

**J**OSHUA KARRASCH was close to bottom when he arrived at UC Santa Cruz in 2007.

A former Navy corpsman who spent a tour of duty treating patients in sweltering field hospitals in Kuwait, he had exactly \$5 to his name. He had just been through a divorce and had been forced to sell his house at a loss. His health was damaged by years of heavy drinking.

But the 27-year-old Karrasch had loved treating patients in the Navy—the feel of serving others and saving lives. He dreamed of becoming an emergency room doctor.

“Once you have a goal, you just have to find a path to achieve that goal,” said Karrasch, who learned the value of hard work from his disabled-veteran father.

The path led him to UCSC.

With his Navy retirement money, Karrasch bought a beat-up 23-foot travel trailer where he could live and get part-time jobs as a paramedic and a handyman. He began classes in psychology and biology, eventually choosing psychology as a major. But even though he loved the wooded campus, life as a student was still an uphill climb.

After five years in the Navy, Karrasch had a hard time relating to the 18 and 20 year olds in his classes, and money was always on his mind. The list of courses he needed to get into medical school seemed daunting too.

But like most vets, he said, he had a hard time asking for help.

Then, Karrasch discovered a UCSC program called Services for Transfer and Re-Entry Students, or STARS, which not only provided a quiet place to study, but showed him how to shave a year off school by tailoring his classes to the medical schools he wanted to attend.

He even learned he could have gotten a loan to tide him over through those first few weeks of school.

“STARS gave me a sense of family and a base of operations. It was wonderful support,” said Karrasch.

So the man who believes in helping others agreed to help STARS develop a peer-mentor program for veterans. Called Veterans Education Team Support, it pairs vets on campus with incoming service people to ease the transition to university life.

A few weeks ago, Karrasch got an e-mail from a soldier in Iraq who wanted to know what it took to go to college when he returned. Karrasch directed the soldier to financial aid and admissions officers who could get him started.

And that, he said, made him feel good.

—PEGGY TOWNSEND

## A path of Service



Students and military vets Josh Karrasch (right) and, from far left, Gordon Wong, Skye De Leo, and Muffie Cooper

### STARS helps uncommon students shine

More than 30 years ago, a group of single mothers at College Eight on the UC Santa Cruz campus got together to help each other with child care and studying.

Today, what those single moms began has turned into the **Services for Transfer and Re-Entry Students**, or STARS, program. Now, it not only provides tutoring and counseling for transfer students, single parents, and veterans, but it also helps them find housing, get financial aid, schedule classes, learn study skills, and even fit into the culture of university life.

More than 3,100 students came to the STARS program last year. But the fastest growing population the program serves now consists of veterans, according to Director Corinne Miller. Since 2004, the number of vets in the program has more than doubled from 40 to about 90 students, and that population is expected to increase as more young veterans come home from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and utilize the new G.I. Bill.

Since its founding, more than 450 donors have supported the STARS program. The UCSC Retirees Association raises funds for scholarships for student veterans and stipends for Veterans Education Team Support (VETS) peer advisers.

“We are especially relying on the support of our generous donors this year to provide stipends for VETS peer mentors, as well as other important offerings for transfer and re-entry students,” said Miller.

For information about STARS, or to contribute, contact Kathleen Hughes at (831) 459-4552 or [khughes@ucsc.edu](mailto:khughes@ucsc.edu).