



CIVIC ASSETS OVERVIEW

The unprecedented length of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have impacted the United States in significant ways—from the loss of life of military personnel, contractors, journalists, and humanitarian aid workers to the physical and emotional injuries countless others have sustained. While the challenges of re-entry into American society faced by recovering service members and veterans are not new, those returning from deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan now face intensified hurdles due to the difficult economic climate and the lack of sufficient resources that span medical and emotional recovery, counseling, re-integration, training, and job placement.

MISSION

The mission of Civic Assets is to rehabilitate and to reintegrate recovering service members and post 9-11 veterans of the armed forces back into civilian society, with a primary focus on those with traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) and/or post traumatic stress (PTS). Rehabilitation and reintegration will be based on an approach developed by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression and by urban conservation corps over the last 30 years — putting men and women to work in teams doing environmental work on public lands in the public interest. In addition, Civic Assets will provide expedited medical and mental healthcare through a partnership with the San Francisco and Martinez VA Medical Centers and the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) Medical Center. We will also help participants access the benefits provided by the G.I. Bill, assisting them to enroll in college and/or vocational training programs including providing extended internships in both the public and private sector when they are ready. These internships will be designed to lead to full time employment based upon the performance of the individual member.

The work of Civic Assets will be greatly enhanced by a partnership with a team of top neurologists, psychiatrists, and neuropsychologists from UCSF and the San Francisco and Martinez Veterans Administration Medical Centers who have designed a cognitive retraining module that combines neuroscience-driven cognitive training with job service to maximize the successful reintegration of injured service members into new occupations. The team wants to study the effectiveness of the entire Civic Assets program with the hope of demonstrating a correlation between community-focused work in a supported team environment and the regeneration of brain tissue and greater brain resiliency among individuals with TBIs and the improved emotional health of those suffering from PTS. By utilizing the unique leadership talents of these men and women, program research will demonstrate the healing and transformative power that results from structured experiences where individuals devote their time and energy for the greater good.

WHY CIVIC ASSETS?

The founders of Civic Assets have spent their careers running urban and rural conservation corps and Americorps programs serving young adults, many of whom are at risk for low educational achievement and joblessness and who suffer from PTS due to the violent circumstances of their lives. The results of these programs include tangible educational achievement, lower crime rates among participants, successful job placements, and low recidivism. This type of supportive educational and employment program will also benefit today's veterans.

Joanna Lennon has interviewed more than 2000 veterans, injured active duty and Reserves personnel, directors of local and national veterans programs, doctors, neurologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, and veteran’s advocacy organizations, and personnel from both the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense in the Pentagon. For the last three years, she and her colleagues have endeavored to better understand the individual and systemic problems that service members face as they attempt to re-integrate back into civilian society. The Civic Assets program was designed in response to the need for a comprehensive approach based on the research findings and input from thousands of interviews.

Growing evidence on the neuroplasticity of the brain—the brain’s ability to change and heal as a result of input from the environment—lends credence to early brain research that has demonstrated the curative effects of positive reinforcement, cognitive engagement, and meaningful responsibility on those with PTS and TBIs. In February 2012, the results of a study by researchers at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs found that “veterans with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) who participated in an evidence-based supported employment program called individual placement and support (IPS)—where they were placed in real-life competitive jobs, not in sheltered or set-aside jobs—were nearly three times more likely to gain competitive employment than those who received a standard vocational rehabilitation program.” During the 12 month study, 76% of the participants gained competitive employment compared with 28% of the participants in the standard vocational rehabilitation program. This is significant at a time when a high percentage of veterans are unemployed; experience severe depression; are prone to high rates of homelessness, suicide, alcohol and drug addiction; and have struggled unsuccessfully to reintegrate into civilian life.

