at Fort Gordon, Ga.

The facility received gifts including occupational therapy equipment, Visa gift cards, a DVD library and GPS systems. Lt. Col. Edwin Larkin, then commander of the battalion, wrote the Legion a letter expressing his appreciation. It read in part:

“Fort Gordon is a very unique WTB because of the population. Our soldiers come from all over the world for treatment, but their family members still live in their original communities, often long distances away.



“The occupational therapy equipment that was purchased was much more than just adaptive volleyball and badminton equipment. The equipment purchased is modified and designed for a specific purpose. The modified nets are attached to poles and only sit three feet from the ground. The game

is played on the floor to accommodate lower-extremity injuries. Servicemembers will sit on the floor and will use their arms and their legs to move around to get to the ball. For those with back injuries who can't get on the floor, we will modify it so that they can play from a special sports wheelchair. The balls look like a regular volleyball, but they are lightweight so that the game can be slowed down for soldiers with traumatic brain injuries, poor vision or limits in motion. This equipment supplied an opportunity for a wounded warrior to belong to a team again. ... The grant money supplied a smile that can only come from getting the ball over a net for the first time and making a point for your team.

“Contributions from the community make a difference in the lives at the Warrior Transition Battalion. It takes a village to transition our ill, injured and wounded, and we are grateful for the community spirit and kindness of The American Legion and its members. We are very grateful to have you as part of our team in providing a well-rounded, caring approach to these soldiers and families.”

OPERATION LANDSTUHL



The history of OCW

Operation Landstuhl morphed into today's effort to provide equipment and recreation for recovering servicemembers

Broken television sets. A lack of personal belongings, due to being transported from the battlefield directly to a military hospital.

That's what wounded U.S. servicemembers faced at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany when then-American Legion National Commander Paul Morin visited in May 2007.

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.

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.

Today, OCW continues to provide comfort items, recreational experiences and more for those recovering in military hospitals and transition units.

First place fund

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 beneficiaries

The American Legion has provided comfort items to military hospitals, warrior transition units and other institutions worldwide. Among them:

Walter Reed Army Medical Center (Washington)

Bethesda Naval Hospital (Md.)

Landstuhl Regional Medical Center (Germany)

Joint Base Lewis-McChord (Tacoma, Wash.)

Fort Hood (Texas)

Fort Bragg (N.C.)

Camp Lejeune (N.C.)

Portsmouth Naval Hospital (Va.)

Fort Carson (Colo.)

Fort Drum (N.Y.)

Fort Stewart (Ga.)

Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (Twentynine Palms, Calif.)

Fort Campbell (Ky.)

Tripler Army Medical Center (Honolulu, Hawaii)

Fort Riley (Kan.)

Camp Pendleton (Calif.)

Fort Gordon (Ga.),

Fort Bliss (Texas)

Fort Knox (Ky.)

The American Legion Department of France

Medevac point (Afghanistan)

Brooke Army Medical Center (Fort Sam Houston, Texas)

Navy Medical Center San Diego

Veterans Affairs Medical Center - Palo Alto (Calif.)

Fort Benning (Ga.)

GI Film Festival (Washington)

Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Minneapolis

Roudebush VAMC in Indianapolis



**"We can use these gifts to make ourselves
stronger and improve our day-to-day lives.
We do appreciate everything we receive.
There are no words to say
how thankful we are."**

Spc. Ashley Durham, Fort Jackson WTB



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To learn more about Operation Comfort Warriors and
to make a contribution online, go to legion.org/OCW.