

The William J. Boatman Public Interest Law Fellowship

William J. (Joe) Boatman is not a lawyer. But he is a Viet Nam War Veteran. This is his story:

“I joined the US Navy in January, 1966 and spent 4 years in as a Hospital Corpsman. I spent 2 years and 8 months in Vietnam, serving both as a Combat Corpsman (medic) with the 7th Marines and aboard the USS Eldorado AGC-11. During my service I received the following awards:

- 8404 Field Service Technician designation
- Vietnam Service Medal with 5 campaign stars
- Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry
- Combat Action Ribbon
- Presidential Unit Citation
- Navy Unit Citation
- Meritorious Unit Citation
- Commendation Letter from Vietnamese Government for rescue efforts

I spent many years after the Navy in the construction and safety business after getting my degree in Management from the University of Texas in 1975. I started my involvement with volunteer work with Veterans after I retired in 1998. I became a Peer Support Specialist, through a certification program by the Veterans Administration, and lead counseling groups for the VA for people suffering the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). I also joined the Texas Association of Vietnam Veterans, serving as the Vice President, and lead efforts with support of the City of Austin’s “No Longer Homeless Program” to help end homelessness in the Veteran population in Austin. Austin, Texas is one of only about a dozen cities in the US that has essentially ended homelessness in the Veteran population. With the help of a grant from the Texas Veterans Commission, we helped a total of 86 Veterans get off the streets in 2013. Our funds were only to help 25, but with the help of other volunteers and organizations we were able to exceed our goals by over 350%. In in middle of 2013, I set up a nonprofit thrift store, The Veterans Connection, in Round Rock. We were able to keep the store going for about 3 ½ years before we had to close it. My health is not good enough for full time work, so my daughter quit her job to run the store. I worked 2 days a week. We were able to keep helping Veterans through the store’s efforts at the rate of five to ten a month, donating furniture, appliances, clothes, household items, and also acting as a source of information for Veterans who needed help with PTSD or other veteran related issues. One of the Veterans we were able to help was Mr. Richard Overton, age 110, who is the oldest living WWII veteran. During this time we associated with the Hutto American Legion in a project called the “Duffle Bag”. Through these efforts we reached out to Veterans and active duty military personnel to over 850 families and individuals.

I have served on the board of the Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 915 in Austin as a director for over 15 years. I am also the State of Texas Chair for PTSD Education and Outreach for the Vietnam Veterans of America, and represented this organization at the National Convention in Springfield, Illinois in 2012. I have directed the PTSD education efforts for the State Board of VVA for over 14 years. I am also a life member of the 1st Marine Association, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Amphibious Force Flagship Association.

With the help of my wife Jennie, who is a Masters Level Social Worker specializing in Combat related PTSD, I have helped over a dozen Veterans obtain their benefits from the VA. This consisted of many direct one on one sessions with the Veterans to not only help them with their benefits, but to also give them the support they needed to learn to cope with their condition.

I have twice testified before the State of Texas Veterans Affairs Committee on the effects of PTSD on Veterans. My testimony was part of an effort to obtain property tax abatement for 100% disabled Veterans. My efforts, and the efforts of many others, were successful and resulted in a law being passed to give these benefits to Veterans. I also served as a consultant to committee concerning the medical and Native American figure for the Texas Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, which is now on the northeast corner of the state capitol.

I learned a long time ago that you cannot save the world. But I also learned that you CAN save a part of it. I am 70 years old now, and have been a 100% disabled Veteran since 1998, but this has not slacked my desire to continue to help other Veterans. I started out care-taking Marines and Sailors in combat, and I am still helping all Veterans as best I can with whatever tools I have to work with, and I will do so, until I die.”

The William J. Boatman Public Interest Law Fellowship is awarded in hopes that the recipient will be inspired by what a dedicated war veteran like Joe Boatman has done in the public's interest as an essential part of his life, and will make a similar commitment.

William J. Boatman