

Best Practices for Helping Our Homeless Veterans



They sleep under bridges and hide in vacant door ways

We once armed them and told them to:

Defend Us.

Once home they became:

Homeless and Defenseless

Our Government's Response:

We're waging new wars

And you're no longer needed.

You can make our day by

moving out of our way

Why Have a Homeless Veterans Work Group?

The homeless situation continues to worsen in the United States. Approximately 30% of all homeless are veterans. More soldiers are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and many of them are suffering from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain damage (TBD) alcoholism, moral fatigue, drug abuse and depression. In most cases these maladies are artifacts from the horrific events they witnessed during their tour of duty.

As a result, many will not be able to cope with civilian every day life situations such as the stress of the workplace and as result will wind up homeless and in an environment that could cause them to run afoul of the justice system.

As an organization one of our goals is to:

“Seek justice for veterans and victims of war”.

Our homeless veterans are victims of war and as such it requires the full support of our membership and the community at large.

This will be the work of the homeless veterans work group (HVWG)

Our Mission Statement Follows:

Mission:

To act as a vehicle in aiding all the chapters of Veterans for peace, by providing tools that can be used to help homeless veterans and their families.

Our work group will be the repository for various “Best Practices” (proven ways to help the homeless) These Best Practices, gathered from various chapters throughout the United States, have already been proven to help the homeless.

Bottom line, it will enable any chapter in the United States to adopt one or more of these Best Practices and put them into play in their cities.

The following pages provide you with a listing of “Best Practices”. Please feel free to review them and select a practice(s) that you believe that you and your chapter/organization can institute in your city. Keep in mind that although we have provided you with details concerning the “Best Practices”, you might still need some additional guidance. Feel free to contact the person who created the “Best Practice” and he/she will provide you with additional information that you may need to successfully launch a program in your chapter and city.

Please keep us informed on how successful you were in your efforts and inform us of any ideas on how we can improve the process of communicating these “Best Practices”.

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1. Distribution of Sleeping Bags to the Homeless Veterans

(July 30, 2011)

Source: Veterans for Peace, San Diego Chapter

Contact: Jack Doxey, San Diego, CA Chapter #91

Phone: 858-735-8468

Email: doxeyassoc@san.vp.com

Brief History:

The city of San Diego has a population of 9,000 homeless people of which approximately 30% are veterans. The situation is critical and with more troops coming home the situation can only get worse.

In September of 2010, our chapter began a project entitled “Compassion. Campaign” The purpose of the campaign is to provide a sleeping bag, rain poncho and stuff sack to each homeless veteran in need. To date, we have raised approximately \$50,000.00 and distributed over 2000 sleeping bags, ponchos and stuff sacks

The work has been extremely gratifying and the homeless are very appreciative. Many of them have only a thin piece of cardboard between them and the pavement when settling down for the evening. Our work certainly will not solve the homeless problem in San Diego but it will give some comfort to the forgotten when they attempt to get a little sleep.

Keep in mind that generally speaking the climate in San Diego is warm however we do live in a semi desert area and the nights can get quite cold. Can you imagine the plight of the homeless in such cold cities such as Chicago and Detroit and how a warm sleeping bag would be a God Send?

We saw the need in our city, and the “Compassion Campaign” (sleeping bag distribution) was initiated. I sincerely hope that if other chapters of VFP find the same need in their city that they consider adopting their own form of “Compassion Campaign.” Using the ideas and process outlined below you should be able to get started. Each city is different with perhaps unique challenges that you will learn as you continue your work.

The Process:

1. Obtain general consensus from your chapter that this is a project that you want to take on and that the commitment/support of the chapter is behind you.
2. Establish a team of 3 to 4 members who will constitute your working group. Elect a "Leader". Quite often this job defaults to the member who initiated the idea.
3. Seek volunteers for the following Jobs:

Media Person:

This member will be responsible for making sure that your efforts can receive full publicity in the newspapers, television and other forms of media. This is most important because it will generate interest and will cause you to obtain cash contributions for the further purchase of sleeping bags.

