

The Bandini Foundation
MISSION: VETS
“Wellness to Work”
Program



The Bandini Foundation Heroes Golf Course
West Los Angeles Veterans Administration, North Campus,
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THE BANDINI FOUNDATION “MISSION: VETS PROGRAM”

The Bandini Foundation was founded in 2008 by Ricardo Bandini and Scott Morey with a mission to support veterans recovering from injuries and illnesses; help them assimilate successfully into the community; and secure civilian employment.

The Bandini family has been supporting veterans since 1887, when Arcadia Bandini de Baker and U.S. Senator John P. Jones donated 525 acres to establish the first Western National Soldiers Home, which eventually became the West Los Angeles Veterans Administration campus.

Over the last 9 years the Foundation has served over 68,000 veterans at our Heroes Golf Course, located on the WLA VA Campus. At Heroes, all veterans join our extended community, receive lessons, and play for free. The course also works with VA Doctors, physical therapists and mental health practitioners who use the health benefits of golf to speed physical recovery, and teach mindfulness to reduce stress and treat PTSD. The Foundation also distributes fruits, vegetables, and food boxes to food insecure veterans thanks to our partnership with the Westside Food Bank.

The Bandini Foundation is dedicated to providing community, fitness, paid jobs training and employment services for veterans, with an emphasis on assisting homeless and at risk veterans. Our goal is to provide them with the personal support, skills, and confidence they need to secure full time employment, food security, and housing. We also offer placement services through in-house, and partnerships with the VA, VSOs, and community veteran support organizations, including the City and County of Los Angeles.

We serve two diverse veteran populations, the first comprising of the 3,681 homeless veterans in Los Angeles County. The second consists of the 243,871 total veterans who are housed in Los Angeles County.

- 15% served before Vietnam – ages 85 to 98.
- 47% are Vietnam veterans – ages 65-84
- 32% served between Vietnam, and Iraq/ Afghanistan – ages 42-64
- 6% are Iraq and Afghanistan veterans – ages 28-41

Our intention is to increase outreach to the veterans in our service areas, with an emphasis on serving those who are homeless, at risk, or are most underserved.

THE PROBLEM:

Over 3,681 homeless veterans were reported in the 2020 Los Angeles County Homeless Count. According to the VA, up to 67% of these homeless veterans suffer from mental illness.

Studies by the Veterans Administration indicate that PTSD, social isolation, unemployment, and substance abuse are the leading causes of homelessness among vets.

According to the NCBI, social isolation and lack of mental health support are major risk factors for veteran homelessness. Eliminating Social Isolation and assisting VA mental health programs is the key to getting veterans stabilized, treated, and housed.

These leading causes also make it extremely difficult for homeless veterans to obtain and sustain employment, which means these veterans not only need transition to housing, but transition to full employment as well by fellow veterans and staff who are attuned to their special needs.

THE PROGRAM:

The Bandini Foundation “MISSION: VETS” Program

The Bandini Foundation “Mission: Vets” Program is an expansion of our highly successful Veterans Jobs Program, that provides paid, on the job training to veterans. The expanded program is designed to provide 360° degree support to our participants.

PROGRAM DESIGN:

We will accomplish this by building closer relationships with our partners in the Veterans Administration, and Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs)/ Mental Health & substance abuse treatment programs. And then work closely with Doctors, social workers, and physical therapists to design individualized programs that focus on community participation, physical/ mental fitness, job training, and employment, as part of each veteran’s positive daily routine.



INVOLVEMENT: The way OUT of Isolation - is GETTING IN-VOLVED

Homeless Veterans who arrive at the Veterans Administration West Los Angeles Campus are often overwhelmed by the complex landscape of VA and VSO programs, so MISSION: VETS provides social support through our Veterans Community Hub (VCH).

The Hub is centered at the Heroes Golf Course, where our veterans welcome homeless and at risk veterans into our community, and provides them with effective peer support to help them navigate VA and VSO programs.

Community Involvement increases the confidence that homeless veterans need to become successful advocates for their own care - and decreases the time it takes for them to get benefits, treatment, and housing.