NEXT STEPS: PILOT PROGRAM

Civic Assets and its partners want to launch an 18-24 month pilot program with a minimum of 20 participants working in teams doing environmental work on public lands, which will lead to individual internships with the goal of full-time employment and long-term careers. The main focus of the pilot will be on participants with TBIs and/or PTS. It will also include a controlled study focused on defining the abilities that a service member leaving military service needs to start a successful career as a civilian. The pilot program will include partnerships with different departments within the San Francisco, Palo Alto, and Martinez Veterans Administration medical centers to conduct medical assessments and recruit participants who are medically able to do the work.

PARTNERSHIPS

Following is a partial list of partners — including public agencies, the military, universities, medical centers, and others — that have issued letters of intent or memoranda of understanding, and verbal agreements with Civic Assets:

- Center for Integrated Brain Health and Wellness, Martinez Veterans Administration Medical Center
- Palo Alto Veterans Administration Medical Center
- Pentagon, Department of Defense, Wounded Warrior Program
- San Francisco Veterans Administration Medical Center
- The 21st Century Conservation Service Corps
- The California Department of Transportation (CALTRANS)
- The East Bay Municipal Utilities District (EDMUD)
- The East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD)
- The Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA)
- The Points of Light Foundation’s Community Blueprint Initiative
- The Port of Oakland

- The Presidio of San Francisco
- The San Francisco Water District
- The United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region
- The University of Southern California, Military Initiative, School of Social Work
- U.S. Marine Corps Wounded Warrior Regiment
- U.S. Marine Corps Wounded Warrior Battalion West, Camp Pendleton
- Various Bay Area cities including Oakland, San Francisco, San Ramon
- Yosemite and Sequoia National Parks

Our partnerships with land management agencies, cities, universities and others will eventually pay a large portion of the direct costs for the program. Teams will be paid by contracts with land management agencies. These agencies will pay the costs of fielding the teams including the salaries of participants, the salaries of supervisors, transportation, insurance, and all other direct costs. The agencies will also pay a percentage towards overhead, and they will be the source of paid internships along with private corporations. Once a partnership is finalized with the military, salaries of active duty participants and supervisors will be paid by the military. This will allow us to reduce costs to hire a team.

The UCSF Medical Center and the VA have agreed to provide expedited medical and mental healthcare services. They will also handle the cognitive retraining program and will help to raise money to fund the research component. In addition, there are a variety of other partnerships that will provide support services to the veterans. These include the University of Southern California (USC) School of Social Work which will provide a cohort of graduate students studying for their Masters in Social Work (MSW). They will contribute 24 hours a week each for the first year of their degree work, providing direct services to the Civic Assets participants. USC will also handle the clinical supervision of the MSW candidates. The UC Berkeley Schools of Social Work and Public Health will provide graduate students who will work directly with the Civic Assets members to help with housing, drug counseling, and other issues. The U.S. Forest Service Montana Smoke Jumpers will provide training and fire fighting certification for each member. We are also working with the Marine Corps Wounded Warrior Program on a proposed pilot to help to transition active duty service members who are waiting for their discharge to help to begin the transition to civilian life.

WHAT WE NEED

According to a business plan funded by the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, Civic Assets could be self sustaining from these contracts after two years of operation. To launch the pilot, we have an urgent need to raise \$1 million to pay for the first three to six months of operations. Once launched, the Civic Assets program will receive most of its operating budget (about \$2.6 million for the first 18 months) from land management agencies for fee-for-service contracts, paid on a reimbursement basis. Start-up funding will be used for working capital until the reimbursements start coming in. We hope to start fielding teams in 2014. This model is the same model successfully developed by Ms. Lennon for Civicorps, formerly known as the East Bay Conservation Corps. At its height of operations, Civicorps was the largest urban conservation corps program in the U.S. with an annual budget of \$22 million, most of it from fee-for-service contracts. It had the largest contingent of AmeriCorps workers early in the history of that national service program.

Civic Assets will have a direct and demonstrable impact on the lives of returning veterans. We owe these individuals a successful reintegration into civilian society after the commitment and sacrifices they have made for our country. An investment in the launch of this program will enable Civic Assets to develop a pilot and then to build capacity. Our business model is based on a proven, self-sustaining, fee-for-service model.