

2025

ANNUAL REPORT

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear friends and supporters,

An annual report gives us a chance to pause, look back, and celebrate what we accomplished together. At Veterans Outreach Center, 2025 was a year of new beginnings and meaningful progress in our mission to serve those who have worn our nation's uniform.

One of the year's most significant milestones was the opening of Otto's Phoenix House, our shelter dedicated to homeless female veterans and their children. As the only shelter of its kind in our region, Otto's Phoenix House fills a critical need while providing more than a place to stay... it offers safety, stability, dignity, and a path forward for women veterans and their families.

We also celebrated the first anniversary of the Steve Preston Peer Connection Center (PCC). The PCC has become everything we envisioned when we first conceived the idea: a safe and sober place where veterans can connect with one another, decompress after a long day, participate in activities, or simply enjoy a few moments in a space designed with them in mind. In fact, it is such a welcoming place that many veterans chose to spend Thanksgiving and Christmas there as well. The relationships and sense of community growing within those walls are a wonderful reflection of what can happen when veterans have a place to belong.

And 2025 brought another exciting new chapter: the launch of our Vets with Pets program, connecting veterans with the companionship, support, and proven benefits that come from the human-animal bond. We are excited about the opportunities this program creates to strengthen the well-being of veterans while recognizing the important role pets can play in their lives.

The year also challenged us to think creatively and adapt. In July, we learned that a \$500,000 federal grant would no longer be available to support our work. Within a matter of days, our team came together to assess the situation, identify opportunities, and develop a new path forward. Rather than simply replace what had been lost, we used the moment as an opportunity to rethink how we could serve veterans even more effectively. We built stronger connections with local employers, thereby helping businesses identify and hire qualified veteran talent. By connecting veterans with employers who recognize their unique strengths, we create opportunities that benefit both the veteran and the broader community.

These accomplishments are especially meaningful because they represent more than programs and services. For the veterans we serve, they represent hope for the future and stability in the present. There will always be challenges in the nonprofit world, and the landscape in which we serve veterans continues to change. But what gives me tremendous confidence is the strength of the VOC community.

There is still so much more ahead for Veterans Outreach Center, and I am excited about where we are going! Thank you for believing in this mission, investing in our veterans, and standing beside us as we continue to create opportunities for those who have given so much to our country.

With deepest gratitude,

Laura A. Heltz

Laura Heltz
Executive Director
U.S. Army Veteran

MISSION/VALUES

Founded locally in 1973 by returning Vietnam veterans, today's Veterans Outreach Center remains deeply rooted in our community. We understand the needs of veterans and their families continue to evolve, and the scars of war can be deep and slow to heal.

We are committed to meeting veterans where they are, offering individualized services in a supportive, caring, and judgment-free environment. Our comprehensive programs and services address mental, physical, and economic well-being to provide healing and societal reconnection.

All services are provided at no cost to veterans.

MISSION

Our mission is to serve veterans with compassion and advocate for all who have worn our nation's uniform so they can RISE and live life to the fullest.

ORGANIZATIONAL VALUES

RESPECT: We treat everyone with dignity and compassion, and we show appreciation for strengths as well as vulnerabilities.

INTEGRITY: We are trust-worthy, honorable and professional. Taking ownership of our actions and communication is a top priority; we do this by conveying honesty and respect through tone, verbal and non-verbal interactions. We demonstrate fiscal responsibility with all resources.

SERVICE: We recognize the great sacrifices that are made by all who have worn our nation's uniform. We are committed to serving our veterans and their families with passion and deep appreciation.

EXCELLENCE: We are hard-working, innovative and creative; we strive for continuous improvement. Our goal is to consistently grow the quality and scope of our services, in order to better meet the needs of our veterans.



What Does “Trauma-Informed Care” for Veterans Mean?



“Trauma-informed care” is a phrase often used in veteran services and mental health, but to people outside of those spaces, it can sound like jargon. At its heart, trauma-informed care is about recognizing that our life experiences can shape how we see the world, respond to situations, and interact with others. It's a philosophy that assumes everyone has experienced trauma in their lives. Thus, it means creating an environment where people feel safe, respected, understood, and heard.