Dr. Alan Teo, a psychiatrist at the VA Portland HC System, led a study that appeared in the April 2018 *Journal of Affective Disorders*, and found that:

"Being cut off from others is like not being connected to your battery," he adds. "You lose an important source of energy. Unfortunately, that loss of energy often results in less motivation to engage with others and to seek help. So the isolation and loneliness worsen, and a vicious cycle is created, whereby loneliness leads to depression, which leads to more loneliness and so on. Breaking that cycle is difficult but important."

The MISSION: VETS Community Hub is essential to ending this cycle because veterans are trained to trust their sisters and brothers in uniform. All veterans are taught to believe that "No One Left Behind" is not just a clever catchphrase: but an essential tenet of a lifelong mission to help their fellow vets. So yes, we want to help get them housed, but we also want to support them so they can stay healthy and live their best lives.

We also distribute groceries and food boxes to veterans in our community who are experiencing food insecurity, thanks to our partnership with the Westside Food Bank and the Heroes Garden.

FITNESS - MISSION: VETS Fitness Program

Fitness is essential to physical and mental health, so our Fitness Program will offer each participating veteran, Golf Clinics and Golf & mindfulness meditation groups, to help them create an active lifestyle tailored to their level of physical ability.

We will also expand our outreach and team up with VA Whole Health programs such as GeroFit, Yoga, Tai Chi, Sleep Well, Wellness Support, Tobacco Cessation, and Mind over Illness, to educate each veteran on the wide array of fitness program & facilities available to them.

Experienced Members of our VCH will also be available to consult with, and guide their fellow veterans to the programs that best fit their individual needs – and it's always encouraging to find a friendly face or two in class to cheer you on.

TRAINING - MISSION: VETS Job Training Program, Phase I

The Bandini Foundation Job Training Program started at our Heroes Golf Course facility, and has been successful thanks in large part to a generous grant from Saint John's Health Center Foundation. This initial grant enabled us to pay veterans as they received on the job training, and helped us to build enduring relationships with local employers, who have grown to appreciate the dedication and skill that our veterans bring.

Our expert training staff is comprised of formerly homeless veterans who understand the special needs of our veteran trainees. Our training team guides each individual veteran through a series of key positions in Golf Course Maintenance & Management, teaching them skills in landscape horticulture & arboriculture, irrigation, pest control, course management, scheduling, marketing, IT, social networking, and customer relations.

Learning these key positions gives each participant a solid 360° understanding of how course M&M works. This boosts the level of confidence in their ability to work as part of a team, and accomplish self-directed tasks when required. The goal is to make each veteran feel at home in any work environment.

EMPLOYMENT: MISSION: VETS Job Training Program, Phase II

Work is essential to stabilizing homeless and at risk veterans' mental & physical health by providing them with a sense of self-worth, accomplishment, and social acceptance.

As veterans complete their phase one training, we help them to write effective resumes, provide them with personal recommendations, and tap our network of employers and VSOs to place our veterans in jobs that suit their new skill sets, personal abilities, and interests.

After our veterans are hired, we track their progress with employers and maintain contact with them to ensure that they are receiving all the assistance they need to successfully transition to, and maintain gainful civilian employment and housing.

PROGRAM HISTORY

The current program is ongoing, with a graduation rate of 100%, and has trained and supported 90 veterans over the last decade. Over the last 9 years 68,000 veterans have benefitted from the services offered at the Bandini Foundation Heroes Golf Course, located on the WLA VA Campus. We average 8,000+ veterans a year served.

OUTCOMES

We track outcomes through metrics that are based on four tracks: Community Involvement, Fitness, Training and Housing. Graduation is based on passing training and job placement as documented by our training team. Our HR team documents community involvement, fitness & housing, with outcomes for housing provided by our partners in the VA and VSO's.

MISSION: VETS "Ooh Rah!"

Serving your country takes confidence, drive, teamwork, and a desire to accomplish every mission successfully. We protect and defend, and are duty bound to help our brothers & sisters because nobody gets left behind – this is what makes the Mission: Vets program so powerful, because:

Nobody gets left behind.

Our mission is to surround our recovering vets with a caring and experienced vet community that will help them re-build the confidence and sense of personal mission they need to live full and successful lives. Housing, meaningful work, physical & mental health, and friendship are our goals for every veteran, so please join me to make it happen. Ooh Rah!

