



VIETNAM VETERANS AGAINST THE WAR, INC

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I cannot tell you how much I appreciate your support of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. Your contributions support military counseling, Iraq Veterans Against the War, and many other critical programs. Without your help we could never have become the strong, vital organization that we are today.

Because of your generous financial support, Vietnam Veterans Against the War has been able to offer seed money for Iraq Veterans Against the War's new ambitious Field Organizing Program.

We have made a large investment in IVAW's field organizing because we believe that only skilled, conscious and sustained organizing impels progressive movements to grow and maintain their vitality over time.

Organizing Team Leader Aaron Hughes has been on the job since July 1. The young Iraq veteran I met a few years ago was an artist who knew nothing about organizing. He is still an artist, but he has grown, not only into an outstanding organizer, but into a trainer of organizers.

In a letter expressing his appreciation of the financial support from VVAW Aaron wrote:

You have continued to believe in IVAW and the power of a veterans and GI movement. Working side by side with you during our Winter Soldier hearing and our GI organizing training has provided us with invaluable mentorship. These experiences have helped us believe we have the power to end the 'foreign adventures' in which we have served.

Since he started, Aaron has focused on establishing relationship with the 124 IVAW chapter leaders around the country, learning about the chapters' goals, needs, and the obstacles they face. At the IVAW convention in early August, he led leadership organizing skills workshops for chapter leaders, covering topics such as: how to plan and carry out a strategic campaign.

When he makes his regular calls to chapter leaders, he helps them develop their own leadership skills by teaching such basics as how to make a phone call, what to say when inviting someone to an event, or how to facilitate a meeting. He helps the local leaders set up one-on-one meetings with potential members and he will role play such a meeting with them so that the local leader is really prepared to engage and involve the person.

Some of the chapters are just in the earliest stages. For example, Aaron was in touch with two young veterans at a community college in Idaho. They want to form an IVAW chapter because they feel isolated from veterans who share their anti-war views. Aaron is helping

them figure out the first steps and he helps provide the resources they need—sometimes something as simple as IVAW t-shirts so that they can be visible to other veterans.

At a completely different level, the Active Duty chapter at Ft. Hood is supporting two members who have refused service in Afghanistan. One has just gotten out of prison and out of the military. They have a strong leader who is committed to building the chapter over the long haul. Aaron will have spent a week with them by the time you read this letter. He will be doing organizing training, particularly focusing on helping current leaders develop leadership in others so they do not have to do everything themselves. He will lead a training with chapter leaders to discuss the best way to develop a successful campaign around the issue they have chosen—stop loss (the practice of requiring soldiers to stay on active duty even when their contract says that their time is up).

"We in IVAW have never had a plan for chapter maintenance, for base building, for leadership development, for campaign development. Hopefully we are now developing in a more sustainable way," Aaron says. "We thought that we could end the war in Iraq quickly. Now we know it is a longer haul, and that even a withdrawal doesn't mean the end of the occupation. I want to be part of making a change that lasts so I don't have to be in my 50's and 60's doing this all over again when the next war comes around."

Aaron has hired two field organizers, each of whom will organize for IVAW in a different region of the country. In addition, a skilled local leader has offered to be a full-time volunteer organizer, bringing the staffing of the field organizing program up to four. I look forward to telling you more about them in my next update.

Meanwhile Vietnam Veterans Against the War's Military Counselors Ray Parrish and Hans Buwalda continue to help veterans and active duty soldiers. A year ago, Ray was contacted by Tom, the son of a Vietnam veteran. Tom's father was exposed to Agent Orange during his service. Tom learned that Agent Orange can cause genetic damage that affects children whose parents were exposed. Tom himself was very seriously disabled with seizures, liver and spleen malfunctions, and memory problems. He found Ray while looking for help on the web.

Ray gave Tom leads that enabled him to find a lawyer to represent him. Ray was particularly excited that the lawyer planned to address a widespread injustice: children of Agent Orange vets are not compensated based on their degree of disability like the vets but only receive a flat sum per month, an amount that the most severely disabled children cannot live on.

Ray also helped Tom get the VA to conduct and pay for blood tests. The tests proved to have surprising results. Tom had high levels of arsenic and mercury in his blood! Only then did Tom tell Ray that he had grown up in family housing at Camp LeJeune, housing that was built over a toxic waste dump from the 60's.

Ray is waiting to hear about the next developments. Will the lawyer obtain compensation for the exposure Tom himself had as a child? Is there potential for a class action suit on behalf of all the children who were exposed at Camp LeJeune over the years?