Purchasing Agent:

This person will have the responsibility to purchase the sleeping bags, ponchos and stuff sacks. Collect enough money to purchase anywhere from 50 to 100 units and competitively bid out the purchase in order to get the best price. Inform the suppliers of what you are attempting to do and you will be surprised at the positive response from the manufacturers. In most cases they will give you an additional discount

(See exhibit A below for a listing of the type bags, ponchos and stuff sacks that we buy and the cost for each)

Distribution Coordinator:

This person will be responsible to oversee the actual distribution of the sleeping bags. It will require that he/she check out the location(s) where the homeless bed down each night and map the route that you will take in making the actual distribution.

Pre-Distribution Meeting:

Have a meeting the actual night of the distribution (just prior to the actual distribution) and go over the details of how you intend to carry out the distribution. Answer any questions that your helpers have.

Make sure that they understand some of the dos and don'ts especially the safety aspects when traveling to the site and when actually meeting with the homeless

Some Precautions:

The gear can get bulky and you will need at least two or three vehicles to transport it. Do not use too many vehicles because it can get dangerous trying to stay up with each other. It might require that you break your route up into two routes and each team go about distributing the bags.

Don't carry large quantities of sleeping bags into the homeless area. First scout out the area and determine who truly needs a bag. Some homeless unfortunately will see an opportunity to get these bags and sell them to others for money. As best you can, determine who truly has a need and then go back to your car and take out just enough bags to satisfy the immediate need. If you show up with a whole lot of bags the homeless might overwhelm you and you will wind up with a bad situation.

After the initial distribution have an informal debriefing meeting and discuss what went well and what the group could have done differently.

I haven't covered everything but hopefully it will give you a good "kick start" in getting your project off the ground.

I have provided you with contact information (my phone numbers and email address so that you can get further help. If I don't have the answers I will put you in touch with someone that will be able to help.

Please see Exhibit A on next page entitled "Procurement Information" for information on where to buy the ponchos and sleeping bags.

Exhibit A
Procurement Information
(As of July 4, 2011)

1. Sleeping Bags:

Coleman brand, Biscayne model, adult regular up to 6 feet, 4 inches, 39inch by 81 inch. It is cold weather rated down to 40 degrees

Cost per bag: (includes tax and shipping) \$26.50 each

2. Rain Poncho:

Coleman brand, adult EVA uniblue vinyl. \$5.10 each

3. Stuff Sack:

Coleman, Nylon Utility bag, 14 by 30 \$2.75 each

Note: Our current source is Coleman Factory Outlet, 5050 Factory Shop Blvd., Suite #845, Castle Rock, Colorado, 80104. 303-660-4094. Doug Mochel is the current representative. We often have to accept other Coleman bags, if the Biscayne is not available, but we prefer it because it is large and 100% polyester and dries out well when wet.

2. Providing Female Veterans with Ongoing Support to Acquire and Maintain Permanent Housing

(August 10, 2011)

Source: Amikas, P O box 711194, San Diego, CA 92171-1194

Contact: Jeeni Cricenzo del Rio, Executive Director, Amikas

Phone: 619-822-2782 Cell: 760-525-1915

Email: www.amikas.org

Brief History:

Amikas is a fairly new organization that was formed to address the growing economic disparity we see in San Diego resulting in more and more of our fellow human beings without a place to live, food and their most basic needs, including need to earn a living. We don't need any more studies and surveys; you only have to open your eyes to see there is a need.

We have been working with Veterans for Peace and Girls Think Tank, and we are participating in the Task Force for Homeless Women and recently MAPSS. Four of our board members are veterans, including Maurice Martin who was himself homeless at the time we began our organization. Maurice and I came up with the idea of shared housing as a way of helping veterans that have some income but not enough to afford San Diego's rent.