- Scott Mulvaney, Marine Corps Veteran, and Mission: Vets program lead

**Bandini Foundation
Heroes Golf Course Jobs Program
Participant Testimonials**



Steve Bethal – US Navy

The Bandini foundation helped me out of a career and financial rut, and taught me skills that will help me work anywhere. We joined the military because we believe in service and protecting our nation, and stood in harm's way together, as a family of Veterans. This program allows us to work together again to achieve common goals, to rebuild a sense of purpose and gain confidence. Working with fellow Veterans puts me in mind that as long as we work together, we'll be winners!



Isaac Choi – US Army

After serving in the Army for nine years I found assimilation back into civilian life to be extremely difficult, since Professional work did not provide me with the sense of community and fulfillment that I was hoping for. During my treatment at the West LA VA I volunteered at the Heroes Garden, and was accepted into the Heroes Training Program. Here I rediscovered a sense of community and pride by working alongside my fellow veterans in a community that supports all of us. I'm excited to help them continue to grow a community that veterans and locals can enjoy together.



Michael Foot – US Army

I never planned on being here, but as I was recovering from hip surgery I discovered the Heroes Course, and started walking the fairways and using the putting green. After a while Ricardo asked if I'd like to join the program and become a Starter – which would give me something to do and help with my recovery from drugs and alcohol. So I joined up and made a lot of good friends, learned new skills, and discovered that when I cross over the front gate all my fears and trauma fade away, and I am whole.



Scott Mulvaney – US Marine Corps

Before coming to Heroes I suffered a Major Depression caused by PTSD and became homeless. I felt isolated, broken, and lost, and my days were filled with fear and thoughts of suicide. Then a fellow vet brought me to the Heroes Golf course and transformed my life. I joined the Bandini Training Program, and the amazing people here helped me to regain a sense of myself, so I could rebuild the confidence I needed to stabilize my life. I'll be forever grateful to this program and the Bandini Foundation.



Lee Nation – US Navy

After a series of medical and personal crisis left me homeless and hopeless, I came to the WLA VA for treatment and discovered the Heroes Golf Course. After talking with the staff I was asked to join the Bandini Foundation training program and my life started to turn around. I found housing and hope for a good life, and was able to use my extensive knowledge of the crafts to make the course and clubhouse beautiful. Now I look forward to coming to the course every morning and working with my friends. Vets get it, and it's great having such a great crew and organization at my back.



Justin Ramirez – US Navy

I came to the VA Domiciliary because I was struggling to deal with everyday life. My substance usage was unhealthy and my mental health was fragile. I felt weak and broken, but after I had some time to heal I began golfing again at Heroes. Then I was invited to join the Bandini training program and it brought happiness, gratitude, and purpose back into my life. It's been incredible working at a course that I love - and that loves veterans back. It's a place of healing and peace, and I will forever be grateful knowing that the Heroes staff will always be there with open arms and warm attitudes.



Lorena Rincon – US Marine Corps

While I was volunteering at the WLA VA Hospital, my fellow on-campus vets mentioned playing golf at Heroes. I was feeling overwhelmed, so I joined the Monday veterans group and enjoyed golf so much I asked to be transferred to the Heroes course. After I was accepted I was trained as a Starter, and grew to love interacting with the golfers, and seeing how my positivity brought out the best in people, and how each veteran in the program has a mission to fulfill. The course is like a different world away from the chaos of the city; it balances you out, so you can be fully in the present moment – and it's a safe space to heal, especially for wounded warriors.



Brad Smith – US Air Force

Working this course just has to be done, and I'm here to do it for all the vets who are here, and coming after us. Thanks to the Bandini Foundation training program I've become a keeper of a magnificent resource that's here to help me and my fellow vets heal. This program has given me a deeper understanding of how a golf course can bring joy to the people who use it; taught me to master the tools to maintain it; and helps me find meaning and purpose in the work I do every day.



Bill T. Williams – US Air Force

After 13 years as a volunteer at Heroes Golf Course I've received the satisfaction of seeing hundreds of veterans coming to terms with themselves and their issues through playing, relaxing, and focusing on the game of golf. For me, the healthy companionship and understanding of my fellow vets has made all the difference in my life. I also enjoy helping them discover additional resources at the VA, Cal Vet, and other veterans support organizations, so they can get the help they need.