

Homeless Veterans

A Resource for Establishing a Homeless Veterans Task Force

(You do not need to do everything listed, just get started. Network with other organizations and identify gaps in the “continuum” of care. Strive to not duplicate efforts being made by others.)



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GETTING STARTED

(For the Department Homeless Veteran Task Force Chairman)

Why are veterans homeless?

Begin by **understanding why** there are such a high percentage of veterans among the homeless. In addition to the complex set of factors affecting all homeless...extreme shortage of affordable housing, poverty, disability...a large number of displaced and at-risk veterans live with lingering effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and substance abuse, compounded by a lack of family and social support networks.

To better understand the issue from the homeless veteran's perspective, contact homeless veteran service providers in your area and ask them to arrange for a homeless, or formerly homeless, veteran to speak at a Department meeting.

Determine Situation in Your State

Over the last few years there has been a development of a model for communities to use to serve homeless individuals called the **“continuum of care”**. It relies on a community to coordinate services and housing for individuals so that resources can be used to the maximum efficiency. **A full continuum of care includes prevention, outreach and assessment, emergency shelter, transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, and affordable housing, plus supportive services in all components.** This model relies on multiple organizations working together providing the components in the volume needed to serve the homeless population.

Before you can start developing and implementing solutions your Homeless Veterans Task Force will need to evaluate the continuum of care for homeless veterans in your state.

Gather data from:

- ◇ The Homeless Coordinator at the VA Medical Centers in your state.
- ◇ Homeless Coalition for city, county or state.
- ◇ Local homeless service providers (housing, employment, mental health, and substance abuse).
- ◇ Police.
- ◇ Formerly homeless veterans.
- ◇ State homeless coordinator (usually appointed by Governor).
- ◇ State director for veterans' affairs.
- ◇ County veteran service officers.

To gain a broader perspective on the need, better understand all of the dimensions of the problem, and ideas for implementing a program in your area, visit or talk to other homeless veteran programs. The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans has a list of providers throughout the nation that can be used as a contact resource. Visit website www.nchv.org for listing under “Provider Network”.

From the above sources, ask the following questions:

(Getting the answers to these questions is a “major” accomplishment and the first step to being well on your way to making a difference in “your” local community.)

- ◇ How many homeless are there?
- ◇ How many of those are veterans?
- ◇ What services are currently available?
- ◇ What services are needed in order to break the cycle of homelessness?
- ◇ What are the short, medium and long range needs?
- ◇ What resources are available to provide services?
- ◇ What additional resources are needed?
- ◇ Who is involved now?
- ◇ Who could/should be involved?
- ◇ Who can we partner with who may be better equipped to respond to some of the services homeless veterans may need?

Involve Others

Select a Homeless Veteran Task Force of individuals who are interested in attacking this issue. At this stage, it is wise to select individuals that can see the big picture and the long road. Individuals that are only doers have a hard time during the development stage sitting around talking and planning. They want to be doing, not talking! Recruit to ensure that the Task Force has the skills required to make the project work!

Develop for the Task Force

- ◇ Goals and objectives for the program year.
- ◇ Develop a strategic plan that will address how the Task Force can impact ending homelessness among veterans through fundraising, volunteering and advocacy.
- ◇ Resource plan (how will you obtain the people, things, and money that you will need?)
- ◇ Budget if appropriate.

HOMELESS VETERANS FACT SHEET

(Definitions, Demographics and Estimated Numbers)

What is the definition of homeless?

PL100-77 signed into law on July 22, 1987 known as the “McKinney Act” provided a definition of homelessness that is commonly used because it controls the federal funding streams.

Excerpt from PL100-77: Sec. 11302

General definition of homeless individual

For purposes of this chapter, the term "homeless" or "homeless individual or homeless person" includes -

(1) an individual who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence; and (2) an individual who has a primary nighttime residence that is -

(A) a supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations (including welfare hotels, congregate shelters, and transitional housing for the mentally ill);

(B) an institution that provides a temporary residence for individuals intended to be institutionalized; or

(C) a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings.

Who is a veteran?

In general most organizations use the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) eligibility criteria to determine which veterans can access services. Eligibility for VA benefits is based upon discharge from active military service under other than dishonorable conditions. Benefits vary according to factors connected with type and length of military service. To see details of eligibility criteria for VA compensation and benefits view the current benefits manual at:

http://www.va.gov/OPA/vadocs/current_benefits.asp

Demographics of homeless veterans

“The Forgotten Americans-Homelessness: Programs and the People They Serve”, released December 8, 1999 by the Interagency Council on the Homeless is their National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients (NSHAPC) done in 1996. You can visit www.huduser.org and download the NSHAPC reports from there.

