



Endeavors President and COO Chip Fulghum and soldiers celebrate the opening of the SSVF office in Killeen, Texas. Photo courtesy of Endeavors



# A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO HELPING VETS IN SUN CITY

Since 2017, the city of El Paso has partnered with a Texas-based nonprofit to ensure that comprehensive, effective and innovative wellness services are accessible to those who serve our country.

BY ALLISON YANG

When Lorenzo Barreras retired from the Navy, he remembers it was a time of uncertainty. “I didn’t know what to do next.”

Barreras wasn’t alone in his experience. Many service members experience challenges adjusting to life outside of the military. In Barreras’ hometown of El Paso, which is home to Fort Bliss and a large veteran population, resources and programs for veterans were plentiful, but accessing them wasn’t always easy. Paul Albright, chief military officer for the city of El Paso, knew his community could do more for those at risk of falling through the cracks.

“When we spoke to [our elected officials] about what we thought we needed to help the veteran and military community, we found we didn’t have data to support what we felt we needed,” Albright said.

To hear directly from veterans about their greatest concerns, the city of El Paso and partners launched the El Paso Veterans Needs Assessment in 2020. With nearly 2,000 respondents, the assessment found the highest needs for local veterans were claims assistance, employment assistance, mental health services, legal assistance, peer support and financial assistance. The city used these findings to adjust their strategic plan.

One of the partners in the city’s efforts was Endeavors, a nonprofit dedicated to providing relief to vulnerable people in crisis. Endeavors’ services are shaped by the six principles of the Endeavors Wellness Model: mind-body, knowledge, environmental, connectedness, economic and spiritual.



El Paso Mayor Oscar Leeser speaks to guests at the Great American Defense Communities reception, which was the topic of the June 2023 episode of the *Sun City Bliss* TV show. Army photo by David Poe

In 2017, Endeavors opened the Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic in El Paso. The clinic provides free to low-cost counseling and mental health services to active duty service members, veterans and their families both in-person and virtually.

“There was a stigma a few years back causing you to suffer in silence if you were struggling,” Albright said. “You tried to work through things quietly or you didn’t work through them at all.”

Since the Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic opened, Benjamin Miranda Jr., deputy senior director of operational business development at Endeavors, has seen the community become increasingly open to discussing mental health. “We want to ensure veterans and families are talking about mental health as if they’re talking about going to see a health care provider for shoulder pain. It should be a normal conversation for everyone and part of our day-to-day dialogue,” Miranda said.

Following the El Paso Veterans Needs Assessment, Endeavors brought Supportive Services for Veterans and their Families (SSVF) to El Paso. Funded by the Department of Veterans Affairs, SSVF assists veterans and their families at risk of or experiencing homelessness by offering homeless prevention and rapid rehousing services.

“It’s simple to give a veteran the keys to their new apartment and say, ‘congratulations and goodbye,’ but that’s not

going to be very successful,” Miranda said. “We have to ensure we’re incorporating extensive case management with veterans and connect them to additional services in the community for them to remain housed and be successful. Even after they exit our program, our case managers stay connected and ensure veterans know they can always reach out, because our goal is to ensure they don’t end up unhoused again.”

Lorenzo Barreras is one of the many veterans helped by SSVF. After the passing of his wife, Barreras struggled financially

and became unhoused. He lived in his vehicle and stayed with family members before contacting the VA for assistance. The VA connected Barreras with Endeavors, and he was assigned a case manager who got to know his needs and found him a new home.

This was only the beginning of Endeavors’ support. After finding Barreras a home, Barreras’ case manager made sure he had groceries, hygiene products and furniture. To prepare for long-term success, Barreras received financial wellness training, and he recently began seeing a therapist at the Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic.

“Endeavors will call me once a month and check up on me to see how I’m doing,” Barreras said. “Whatever I need, they’re able to help me.”

Today, Barreras is worlds away from the uncertainty he experienced when he was transitioning out of the military. The security of a reliable housing situation brings peace of mind, and he enjoys writing poetry and reading in his free time.

“I was thinking a lot of negative stuff when I was out on the street, but when I found a home, I knew there was help out there,” Barreras said. “I’m very appreciative of Endeavors. I have learned so many things from them.”

El Paso, Texas is home to one of 24 Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinics across the country. Photo courtesy of Endeavors

