Support The Enlisted Project is committed to helping active duty military and recently discharged veteran families in times of crisis, by providing them financial assistance in the form of grants and working with them through one-on-one counseling and financial education workshops to establish a path of recovery and ultimately achieve financial long-term self-sufficiency.

Learn more about our programs and advocacy at www.stepsocal.org.
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Helping Military and Veteran Families Every Day
Dear Friends,

I am extremely proud of the amount of value and support we were able to deliver to our military and veteran families in Southern California this past year. As they were headed toward, or already in, a financial downward spiral, they swallowed their pride and asked for help – and with STEP’s help, they were able to get themselves on a positive path toward financial self-sufficiency. Our military families have many hardships, extenuating circumstances and relatively small compensation packages. They have been sent to live where the cost of living is 30% higher and housing rates are almost double the U.S. average. When these factors are combined with the generally low level of financial prowess associated with our country’s youth – we find that many of our military families can inadvertently get themselves into a fast-moving financial crisis.

Last year, our caseload grew by 23% to a record 941 applications. Each of these applicants received a case worker who spent the time understanding their unique situation and culture. Then through education, empowerment and when needed, a financial grant, we were able to ensure their most basic needs were met while they got themselves on a path to financial self-sufficiency.

To ensure those needs were met, STEP awarded $409,000 in assistance grants to lenders and creditors on behalf of our young active duty and veteran families, bridging the following services until they could get their feet under themselves:

- 256 Families received food gift cards to provide basic life sustenance........... $ 48,135
- 113 Utility payments made to reconnect or stop disconnection................. $ 33,055
- 86 Auto payments made to stop repossession......................................... $ 70,327
- 94 Rent & Mortgage payments to stop pending evictions....................... $ 148,318
- Plus insurance, auto repair, critical baby needs and other emergencies....... $ 100,178

4,203 military lives were improved last year by their interaction with STEP, none of which could have been done without the resources we received from generous foundations, corporate partners and individuals throughout the community. As always, we extend a sincere thank you to those that contributed their time, talent or funds toward our mission success.

In closing, the staff's energy, the volunteers’ dedication and our community partners’ generosity made for an outstanding year. I would encourage you to reach out to me with your thoughts, feedback or fresh perspective on how our nonprofit provides support to the active duty and veteran communities. We are truly appreciative of the help provided through your time, skills and resources!

Tony Teravainen
President/CEO

Helping Military and Veteran Families Every Day
Emergency Financial Assistance (EFA) Analysis

Support The Enlisted Project (STEP) has a mission to assist junior enlisted and recently discharged veteran families facing financial crisis. The vast majority of this accomplished through our Emergency Financial Assistance (EFA) program, where hands-on financial counseling and budgeting is provided by a social work team (MSW, social work interns and volunteers) and, when necessary, financial grants are included to ensure their basic needs are met while military and veteran families are working to achieve financial self-sufficiency.

There are approximately 85,000 junior enlisted service members stationed in Southern California, and their salaries are below or just above the Low Income level established by HUD - and about 30,000 of these military families regularly rely on food assistance to feed themselves.

When these low-income families are sent to live and work in the nation’s 4th most expensive city to live in, and are then subjected to the many other hardships and uncertainties facing these 20-24 year old family leaders, we find that families can inadvertently get into financial crisis. STEP is here for these families to help them recover with dignity before being engulfed in the downward spiral of financial ruin.

Southern California not only has the highest concentration of active duty military in the U.S., it also has the most and youngest veterans in the U.S. In addition to that, there are over 20,000 new veterans per year established here. Over half of our veterans state their transition was Difficult or Very Difficult. STEP is here to assist these new veterans, ensuring they remain financially stable during their transition, and they have the opportunity to move into a successful next chapter of their lives.

Our board’s decision to extend transitioning veteran support from 12 to 18 months at the beginning of the fiscal year was one of the factors that allowed for an 18% growth in veteran family support this year. We engaged to help many of these families as they struggled during the navigation of their earned benefits; either during the immediate transition when DoD separation pay was being delayed in audit and VA disability pay had not begun or when GI Bill benefits were being delayed due to a breakdown in communication from the educational institution to the VA.
Emergency food remained our largest assist area due to families sacrificing physiological needs and diverting money to other living expenses before realizing they can’t manage to meet the basic need of food.