Veteran Specific Highlights:

- ◆ **23% of homeless population are veterans**
- ◆ 33% of male homeless population are veterans
- ◆ **47% Vietnam Era**
- ◆ 17% post Vietnam
- ◆ 15% pre Vietnam
- ◆ 67% served three or more years
- ◆ 33% stationed in war zone

- ◆ 25% have used VA Homeless Services
- ◆ 85% completed high school/GED compared to 56% of non-veterans
- ◆ 89% received Honorable Discharge
- ◆ 79% reside in central cities
- ◆ 16% reside in suburban areas
- ◆ 5% reside in rural areas
- ◆ **76% experience alcohol, drug, or mental health problems**
- ◆ 46% white males compared to 34% non-veterans
- ◆ **46% age 45 or older compared to 20% non-veterans**

Service needs:

- ◆ 45% help finding job
- ◆ 37% finding housing

How many homeless veterans are there?

Accurate numbers community-by-community is not available. Some communities do annual counts others do an estimate based on a variety of factors. Contact the closest Department of Veterans' Affairs Medical Center, Homeless Coordinator or the office of your mayor or other presiding government to get local information.

The Urban Institute in conjunction with the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients (NSHAPC) done in 1996 projected that:

During a year 2.3 - 3.5 million people are homeless in America that would then indicate by taking 23% of that range for veterans, there are 529,000 – 840,000 homeless veterans over a year

To get the full report “Helping America’s Homeless” published by The Urban Institute Press, 2001 visit www.urban.org

ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

(To Support the Continuum of Care Model)

Included here are some suggestions to involve the AMVETS Family in the homeless veteran programs through volunteering, fundraising and advocacy. There are limitless opportunities and we recommend that you consult with the local homeless veteran service providers to tailor your local efforts to the needs of the specific community.

Volunteering

Publicize, through your newsletter or bulletin board, a list of local service providers who need volunteers for a few hours a week or month. On your list include soup kitchens, shelters, transitional and permanent housing programs, VA Medical Centers and Vet Centers.

Prevention

Establish an emergency fund that can be used to pay rent, utilities, food, car repair or a variety of items for individuals or families to keep them from becoming homeless. Make sure there is a fast track approval process as most of these situations are within a critical period.

Outreach and Assessment

Participate in the nearest Stand Down for homeless veterans. A Stand Down is a 2- to 3-day outreach event that gives homeless veterans and their families a secure place to receive nutritious meals, health care, clothing, legal assistance and a wide range of other information and supportive services.

A Stand Down is not a solution to homelessness...it is an opportunity to create an atmosphere conducive to change and recovery. It takes hundreds of caring people and organizations to host a Stand Down. To learn about current Stand Downs, dates and locations, visit www.nchv.org.

Emergency Shelter

Provide personal care items (shampoo, soap, shaving items, disposable towlettes, etc.) clothing (new underwear, socks, t-shirts are always needed), food, meals, etc.

Transitional Housing

Life Skills - Veterans often stay in transitional housing for up to two years in order to have the time to address and manage the issues that contributed to their homelessness. Re-learning life skills is often a critical component which includes things like: managing money, balancing a check book, learning to shop, developing cooking skills, learning how to interact socially, computer skills, resume writing and a range of other skills. **Volunteers can often provide assistance in helping veterans learn these skills.**

Field Trips – Organize taking group fishing, to a sporting event, to church, museums, concerts, movies, etc.

Legal Assistance – Veterans have often incurred legal issues prior to and since becoming homeless that often can be resolved by having some legal advice and representation.

Counseling – If you have members that have a professional background in mental health or substance abuse counseling these services are always needed. Many veterans reunite with their families during this part of the transition process and need counseling on family dynamics and parenting skills.

Supportive Permanent Housing

This type of housing is for those veterans that have conditions that will best be managed with housing that includes a variety of supportive services that provide case management and oversight of the veterans. This usually includes those with mental health disorders and physical disabilities that limit their independence.

Discuss volunteer opportunities with the organization managing the facility.

Affordable Housing

Moving - When veterans transition to independent living they often need assistance with moving and furnishing their new home. Housewarming parties to provide those items and assistance with decorating can all be opportunities for the entire AMVETS Family to participate.

Child Care – If veterans have children living with them they often cannot afford childcare that is essential if they are working. There are members of the AMVETS Family that would enjoy providing this critically needed service.