Johanna (Hans) is an experienced and licensed counselor who specializes in therapy with war survivors and veterans. In addition to seeing veterans with PTSD who need therapy, Hans does active outreach to veterans who have been referred to her but who have not taken the initiative to contact her. She understands how hard it can be to ask for help. It makes it easier for some vets if they have actually met her. That is why she goes to many events that veterans attend. Sometimes veterans call months later to ask for assistance for themselves or their friends.

She and Ray attended the IVAW national meeting in early in August. One IVAW chapter president told Hans about Mary, a chapter members who was interested in coming to the convention but did not think she could handle being with so many people. The chapter president was able to tell her that there would be a therapist at the convention. That made a difference to Mary and she decided to go.

Hans met with Mary the first day. Hans talked with her and told her she would be available at the convention 24/7 and had Mary program her cell phone number into her phone. With that knowledge, Mary was able to participate in the convention and did not need further support from Hans while she was there.

While Hans counsels many veterans during events and over the phone, some come to the office for counseling. One of them is Mike, who is about to deploy to Afghanistan. Mike feels very conflicted because he doesn't believe in the war, and he would like to consider applying for Conscientious Objector Status. On the other hand, he thinks he should go to support his buddies. Mike uses Hans's support to figure out what he wants to do and also to deal with the ridicule he faces when he tries to explain his opinion about the war to his buddies.

In late July, fellow National Coordinator Marty Webster and I traveled to Florida to attend the Southeast Regional Organizing and Planning Conference that Vietnam Veterans Against the War had initiated. Along with Willie Hager, the Florida VVAW contact, we met with Southeast representatives of Iraq Veterans Against the War and Veterans For Peace. We agreed to work together in the Southeast on GI Rights and Counter Recruiting, Sexual Abuse of Women in the Military, Veterans' Immigration and Citizenship Issues, PTSD Outreach, and on obtaining needed reforms in the VA. I will keep you updated on our progress

In Louisville, Vietnam Veterans Against the War and the Louisville Peace Action Community hosted a visit by Gold Star mother Cindy Sheehan, who, a few years back, confronted President Bush about the death of her son Casey. They arranged for Cindy to speak to the media, at four different universities and a grade school among other things. Kentuckiana VVAW will also be involved in demonstrations about US involvement in the war in Afghanistan this fall.

In California, the Central Coast Chapter of VVAW educated the public at street fairs in Ventura and Camarillo. They brought out such issues as the cost of war, PTSD, Traumatic Brain Injury, Agent Orange, and Saving Our Veterans' Land. Their chapter has been central to efforts to protest the transfer of land that was deeded to the sole purpose of healing veterans from the wounds of war to general use. They also created a book drive for the

library at the new local Veterans Home and collected over 900 books and 600 DVDs and video tapes.

Chicago VVAW and VFP members provided logistical help and security for a major benefit put on by Brew Not Bombs. The beer tasting and concert benefited Iraq Veterans Against the War, who received \$2000 from the well-attended event. Unfortunately our own VVAW home brewers did not win the Best Beer prize this year.

Vietnam Veterans Against the War has always supported compensation for Vietnamese and US victims of Agent Orange. This chemical was used as a defoliant in Vietnam causes cancer, diabetes, and joint problems in soldiers and civilians who were exposed. Their children may be born with serious birth defects. We have heard that John Conyers will be introducing legislation that will compensate Vietnamese victims and improve compensation for Vietnam Veterans who were exposed. We are following developments intensively and we plan to make every effort to organize for compensation. VVAW National Coordinator Marty Webster serves on the core group of Vietnam Agent Orange Relief & Responsibility Campaign.

Action Alert:

Agent Orange is no longer used. But today's troops and civilians in war zones are exposed to Depleted Uranium, which the US military used to harden its weapons for improved penetration of targets. Gulf War I veterans and civilians, and Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and civilians who are exposed to Depleted Uranium manifest chronic illnesses.

I would like to ask you to sign a petition against the use of Depleted Uranium by going to the web site of the International Coalition to Ban Uranium Weapons: http://web.bandedpleteduranium.org/campaign/?id_topic=1&id=1 and signing your name.

In closing, I want to thank you again for your support of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. We know you cannot make a financial contribution every time you receive one of my updates, **but, if you are able to make a tax deductible donation at this time, we will use it to support Iraq Veterans Against the War, to offer counseling to veterans and GIs, and to work for decent benefits for all veterans.**

Sincerely,



Barry Romo
National Coordinator

I am sending Vietnam Veterans Against the War \$35 \$50 \$100 \$250 \$500 Other to support its work for peace and for decent benefits for all veterans. Checks to VVAW are tax deductible. You can also donate online at vvaaw.org.

Name (print) _____
Address _____
City, State, Zip _____
E-Mail Address (please print clearly) _____