We decided to start our own program for female veterans with or without children. We realize that many women leaving the military need help making that transition to civilian life. Not only are they dealing with possible mental health issues, such as post traumatic stress disorder but many are missing that team support that they had in the military. Many need help learning the skills needed to function in the civilian world. , especially in light of our current situation of high unemployment and cut backs in social safety nets. So we teamed up with Able –Disabled Advocacy and Bayside Community Services so that we can provide our clients with the case management and life skills training they need.

Now we are reaching out to property owners and landlords to identify and negotiate for rentals where each woman will have her own lease, security deposits can be reduced and

Credit checks can be eliminated in lieu of being part of the Amikas program. We are doing all of this at this time without any funds.

The Process:

1. Increase affordable housing Inventory by: Negotiating with banks and landlord to rent two bedroom single family homes to female veteran families in the “Ad Up” house sharing program. Reach out to struggling families who can afford their mortgage if they can take in a female veteran border. Outreach to seniors and disabled homeowners willing to share their home with a female veteran.
2. Provide case workers who will assist female veterans with necessary guidance and support needed to achieve housing stability.
3. Assist clients in getting services and financial assistance from VA, California, and San Diego County and City programs so they can afford rent and living expenses over the long term without relying on housing vouchers.
4. Match clients and their children as housemates and with house sharing options and negotiate lease, security deposits and credit check with landlord.
5. Provide Volunteer Housing Navigator to assist clients in every step of the rental and moving process
6. Assist housemates in getting household furnishings, kitchen and cooking items, bedding etc.
7. Provide education in civilian life skills, budgeting, housekeeping, conflict management, food preparation, health safety and hygiene.
8. Provide training to find a job, including job search and interview strategies.
9. Provide support to help overcome barriers to employment such as transportation, child care, etc.

3. Visiting Our Congressional Representatives

(November 9, 2011)

Source: Veterans for Peace, San Diego Chapter

Contact; Jack Doxey

Phone: Cell: 858-735-8468

Home Phone: 858-592-0667

Email: doxeyassoc@san.rr.com

Brief History:

Approximately 8 years ago, The San Diego Chapter of Veterans for Peace established a goal of meeting with their congressional representatives and soliciting their help on issues relating to active military personnel and veterans, with an emphasis on both male and female homeless military personnel.

From our experience of interacting with our five congress people, we came away with an overriding conclusion that you must have an extra amount of tenacity in order to get an audience with them. We have five congress people in the county of San Diego and Imperial County and we do have some that are very accommodating. But for the most part, they attempt to avoid you because they are "busy elsewhere." My thought is what can be more important than meeting with your constituents.

A lesson we learned is that it is not enough to just make a presentation when meeting with them. What we should require from our representatives is that they take action on our requests. Put another way, we want deliverables from them.

Typically they will give you one-half hour for the meeting. That is not a lot of time so I caution you not to try to cover too many subjects. Narrow it down to two of the most important issues and absolutely no more than three. This way you will have the luxury of expanding on each of the subjects.

Keep in mind that in many cases you will have to repeatedly email and call them to get an appointment. In some cases, we actually picketed their office and embarrassed them into meeting with us.

I hope I didn't make the experience sound impossible. It is not but it does take a lot of tenacity to get an appointment so when you do pin them down and you get a date for a meeting do your homework and come prepared to make it productive for you and hopefully the congress person as well.

The Process:

1. First, get a firm commitment from your chapter or organization that the members will support all the effort required to interact with your congressional representatives. If the support is there than proceed to the following steps:
2. Create a complete, accurate listing of all the congressional representatives for your city/county. For example in San Diego we have a total of five congressional representatives. Information to include in the listing is such things as the Washington DC office address and all the staff that report to the congress person. Make sure that the spelling of the names is accurate. Include their titles and get to know the staff so that you can freely communicate with them. Make the same type listing for the local office and include telephone numbers and email and fax numbers. It is important that the information is periodically updated so that you have the ability to contact the right person at the right time.
3. Set a goal as to how often you want to visit your congress people. For example, we meet at least once a year with each of our Representatives.
4. Contact your first representative and make an appointment to visit with them. Determine how much time they will allocate to you. Typically it is one half hour to forty five minutes.
5. Develop an agenda and include in the agenda the deliverables you want from your representative. It is not enough to simply provide your opinion on a subject and then leave. We should indicate the importance of the issue and than specifically tell them what action you want them to take.
6. Follow up with a thank you letter and indicate that you will follow up with them to determine what action they have taken. In most cases they will “blow you off” and not respond to your calls or emails. You must be persistent and let them know that you will not go away until they give you a decision regarding your requests.