Burial Programs

There has been an increasing awareness that veterans often die as indigents and unrecognized for their military service. Several programs have been developed over the last few years that work with local medical examiners, hospitals, and mortuaries to identify veterans and provide a proper military burial. This may be an issue that needs attention in your state.

ADVOCACY

Encourage Participation in Local Homeless Coalitions

Develop partnerships that will assist meeting the needs of the homeless veteran population within the homeless community. Often local coalitions assign or influence the assignment of priorities for government funds. If you are not at the table, veterans will be less likely to receive a share.

Register Homeless Veterans to Vote

Get in touch with existing voter registration efforts and let them know you are interested in registering homeless veterans.

Contact Your Elected Representatives...

Elected representatives (local/state/US) want to hear from people in their districts about issues voters support. Effective ways of communicating with your legislators include visiting them in person and writing letters.

- ◇ See the AMVETS website www.amvets.org and the National Coalition for Homeless Veteran' website for current legislative issues concerning homeless veterans:
www.nchv.org
- ◇ Invite elected officials and political candidates to speak before your Department. Invite other VSOs to participate in the forum. Discuss opportunities to work together on efforts to end homelessness among veterans.
- ◇ The importance of a well-written, personalized letter should never be underestimated **and the CapWiz feature from our AMVETS website "homepage," is your link to Capitol Hill.**

Effective letter writing tips...

- ◇ **Let your legislator know that you are a constituent.** Legislators respond best to letters from voters in their districts. Include your address.
- ◇ **Get to the point.** The best letters are short, well organized and to the point. Include personal or local facts.
- ◇ **Tell elected officials what you want them to do.** Don't be shy; elected officials are in the business of serving you. Request a response.
- ◇ **Write to other key legislative members** on the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committees.

Multiplying Your Efforts by Using the News Media...

When you have your project selected, **use the news media** to reach as many people as possible. Send your message to your local newspaper as a Letter to the Editor, telephone a radio call-in show, or make public announcements at local civic gatherings.

STARTING A HOMELESS VETERAN PROGRAM

(For the brave and committed)

If your Department/District/Post/Auxiliary/Squadron wants to start its own program for homeless veterans because one does not exist or more are needed, you need to thoroughly investigate and develop a detailed plan before making the final decision. Look for partnership opportunities before starting a new program from the ground up.

Determine Need

Gather data from:

- ◇ The Homeless Coordinator at the VA Medical Center nearest you.
- ◇ Homeless Coalition for city, county or state.
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- ◇ What resources are available to us?
- ◇ What additional resources are needed?
- ◇ Who is involved now?
- ◇ Who could/should be involved?
- ◇ What limitations can we expect on our ability to establish a program (i.e. zoning, community opposition, etc?)
- ◇ How can we cope with community resistance?
- ◇ Can we partner with social service providers who may be better equipped to respond to some of the services homeless veterans may need?

Involve Others

Select an organizing committee of individuals who are interested in attacking this issue. At this stage, it is wise to select individuals that can see the big picture and the long road. Individuals that are doers have a hard time during the development stage sitting around talking and planning. They want to be doing, not talking!

Consider the mix of skills required: site selection, organizing and planning, public relations/education, handling finances and legal paperwork, fundraising and resource development, and working directly with homeless people, some of who may suffer from serious physical, psychiatric, or substance abuse problems. Recruit to ensure that the organizing committee has the skills required to make the project work!

Take this test:

- ◇ Is there enough commitment to making the plan work? This is especially important because initial enthusiasm may not endure long enough to see the project through.
- ◇ What is the scope of service participants are willing to commit to and able to provide?
- ◇ Is there access to enough resources to make the plan work? Do we know how to compete for resources?
- ◇ Is your plan meeting the needs of the homeless veterans within your community?

Develop

- ◇ Mission: what will you do?
- ◇ Goals and objectives
- ◇ Business plan
- ◇ Resource plan (how will you obtain the people, things, and money that you will need)
- ◇ Budget
- ◇ Bylaws
- ◇ Program guidelines

Learn About Nonprofit Organization Management

Board of Directors

- ◇ Risks, responsibilities, recruitment, demographics, tenure, and client representation
- ◇ Committee structure and tenure
- ◇ Executive committee

Financial Management

- ◇ Restricted funds versus unrestricted funds
- ◇ IRS 990 filing requirements
- ◇ Charitable solicitation requirements
- ◇ Director and officer liability insurance

Apply for a 501(c)3 IRS tax-exempt status

Obtaining 501(c)3 status from the federal government gives the organization access to grants from the federal and state governments, and from private and corporate foundations. AMVETS is a 501(c)19 organization so you will need to form a separate corporation if you want to access Federal and foundation grants.