"I didn’t know how I was going to be able to buy diapers. You have no idea how much of a Godsend this is.”

Jacob, Active Duty E1

Needs met increased by 18.5% this year. Utilities showed the largest growth in support; part of the 9% jump resulted as families learned to adapt to soaring electric bills as Lincoln Military Housing stopped paying those bills as a result of a Pentagon directive.

70% of the basic needs that STEP issued grants toward, to ensure services were maintained, are classified as the most fundamental needs for personal health in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.

Air, Food, Water, Shelter, Clothing, Sleep.
Emergency Financial Assistance Program Investment

The demand for our EFA program last year was largest since our inception. With a record high 941 applications, costing $600 each to manage, and record high grant levels, $409,000 in grants to ensure basic needs were met, it cost STEP $1 million to provide the needed support to help our young, Southern California military and veteran families get on a path to financial self-sufficiency from their financial crisis.

Of all the families that went through our EFA program, 92% do not come back for their second allowed use of the program. They become financially self-sufficient.

"My wife and I have been trying, we really have been trying. We just couldn't get out from under all of this. We needed just a little boost to get us there. And you gave that to us. Thank you."

Joseph, Active Duty E5

The average and median costs for both active duty and veteran-related cases increased this year. Veteran cases continue to cost more as 27% of our Veteran family’s needs are for homelessness prevention.
Secondary Programs to Help Shape Healthy Financial Families

1) In-Kind Family Support
We operate brick and mortar warehouses, donated by community partners, in San Diego County and a "Warehouse on Wheels" program throughout our entire service area. This year we had a 700% increase in the lives touched through this critical support element. The majority of products distributed from the warehouse consist of items meant to offset critical living expenses (i.e. car seats, cribs, diapers, gently used children’s clothes). Some of the growth can be contributed to the warehouse space we acquired with the relocation of our San Diego office and the outpouring of community support during our annual Spring Baby Drive. The donated items (new and gently used) go a far way in helping meet needs as families work to reestablish and strengthen their family budget following a financial crisis.

“My husband stopped at my work after he left your warehouse to show me everything you donated for the kids and I could not believe it… I cannot fully express our gratitude and thankfulness.”
Alexandra, Veteran Wife

2) Financial Freedom Seminars
We truly believe financial management has to be a lifetime pursuit, with the addition of new resources and levels of knowledge accumulating through time. Following the one-on-one case management/counseling surrounding financial crisis recovery, and accompanying any grant-based financial assistance, we strongly encourage military families (service member, spouse and 14+ aged children) to attend. The workshops are geared to provide goal oriented objectives (i.e. Stretch Your Dollars) and aim to grow basic money management skills. We want to see families build healthy financial habits that can help them weather future unforeseen emergencies.

STEP utilizes specially earmarked funds provided by some of our generous corporate sponsors, like The Boeing Company, to provide the workshops at no charge. With the help of community partners and volunteers, we were able to deliver eight workshops of second-stage financial education.

“STEP has been a saving grace for our family, STEP has allowed our family to regain control of our finances. Since STEP, we have paid off most of our debt, increased our credit scores and currently are preparing to purchase a home in the near future.”
John, Active Duty E6

Helping Military and Veteran Families Every Day
3) Morale Programs

With finances, specifically family budgeting, being one of the number one stressors in America and a leading cause of divorce, we understand the importance of finding a balance between maintaining a responsible family budget while also allowing the family to have moments when they can truly enjoy some of the fantastic amenities of Southern California, without feeling a continual guilt of wondering “can we afford this?”.

STEP strives to build healthy relationships with community partners (i.e. San Diego Padres, La Jolla Playhouse) to acquire in-kind donations (i.e. tickets) that we are able to give to active duty and veteran families. These gifts are meant to directly offset costs they would incur if they were trying to provide entertainment from their monthly family budget. The events afford the family an opportunity to enjoy quality time together without deviating from their long-term financial goals.

With a more specific focus, STEP once again worked with the Wounded Warrior Battalion to provide events that allowed the caregivers to detach from their emotionally-heavy, daily roles for a short period and partake in events meant to facilitate reflection, group support and resource awareness.