Congressional Checklist:

1. Research their voting record and come prepared to discuss those areas that concern you.
2. Narrow the discussion down to one or two topics.
3. Leave the congress people with what I call leave behind material. It should further explain the points that you made at the meeting and state what specifically you want them to do.
4. Make every attempt to keep the environment cordial. No sense making enemies.
5. Have a written agenda and list all attendees, both your organization and the congress person and his staff.
6. Those members assigned to speak should display brevity. Encourage them to practice before the actual meeting to ensure that they don't go over their allotted time.
7. Encourage feedback. Don't allow the congress person or his staff to go mute.
8. Keep the verbiage and visual aids down to a minimum.

I wish you success in your efforts to meet with your representatives. Keep in mind that they work for us rather than us working for them. Be persistent because most of them unfortunately are representing "other interests" and most often their interests do not match your needs and expectation.

If you need further information, contact Jack Doxey at the information provided at the top of this "*Best Practice.*"

4. Helpful Guidance When Working With Homeless Veterans

(April 1, 2013)

Source: Veterans for Peace, San Diego Chapter #91

Contact; Maurice Martin, Vice President, San Diego Chapter #91

Phone: 619-279-8665

Email: mauricemartin357@yahoo.com

Brief History:

The federal government has put a “stake in the ground” and set an ambitious goal to end all veteran homelessness in the United States by the year 2015. This is definitely a “stretch” goal.

We have to be practical when approaching this issue. Our first order of business is to educate both ourselves and the community at large on what should be our first steps. We witness, everyday, policy makers, service providers, faith based organizations make decisions based on assumptions about what the homeless needs are. Many times the assumption are wrong and the homeless have to live with these mistakes.

Making assumptions in our work is not practicing “Best Practices”. Our job is to make sure we have a good guide book, a good road map. Our work group’s Mission and Vision is a good start.

The Process:

Prior to launching any efforts to help the homeless veterans we should always ask the following vitally important questions:

1. Who Are My Customers?

It might seem like a rather simplistic question but many times we start off knowing but at a later date we stray and we forget who we are serving and as a result do a disservice to the homeless veterans. Our mission statement is quite explicit as to who is our customers are. It is the homeless veterans residing in the chapter cities we serve throughout the United States.

2. What Are Their Needs and Expectations?

The first order of business is to stop talking and start listening. How can we possibly know what the homeless need if we don't listen to them? When I say listen I mean *naive listening*. By *naive listening* I mean listening with no pre conceived ideas as to what the homeless need. I mean truly listening to find out what their needs are and I emphasize "*their needs*".

3. What Activities/Processes Do We Have To Meet Their Needs?

Perhaps we already have processes or activities already available in our chapter cities that we can directly put into place to satisfy their need. For example in the city of San Diego there was a need for warmth during the cold months in San Diego. Yes, San Diego, is a lot warmer than other cities but never the less it is a semi desert area and the nights can get quite cold. Chapter 91 went about providing sleeping bags and thus far have distributed over 1600 sleeping bags to the homeless in downtown San Diego. Does it eliminate homelessness? No it does not, but it does satisfy an immediate need for the homeless.

If you do not have the activities or processes to satisfy their need than look toward either creating them or consult the "Best Practices" listed on the national web site and see if one of the Best Practices match the need that exists in your city.

Bottom line, your enthusiasm for helping the homeless veterans coupled with due diligence in truly determining their needs and expectations will go a long way in making your endeavors for the homeless pay off.