It takes 2-6 months after filling out an application to receive a ruling from the IRS. You must have a mission, business plan, budget, bylaws, and a board of directors completed before applying.

Each state has different requirements to become a nonprofit organization. Check with these requirements prior to completing the IRS application.

Participate in Local Homeless Coalitions

Develop partnerships that will assist meeting the needs of the homeless veteran population within the homeless community. Often local coalitions assign or influence the assignment of priorities for government funds. If you are not at the table, you will be less likely to receive a share.

Develop a Public Education and Marketing Campaign

Brochures or one-piece information “fact sheets” are helpful when educating or requesting investments from the community. Make sure they look professional and answer basic who, what, where, why, when, and how questions.

Prepare several individuals to be speakers for the organization. Educating the community often happens at organization meetings, and you need a representative who can address an audience and gain their support.

Fundraising

Suggest the Department/District/Post/Auxiliary/Squadron donate a percentage of their budget, or proceeds from a special event to your local homeless veteran provider each year.

Work with local houses of worship to remember homeless veterans through a special collection, perhaps around Veterans Day.

Encourage youth groups to hold special events to raise funds for local homeless veteran services.

Additional Resources

The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans has several brochures on nonprofit and homeless veteran topics that you may find helpful, including *Forming a Nonprofit Organization* and *Organization Planning*.

Board Source is an excellent nonprofit governance resource. Call 1-800-883-6262 or visit www.boardsource.org.

National Council for Nonprofit Associations. Most states have nonprofit associations that provide technical assistance to nonprofits. Call 1-202-833-5740 for your nearest association or visit www.nca.org.

A.H. Wilder Foundation Publishing Center has a wide variety of topics for nonprofits. Call 1-800-274-6024 for catalog or visit www.wilder.org.

Jossey-Bass Publishers has a variety of topics for nonprofits. Visit their Website to view their publication selection: www.josseybass.com.

The **Society for Nonprofit Organizations** publishes *Nonprofit World* bi-monthly. Call 1-800-424-7367 or visit www.danenet.org/snpo.

Placemakers: A Guide to Developing Housing for Homeless People published by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Call 1-800-998-9999 (Community Connections) or visit www.hud.gov/cpd/cont/perm.html.

Libraries and bookstores have books on nonprofit management and related topics.

Community Connections is the Information Center for HUD's Office of Community Planning and Development and is a very useful clearing-house of information on model programs, affordable housing initiatives, funding, training and conferences, technical assistance providers, and other topics. Call 1-800-998-9999 or visit www.comcon.org.

The Alliance for Nonprofit Management allows you to search for an assistance provider among their members in your area. Areas of assistance include marketing, governance, human resources, and many others. You can also subscribe to their free online newsletter. Call 202-955-8406 or visit www.allianceonline.org.

Government websites for HUD (www.hud.gov), HHS (www.hhs.gov), DOL (www.dol.gov) and the VA (www.va.gov) provide useful information on federal government resources and programs available to veterans and organizations supporting them.

A Final Note

In addition to management and board development, your ability to obtain resources will be critical to your success. The government websites mentioned above will provide information on participating in federally funded programs. The Foundation Center (www.fdncenter.org) is a good place to start your research on sources of community and foundation funding. In addition, the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans produces brochures on *Grantseeking* and *Fundraising*.

RESOURCES

National Coalition for Homeless Veterans

800-VET-HELP or visit www.nchv.org

National Alliance to End Homelessness

202-638-1526 or visit www.naeh.org

National Coalition for the Homeless

202-737-6444 or visit www.nationalhomeless.org

National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty

202-638-2535 or visit www.nlchp.org

National Low Income Housing Coalition

202-1530 or visit www.nlihc.org

Department of Veterans Affairs

www.va.gov

Veterans Benefits 800-827-1000

Homeless Veteran Initiatives 202-273-5774

National Center for Women Veterans 202-273-6193

National Center for PTSD 800-296-6300

Department of Housing and Urban Development

Veteran Resource Center 800-998-9999 or visit www.hud.gov

HUDUSER www.huduser.org

Department of Labor

Veterans Employment and Training Service

202-693-4700 or visit www.dol.gov/vets

Small Business Administration.

Veterans Affairs 202-205-6773 or visit www.sba.gov/vets