Lastly, STEP delivered a holiday program, Sharing the Joy, that linked corporate and community partners with military and veteran families who struggled throughout the year in Southern California. With the overwhelming support of corporations, businesses and individual community families, we ensured nearly 500 family members had something to be merry about following a tough year.

“I just wanted to thank you and STEP again for giving us the opportunity to adopt a family. We are looking forward to remaining close to them and watching their children grow.”

Deb, Community Partner

Helping Military and Veteran Families Every Day
Emergency Financial Assistance

Demographics

Emergency Financial Assistance applicants must meet three primary prerequisites:

1) The applicant must be active duty military or a recently honorably discharged veteran in the pay grades of E1 - E6.

2) The applicant must reside in one of the seven supported counties (San Diego, Orange, Los Angeles, Ventura, San Bernardino, Riverside and Imperial Counties).

3) Must be in a verifiable financial crisis – as defined by eminent loss of basic need.

Applicants by Pay Grade

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“Sincerely appreciate all the help you have provided me, and guiding me through this (budgeting) process. Many, many thanks to you and the STEP personnel.”

Gabriel, Active Duty E4

88% of families who received STEP services 6-36 months previously, state they are in a better financial situation because of the services they received from STEP.

Helping Military and Veteran Families Every Day
Using several avenues to spread the word, our membership with numerous military family collaboratives, profiles in all seven counties’ 2-1-1 databases, attendance at more than 170 community outreach events, and a significant number of key leader engagements has produced a healthy network able to assist with ensuring those eligible for assistance know that we are here for them and that we have the resources to help them.

Volunteer Support

Volunteers continue to be one of our most precious resources. This year, we tried to get smarter about how we approach volunteer recruitment, retention and recognition by starting the Service Enterprise Initiative certification process. Accumulating just more than 6,300 total hours, we increased our capacity to care for military and veteran families by doubling the amount of volunteer hours. Volunteers’ generosity of time added approximately $145,341 of labor toward our mission.

*Value based upon Independent Sector latest estimation of value placed on volunteer time.

Learn more about our volunteer opportunities at [www.stepsocal.org](http://www.stepsocal.org)
Financials

Although we have been serving our Southern California military families since 2005, in October 2012 Support The Enlisted Project (STEP) disaffiliated from its national sponsor, changed its name, and modified its mission, policies and structure to adjust to the needs of our local military and veteran families.

The impact has been a near doubling of our value and services delivered to the same community, than it had when operating under the national sponsor. We are continually reminded it was the right decision as we have seen the demand for all of our services and programs increase. Knowing there is this demand, this unmet need to serve our underserved military families, we are committed to be an available resources for them.

We have posted three consecutive years of growth and improvement in our service delivered, lives enhanced, program expenses and outcomes achieved. We have also posted the same growth in income, revenue, donor base, financial ratios, partner affiliates, and many other business areas. This positive growth is a reflection of a true need being addressed with a sound strategy, a committed Board, a capable execution team, and a passion by all to serve our military families while they sacrifice in many other ways to serve us.

Future

What’s Next

Keeping the passion for caring for military and veteran families while looking for ways to better collaborate with other community resources to provide efficient and effective, holistic solutions to military families will be the key theme for Fiscal Year 2016. We know there are many organizations operating who serve these same families – we need to work to create opportunities and improve how we collectively serve – increasing our value to the community.

We will also continue to be a relevant, reliable and responsive resource for the men and women who have chosen to serve our great nation! While pleased with our progress to integrate STEP throughout Southern California, we will not rest until we achieve our vision of being certain that every military and veteran family in financial crisis knows STEP is a viable resource for them.

With exposure throughout the region, we have found an increasing number of eligible families that otherwise might have gotten overtaken by circumstances and left behind.

Specific goals we have for the fiscal year:

• Partnering with other resources to improve overall service delivered.
• Completing our Service Enterprise Initiative certification and growing our Volunteer force throughout all seven counties.
• Increasing the frequency and reach of our financial seminars.
• Strengthening our long-term measurements to fuel improvements.
• Raising more funding to meet the needs of a growing case load.

Helping Military and Veteran Families Every Day
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