Lastly, our efforts are to always work on promoting solutions in the area of more accessible and affordable housing locally, pushing for state support of housing programs, and advocating for more national housing resources.

5. Allocation of Money Grants to Homeless Veterans

(April 18, 2013)

Source: Veterans for Peace, Asheville Chapter 099

Contact: John Spitzberg, Past President, Chapter 099

Phone: 828-230-6902

Email: jspitzberg227@aol.com

Brief History:

Chapter 099 has authorized a line item in the budget for use for homeless veterans in need of financial help from time to time. There are anywhere from 200 to 300 veterans living at a converted motel which is called the “Veterans Restorative Center”. This facility is funded and managed by the Veterans Administration hospital and the Asheville, Buncombe County Christian Ministry. However the project is for men only. Women who are homeless veterans are housed in another program. From time to time a veteran falls between the cracks and winds up on the street. It is for these people that this Best Practice is directed.

In Asheville there is a non for profit organization called “Asheville Homeless Network” (AHN) which is administered by the homeless, formerly homeless and allies. This organization has paired with chapter 099 and will give a veteran in need up to \$50.00. The membership will grant the person up to \$50.00 for emergencies such as filling a prescription, providing a sleeping bag, tent etc. Some of the veterans that have asked for a personal grant may be unable to use the VA services due to a discharge not honored by the government.

The Process:

1. AHN holds meetings evry Thursday. Any homeless person can ask the membership for a grant of up to 50.00. The membership reviews the request, and grants the person up to \$50.00 for what is needed. A check is written.
2. The treasure of Chapter 099 is notified and a check will be sent to AHN. The chapter is authorized to do this no more than once per month.

Some Precautions:

It is important to verify the need and check their dd 214 to be sure that only homeless veterans are involved. It is also advisable that, to the extent possswible, the veteran is given any help to meet the emergency. This might mean helping the veteran to link with veteran's counselor to help examine the discharge for upgrading, taking the veterans to the pharmacy etc.

AHN hopes to combine with the local chapter of the VFP to act as an ombudsman or advocate for the homeless veterans. For instance AHN is aware that in Asheville there have been no vouchers for the Hud/Vash program for several months. This is of great concern because homeless veterans can not make use of this fine program.

Final Consideration:

The Best Practice is to link with an agency or organization which focuses on the homeless in general such as the Ashville Homeless Network (AHN). A liaison with such an agency can produce an agreement such as the one between AHN and VFP to handle emergencies.

In general this is a gap filling design where agencies have not been effective in meeting the need. Also when a government agency such as the Veterans Administration has a problem with getting vouchers for housing, it is imperative that an advocacy group be available. Possibly Veterans for Peace can fill that gap.

6. Veteran Drug Court Mentoring

(May 14, 2013)

Source: Veterans for Peace, Chapter # 61-St Louis Mo.

Contact: Woody Powell

Phone: 636-393-9603

Email: woodypowell@gamil.com

Brief History:

I encountered this program while at a planning meeting for the local “Stand Down”. I presented my self to a VFW member who was a mentor-coordinator. I eventfully became a mentor coordinator myself.

We mentor veterans going through a recovery process intended to keep people out of prison so long as they meet certain conditions and work on their sobriety. Our particular program features veteran mentors who are themselves in recovery, so we have two points of commonality with our clients.

The Process:

One of our clients suffers from severe arthritis in his hands and cannot hold a pen for very long. The judge suggested he talk to a mentor about getting a computer so he could write using a keyboard. The VFP office happened to have a retired computer which we donated. That set up conversations with other vets in the program about the need for basic computer skills to effectively enter the job market. One graduate of the vet court became quite excited about the concept and offered to manage the project. We obtained free space from a local “not for profit” that had participated in the Stand Down. We received further help from one of our members who worked for the city of St. Louis. He joined us because of our work in the Stand Down. (See story below)

Our web site: <http://www.vetcourtcomputerclinic.org/>

7. Stand Down

(May 14, 2013)

Source; Veterans for Peace, Chapter 61, St Louis Mo.

