



Welcome Home

How you can help Colorado's soldiers readjust to civilian life.

Army lieutenant DJ Skelton woke up in a U.S. hospital four years ago to grim news: A grenade explosion during his first tour in Iraq had cost him his left eye, the roof of his mouth, and the use of his left arm. An avid rock climber, Skelton, 24, faced daunting prospects for future athletics; with grit and determination, however, he relearned climbing well enough to share his new techniques with other injured soldiers.

In 2007, Skelton cofounded Paradox Sports with fellow Boulderite and climber Timmy O'Neill, hoping to encourage post-traumatic growth for disabled veterans and civilians through reintegration with the outdoor sports community. The nonprofit is one of numerous non-military programs popping up across the Front Range to fill gaps in treatment for veterans and active-duty troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

More than 110,000 Coloradans have served in the military since 9/11, and up to 25 percent will return home with physical or mental health problems. Last year, almost 3,700 Colorado veterans sought treatment through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The cost of treating these soldiers—the

RAND Corporation estimates that care for post-traumatic stress disorder can top \$12,500 a year per person—surpasses the monies available through federal programs. That's where the private sector is stepping in. "We are a bridge between the military and civilian world," says Elizabeth Hawkins, executive director of Boulder nonprofit ONE Freedom, which, since 2006, has helped more than 3,000 veterans and their families understand the body's natural response to stress and trauma. "The military is recognizing that this issue is going to require the assistance of NGOs and nonprofits."

Most important, programs like this help raise awareness of those who have served our country, says Rick Duncan, a disabled Iraq War veteran and founder of the Colorado Veterans Alliance, an advocacy group for post-9/11 vets. "Veterans, like any other sector of the population, impact our community in many different ways," Duncan says. "The most effective way to get involved is to be aware and to know that there are veterans around you wherever you go. It's an awareness that there is a human cost paid when you go to war." —NATASHA GARDNER

Last year, almost 3,700 Colorado veterans sought treatment through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Support

Before observing Veterans Day on November 11, head to the Colorado Veterans Monument in Civic Center Park (200 E. Colfax Ave.) on November 8 at 10 a.m. for the annual **Veterans Day Parade**. Visit www.coloradoveteransmonument.org for information.

Give

Call 303-636-5705 to donate to **Operation TBI Freedom's** emergency fund, an account set up to help vets suffering from traumatic brain injuries who may be in crisis situations such as home eviction or severe depression. Or, visit www.onefreedom.org to sponsor a veteran's participation in a **ONE Freedom workshop**, where vets will learn how their bodies react to stress and trauma—and how to overcome it.

Spread the Word

People House's Veteran Reintegration Program offers affordable counseling for veterans and their families, but the group has more therapists than veterans seeking help. Pass along the number (303-480-5130) to a vet in need.

Connect

Speak up or simply listen at one of **Colorado Veterans Alliance's** open mic nights, held monthly in Denver and Colorado Springs. Visit www.coloradovets.org for upcoming events. Or, use your climbing cred to help **Paradox Sports** integrate disabled athletes into the outdoor sports community. Call 303-909-6067 or visit www.paradoxsports.org.