Embracing the Sanctuary Model

At Veterans Outreach Center, trauma-informed care is woven into everything we do. It shapes how we deliver services, how we interact with veterans, and how we create a warm and welcoming atmosphere for everyone in our buildings.

A major part of this is through adopting the Sanctuary model through the Andrus Sanctuary Institute. It provides a framework for creating meaningful organizational change and building a trauma-responsible community. By recognizing that trauma and adversity can affect all of us, it helps us better understand and support one another. This model allows us to focus on growth, change, and hope for the future while helping the veterans we serve achieve that for themselves.

Adversity is an inherent part of being human, and many of the behaviors we see are shaped by what people have been through. Because adversity, trauma, and chronic stress affect all of us, we can more readily recognize their impact and create the conditions that help people heal, grow, and move forward.

From “What’s Wrong with You” to “What Happened to You?”

Traditionally, systems have focused on treating specific symptoms or behaviors by asking, “What’s wrong with you?” Even when asked with good intentions, that question can feel alienating and judgmental. It suggests that something is inherently wrong with the

person, rather than recognizing that many behaviors and symptoms may be rooted in trauma or difficult life experiences. In doing so, it often overlooks the person's humanity and lacks the empathy needed to truly support healing.

A trauma-informed approach shifts the conversation away from “What’s wrong with you?” and instead asks, “What happened to you?” and “How can we support you moving forward?” For veterans, military service is a deeply personal experience shaped by both shared and individual challenges. Combat deployments, military sexual trauma, repeated relocations, and the sudden loss of military structure during the transition to civilian life can all leave lasting visible and invisible impacts. When those experiences intersect with hardships or trauma that may have existed before military service, the weight can become even greater. Viewing veterans through a trauma-informed lens allows us to honor the full context of their experiences with empathy and dignity, while recognizing that those experiences are part of their story — not the definition of who they are.

A Community of Care

Navigating our own trauma and supporting others through theirs is nuanced, complex, and deeply personal. Every individual's experience and healing journey are different, and a trauma-informed approach isn't one single program, service, or interaction. Instead, it's a cultural baseline to empower veterans to thrive mentally, physically, and emotionally.

If you're a veteran carrying the weight of your transition, you don't have to carry it alone. Our team is ready to meet you exactly where you are without judgment. Contact us today to get started.

For our supporters, when you help our mission, you're making sure these vital, trauma-informed resources are available to our nation's heroes today, tomorrow, and long into the future.

Veterans Outreach Center Refocuses Employment Services to Workforce Development

New model prioritizes career advancement, professional credentialing, and upward mobility for veterans at every stage of their civilian journey.

Veterans Outreach Center has restructured its employment services, rebranding the department as Workforce Development and expanding its focus to comprehensive career development. The new model supports veterans at every stage of their careers, from entry-level job seekers who need immediate placement to experienced professionals pursuing new opportunities and career advancement.

The transition from “Employment and Training” to “Workforce Development” reflects VOC’s commitment to long-term economic success for the region’s veterans. While VOC remains a critical safety net for veterans facing employment barriers, this program reorganization is equally focused on veterans who have jobs but are working below their skill level, or established professionals looking to climb the corporate ladder.

“The narrative that Veterans Outreach Center is only a crisis center is outdated,” Veterans Outreach Center Executive Director and U.S. Army veteran Laura Heltz said. “As someone who was once told my military experience didn’t count as work experience, I know firsthand what it’s like struggling to find a job after service. Our Workforce Development model is designed to support veterans through every promotion, certification, and pivot in their career”.

VOC can help veterans find career opportunities across multiple industries, including:

- Administration and business
- Animal welfare
- Construction and skilled trades
- Customer service
- Education and childcare
- Energy and optics
- Healthcare and caregiving
- Hospitality and food service
- Human services
- Information technology
- Manufacturing
- Public safety and security

VOC is also seeking partnerships with employers looking for qualified candidates. To learn more, contact Dave.VanBlarcom@vocroc.org or stop by VOC at 447 South Ave., Rochester.