Contact: Woody Powell

Phone Number: 636-393-9603

Email: woodypowell@gmail.com

Brief History:

Homeless vets abound in our city, the city of St. Louis Mo. Our chapter saw this situation as an opportunity to serve one aspect of our statement of purpose, namely “to seek justice for veterans and victims of war”. We injected ourselves into the mainstream of community activities.

The Process:

We simply volunteered to help and joined with a number of other organizations. Over time, we (Veterans for Peace) attracted members from some of these organizations and eventually became a major part of the process. We hold two major “Stand Downs” per year, one in the spring and one in the fall.

We have also expanded our activities to work specifically with women in a twice per year “Stand Up”. We work with essentially the same groups. We have earned the respect and support of even active duty military through these activities.

Pitfalls to Avoid:

Do not proselytize your issues/organization up front. In time we were invited to table at these events but only after earning respect for our many contributions.

Available Resources:

National Coalition for Homeless Veterans -- www.nchv.org

8. Veterans Court Computer Clinic

(May 14, 2013)

Source: Veterans for Peace Chapter 61, St Louis Mo.

Contact: Woody Powell

Phone: 636-393-9603

Email: woodypowell@gmail.com

Brief History:

“Veterans Court Mentoring” in St. Louis has moved to a new level with the introduction of a computer clinic designed to assist veterans and other victims of a shattered economy to prepare themselves for employment in an increasingly sophisticated work environment.

Veterans helping veterans is a key factor in the vet court program which keeps veterans, many of whom suffer from PTSD, out of prison through a program of personal recovery. Key element of the Vet Court process is mentoring by other veterans, themselves in recovery.

Co-sponsoring the enterprise with Veterans for Peace and the St. Louis Veterans Court under Commissioner James E Sullivan is the “Employment Connections”, a non profit of 25 years standing, providing employment services of many kinds to people released from the prison system, such as veterans and others needing help? It has gifted the clinic with space and internet/telephone access.

Donations by the St Louis Post Dispatch and Applied Logic Inc., a St. Louis based medical inventory software provider, have given us a foundation of thirteen working computers

The Process:

At present, classes in basic computer skills, conducted by vet court volunteer Kennedy Davis have been set up for mornings (Mondays thru Thursday). He is assisted by a volunteer instructor from the Harris Stowe College who can cover several aspects of job hunting and career building in addition to basic computer skill building.

The program needs more support from the community it serves in term of money to be used for basic supplies and computers or in kind donations, such as tables for additional workbenches.

To follow up on this story, call Woody Powell at 636-271-1312 or 636-393-9603

Pitfall to Avoid:

Trying to manage these people's lives. It is best to be there for them lending an ear or a shoulder but not a handout.

Available Resources;

Contact: <http://www.nadcp.org/ndcp-hoe/>

9. VFP Chapter Advocacy for Homeless Veterans

(May 22, 2013)

Source: VFP Chapter 099, Asheville North Carolina

Contact: John Spitzberg, member of Chapter 099

Telephone: 828-230-6902

Email: jspitzb227@aol.com

Brief History:

The Veterans Administration in Asheville North Carolina has a unit dedicated to helping homeless veterans. Part of their program deals with housing. The Housing and Urban Development/Veterans Administration Supportive Housing (HUD/VASH) unit has from time to time experienced a lack of vouchers for the homeless. Without these vouchers the homeless veteran is not able to get housing through the HUD office.

Additionally, homeless veterans may not know how to access organizations and /or agencies to help them. What can happen is that the veteran can “fall through the cracks”. A chapter interested in helping the homeless veterans may wish to create an advocacy arm to its chapter dedicated to filling this gap.

