

Blue Shield volunteers step up with The Salvation Army to serve those in need

Employees contribute over 300 volunteer hours during a three-day event dedicated to giving back to local communities.

After a Blue Shield California (BSC) employee volunteered at The Salvation Army San Francisco All Nations Corps, they wanted to share the meaningful experience with others.

The result? A proposal for Operation VET, Blue Shield's internal Employee Resource Group (ERG) supporting veterans and military families, to volunteer at the location. The group embraced the idea in 2024 and partnered with the All Nations Corps to assist in the food pantry and assemble heat wave kits.

"We had an overwhelmingly great response and turnout to the event," said BSC ERG Operation VET Co-Chair Leigh DaSilva. "That spurred the decision to expand this event out to all of our BSC office locations."

BSC employees volunteered at Salvation Army food pantries across the state from July 15-17, contributing more than 300 service hours to help fight food insecurity for families and veterans.





Courtesy Blue Shield of California.

As part of the company's inaugural "Give Back" event—organized by Operation VET—more than 80 employees spent a day volunteering at a Salvation Army location near their workplace, with groups in Lodi, North Highlands, Oakland, San Francisco, Glendale, Long Beach and El Cajon.

Groups unloaded donations, restocked shelves and prepared food bags and boxes for distribution.

To bring the "Give Back" event to life, DaSilva said BSC leaned on an existing relationship with The Salvation Army's divisional corporate engagement teams to facilitate connections to California Salvation Army locations and initiate planning.

Local Salvation Army teams then worked directly with Blue Shield volunteers to confirm dates, shift times and food pantry needs.

"Coming together with colleagues for this important cause is a powerful reminder of Blue Shield's commitment to making an [impact in our local communities](#) and bringing our values to life," said Ellen Sexton, BSC Executive Vice President and Chief Growth Officer.

At the San Francisco All Nations Corps, Corps Administrator Kenneth Kinman said Blue Shield's help meant regular volunteers could take a rare day off. A U.S. Army veteran himself, Kinman said Blue Shield's volunteers brought strong energy and a willingness to serve.

"They were all bouncing around, helping out wherever we needed them," he said. "They really made everything go smoothly."

Kinman said the team helped unload deliveries, assemble food bags and organize the distribution area. He remembered one volunteer, who shared her parents had once relied on a [Salvation Army food pantry](#).

"Now, she was glad to be giving back to the same network that had supported her family," Kinman said. "That really stuck with me. It wasn't about publicity. Their hearts and minds were in it."

"Our members loved this opportunity to serve. It was hands-on, local and meaningful—and that's what makes it special."

Leigh DaSilva, BSC ERG Operation VET Co-Chair

DaSilva said feedback from other sites echoed that sentiment. One Blue Shield volunteer told her it was the best service experience they'd ever had—despite being a frequent volunteer. Another said, "The Lodi event was so awesome... I even plan to go back on my own as often as I can. I didn't realize I enjoyed sorting food and stocking pantries as much as I did."

Staff at Long Beach Red Shield noticed that same spirit.

“Throughout the day, our Blue Shield volunteers brought energy, compassion and care to every task—sorting generous donations, assembling food boxes and guiding clients through their shopping experience in the main lobby,” said Long Beach Red Shield Volunteer Coordinator Jenny Santic. “Our Blue Shield team of volunteers embodied the spirit of community.”

Thanking BSC for the “tangible impact” its employees made, Santic said the Red Shield looks forward to future volunteer opportunities.

“The efforts of The Salvation Army to support our veteran community and their families align seamlessly with our company’s mission and values,” DaSilva said. “By contributing to our local food pantries, we are able to extend our commitment to healthcare in various forms, ultimately serving our community and fulfilling our mission.”



Courtesy Blue Shield of California.

Mike Roehm, BSC Vice President for Healthcare Business Operations and executive sponsor for Operation VET, said the 880 members who comprise Operation VET are committed.

“The employees in Operation VET are passionate about giving back to those who sacrificed so much for our country,” he said. “We are grateful to The Salvation Army for allowing us the opportunity to partner with them.”

From The Salvation Army’s perspective, the impact went beyond the numbers.

“Every volunteer act of community service contributes to creating positive change,” said Western Territorial Corporate Engagement Director Amy Hudson. “Thank you to Blue Shield of California for helping us deliver on vital service for our community. Together we are uplifting individuals and families and making their day just a little bit easier.”

Looking ahead, DaSilva said BSC Operation VET hopes to continue the partnership with The Salvation Army and expand its reach.

“Our members loved this opportunity to serve. It was hands-on, local and meaningful—and that’s what makes it special,” she said.

Do Good:

- Have you ever found yourself wanting to volunteer but unsure of what to do or how to go about it? Here’s the key: You can make an impact for good with whatever time and skills you have. Whatever your interest, there is a *you-sized* need for goodness in the world. [Get the guide on How To Be An Impactful Volunteer](#) with nine habits to make a difference when giving back.