OUR SERVICES



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

- Vocational assessments
- Interview skills training
- Career counseling
- Resume preparation
- OSHA (and many other) certifications
- Pipeline connecting veteran applicants to employers



HEALTH & WELLNESS

- Hydromassage
- Laundry
- Barber shop
- Crisis intervention
- Reiki
- Suicide prevention
- Fitness center
- Peer groups
- Outdoor programs



RESIDENTIAL PROGRAMS

- State-of-the-art 46-bed emergency housing facility for male veterans
- 33 units of permanent, affordable housing
- 7-bed transitional housing for female veterans and/or their children



SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

- Care management
- Female veteran programming
- Senior veteran services
- Veterans Treatment Court
- Social activities
- Vets with Pets program
- Emergency funds



QUARTERMASTER

- Food pantry with fresh meat and dairy products
- Clothing (including professional attire)
- Essential items
- Pet food
- Baby formula



ON-SITE COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- Legal counseling
- Financial coaching
- Accredited VA benefits counseling
- Free bus passes
- Higher education support

The generosity of our supporters ensures we are able to continue our important work. To see a complete list of donors, please visit vocroc.org/donor-list.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

SERVICES SUMMARY

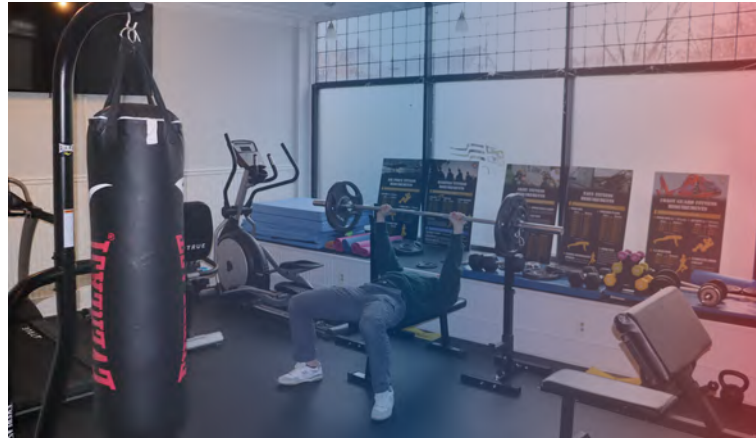
TOTAL SERVED

1,926 total vets served **18,679** times
468 new vets served
1,458 returning vets served
265 female vets served
356 outreach events conducted



HEALTH & WELLNESS

597 vets received **608** buddy checks from VOC staff
155 vets attended peer support groups **1,065** times
145 vets used the fitness center **1,775** times
53 vets participated in outdoor programs **292** times
1,048 vets used our Quartermaster **6,761** times



RESIDENTIAL SERVICES

Served **156** vets in residential facilities
Served **118** male vets at Richards House
Served **9** female vets at Otto's Phoenix House
Served **29** vets in permanent supportive housing (Liberty Landing)



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

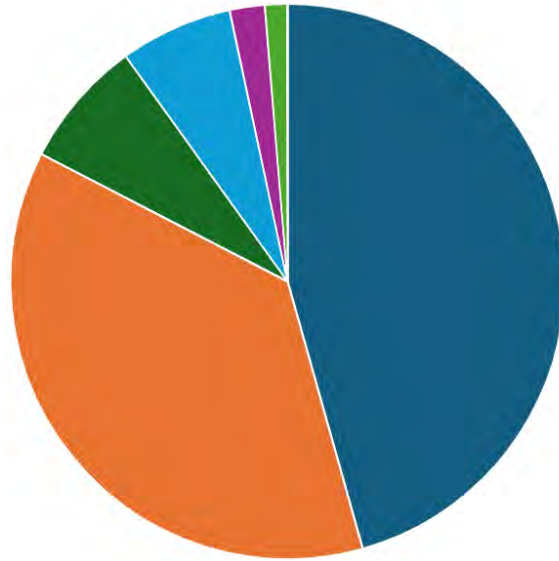
93 vets obtained jobs
312 vets attended trainings **773** times
125 vets enrolled in Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program (HVRP)