The Process:

Each chapter elects a member or two to form a homeless veterans committee. In turn one or more people would become the advocacy point person. He/she would make a list of all agencies/organizations tasked with working with the homeless veterans. They would then make appointments to meet with the program leaders to inform them of VFP mission statement as it relates to the homeless veterans. An agreement to work together and fill in gaps of service would be the goal. When there is a breakdown in services provided by agencies such as the VA, the chapter committee would consult with the agency to see whether they could be of help and to advocate for the homeless veteran

Some Precautions:

VFP should not be viewed as an oversight committee but rather a dedicated group helping to promote the welfare of the homeless veteran. It is also important to remember to help the homeless “help themselves” as opposed to doing it for them.

Some Final Considerations:

Each chapter should define its mission for itself based on the issues presented to them. The nature of this “Best Practice” involves filling in the gaps, working with other agencies wherever possible, and always working for the benefit of the homeless veteran.

10. “The Mission Continues”

(July 27, 2013)

Source: The Mission Continues Project

Contact: Meredith Knopp, Vice President of Programs

Phone: 314-588- 8805

Fax: 314-571-6227

Web Page: <http://missioncontinues.org/>

Note: Much of this article comprises of excerpts from an article recently published in Time Magazine (July 2013 issue) If this concept of helping veterans captures your attention and you desire more information please consult the information above for more details (Jack Doxey, Veterans for Peace)

Brief History:

The Mission Continues, which is based in St. Louis, but has people serving throughout the country, is at the heart of a growing community-service activism among the younger generation of combat veterans. Groups are sprouting throughout the country, building houses, working in health care, teaching, counseling, farming and taking care of their more seriously wounded comrades.

“Team Rubicon”, based in Los Angeles has a roster of about 7000 veterans ready for disaster relief missions around the world. It was co founded by Mission Continues fellow, Jake Wood.

This self-help ethos stands in stark contrast to that of the more traditional military related charities. Eric Creiten, the founder and CEO of “The Mission Continues”, is notoriously tough on veterans who come to him with service related excuses. He says: “People understand the tremendous sacrifice the veterans have made and they want to do something for them.” He continues: “And, that sometimes leads to us being given an excuse such as when you didn’t show up for work on time. It must be that you have post traumatic stress disorder. Oh, you’re disabled. Don’t even try. Or your being a bad partner to your husband or wife. Or a bad father or mother. It must be that you lost a bunch of friends. We simply do not accept those types of excuses”

Jake Woods has little tolerance for veterans who see themselves as victims of post traumatic stress. He believes it is a condition that can be battled and defeated. Wood says: “If you’re out doing disaster relief, you’re less likely to be thinking about yourself and more likely to be thinking about people your helping. You’re also presenting yourself, and other veterans, as a model, a potential community leader”

The above statement is the very essence of this project. If someone gets so involved in helping others, then his or her problems pale to insignificance. A person doesn't get completely rid of his issues, but this approach puts them into proper perspective.

The Process:

Greiten places veterans into four classes a year and also has a weekend orientation at which they get to meet one another and gain the sense that they are, once again, part of something larger than themselves. They do a service project together and take an oath of service before returning to their communities. In addition, Greiten and his team have developed a mandatory personal-development curriculum for those who become "Fellows". This program involves completing reading and writing assignments each month to help the Fellows' transition to civilian life and, more importantly, to become citizen leaders back home.

(Note: one can't help but think that many of our colleagues who are veterans have been helped by virtue of the fact that they joined our organization, Veterans for Peace, and in the process, forgot themselves and their personal issues by concentrating on helping others through assisting in VFP efforts.)

In closing, there is more to this very successful project called, "The Mission Continues", and to find out more about it, I encourage you to access the information I have provided for you (above).

Wouldn't it be wonderful if you could start up your own version of "The Mission Continues" in your VFP Chapter? Or, even better, perhaps you could use the concept of "helping" others in your attempts to recruit new members to join your chapter of Veterans for Peace.

Jack Doxey
Veterans for Peace
doxeyassoc@san.rr.com

11. Veterans Sustainable Agricultural Training (VSAT)

(October 30, 2013)

Source: Archi's Acres Inc.