FINANCIAL SUMMARY

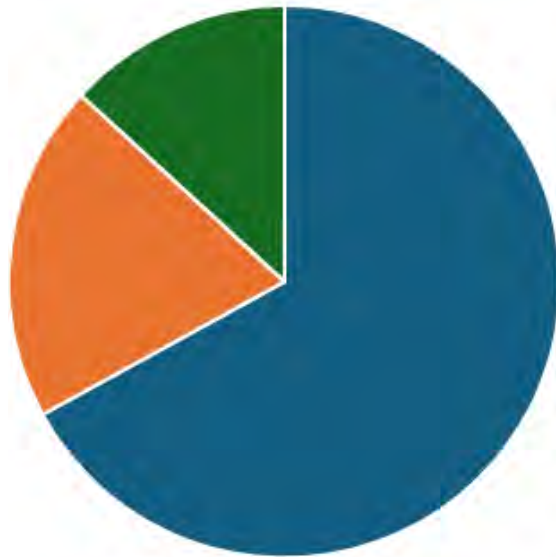
REVENUE

46%	Government Grants
37%	Contributions & Private Grants
7%	Fundraising (Net)
7%	Investment Income
2%	United Way
1%	Flag Store (Net)
0%	Other



EXPENSES

67%	Programs
20%	Administrative
13%	Fundraising



TOTAL REVENUE: \$4,644,574

TOTAL EXPENSES: \$4,989,224

NET REVENUE: -\$344,650

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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* Veteran

MOVED BY MOUNTAINS

How one veteran's hike moved him to drop the weight of his past.



VOC's hiking group embarked on its second-ever overnight trip to the Adirondacks for a weekend hike. The group covered 10 miles and 1,800 feet of elevation gain spread over two mountains, one lake, and one waterfall trail.

However, for veteran Steve Shaffner, this trip was about a lot more than hiking.

16 years ago, Steve's mom passed away. For deeply personal reasons, he didn't attend her funeral. 10 years after that, he lost his older brother. He kept their ashes ever since, waiting for the right moment to get the closure he needed.

Just last year, Steve was using a cane and could barely walk on his own, never thinking he would be able to reach the summit of a mountain. Despite his mobility challenges, he wanted to take part in VOC's hiking group to get outside and enjoy nature.

After a year of hard work and dedication, Steve felt confident in his abilities and prepared to join the hiking group on a weekend trip to the mountains. Carrying his mother's and brother's ashes in his hiking pack, Steve and the rest of the group summited Mt Van Hoevenberg around 11 a.m. Deciding the moment felt right, Steve asked VOC's Wellness Programs Manager and trip guide, Jeff Klein, to



record a video of Steve spreading his family's ashes on the top of the mountain so he could share the moment with his sister.

Afterwards, Steve said he felt "transformed," feeling the weight lift off his shoulders.

"Studies have repeatedly shown the benefits of spending time in nature," Klein said. "It lowers stress and helps to alleviate symptoms of several mental health conditions including depression, anxiety, and PTSD."

"But being able to see the positive effects the outdoors can have on someone firsthand is truly

special. There's an old saying that goes 'you carry more weight into the woods than you carry out.' and this has never been more true than it was for Steve that day.

"Interestingly, I didn't notice this when I took the photos, but on the way in, Steve is hiking alone behind the other vets. After scattering his mom's and brother's ashes, on the way out, he is leading the group. I thought that was pretty moving."

To learn more about our health and wellness programs, visit www.vocroc.org/health-wellness.



VETERANS OUTREACH CENTER, INC.

447 South Ave

Rochester, NY 14620

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