Contact: Karen Archipley or Colin Archipley

Address: Archi's Acres Inc. Escondido, CA 92026-5306

Phone: Local: 760-670-5489

Toll free: 800-933-5234

Fax: 760-751-4389

Web Page: Archi'sacres.com

Brief History:

Master Sergeant Colin Archipley is a highly decorated marine and served three combat tours in Iraq. After his third tour, in 2006, he and his wife Karen decided to go into farming. While Colin was still serving his third tour, Karen was busy buying a two and a half acre avocado farm in Valley Center California.

The farm had 200 avocado trees but previous owners had neglected the trees and they were in bad condition. Adding to their woes was the news that their first water bill was a whopping \$849 dollars and 97 cents. An alternative plan had to be explored so Colin, while still in the service, researched a more cost efficient and ergonomically friendly form of farming called sustainable hydroponics, organic farming.

Upon Colin's return, he and his wife Karen built a greenhouse to grow organic basil without soil. Within months they were able to sustain themselves. They discovered one benefit after another by moving away from the old traditional form of farming. For example with hydroponics farming you use 90% less water and can farm almost anywhere with a lot less land.

The Process: (to aid his fellow veterans)

Colin never forgot his fellow veterans and was determined to help them transition from the rigid structure of the military into the wide open you're on your own mentality of civilian life.

Many veterans find it difficult to make that transition and Colin was determined to help those veterans that wanted to become independent by pursuing organic hydroponics farming.

Karen and Colin started a school that provided an extensive six week training program on how to become an entrepreneur and own your own small farm or get ready to be gainfully employed in the industry. They named this program the Veteran Sustainable Agricultural Training program, (VSAT)

As of this date, over 200 veterans have successfully graduated from the program. The training is not free but it is reasonable and an interested veteran, by accessing the contact information above, can get information on how to make application not only for the school but for some form of tuition aid.

Some Interesting Facts:

Every acre of greenhouse will create over ten jobs and every job created on the farm will create over 2.5 jobs elsewhere in the community.

Advice from Karen and Colin based upon their experience in this type of farming:

1. You need to dedicate 100% of your time to make your business a success. (It is not part time work)
2. Prepare, Prepare and Prepare.
3. Know your Product
4. Know your Customers (their needs and expectations)
5. Know your Competition
6. Seek out the financial infrastructure to support short term and long term goals.

Keys to being a Successful Startup?

1. Understanding that it is a full time occupation
2. Commit yourself to success
3. Take risks
4. Understand that everyday will be a challenge

If this type of a challenge peaks your interest, contact Karen and Colin at Archi's Acres Inc. (See information listed above)

12. Quixote Village

(February 2014)

Source: Senior Housing and Community Developer

Contact: Ms. Ginger Segel, Project Developer

Telephone:

Email: ginger@communityframworks.org

Brief History:

Quixote Village is located in Olympia, Washington and is a self governing community of about 30 homeless adults, supported by Panza, a local non profit organization. Quixote Village is named after the famous tilter of windmills, and Panza his loyal servant, Sancho Panza.

The following information was obtained from an article (briefing paper)) that described how a small homeless tent community was turned into a permanent village. It is a remarkable story about the city of Olympia that fought all odds and obstacles to bring into existence a marvelous village of homeless people who successfully work together with faith based organizations, corporations, non profits and the residents to constantly improve the overall life of the homeless people of Olympia.

Quixote Village began as a protest in a downtown Olympia parking lot in February of 2007, when police prepared to forcible dismantle the camp. A local church stepped forward to offer sanctuary.

Within a few months, more churches stepped forward to host the camp. The city of Olympia passed an ordinance that recognized the right of faith based communities to practice their religious beliefs by offering the homeless sanctuary on their grounds.

However, the founders envisioned going from a simple camp of tents to something much more permanent. They wanted a location where they could build bedroom cottages around a community center with a kitchen, social space, showers, bathrooms and laundry facilities.

It took the full attention of both camp residents and Panza to recruit new faith communities to host, to marshal community support and donations, and to create the organizational infrastructure to sustain the village's existence.

A Keen Observation on the Part of the Homeless:

For many residents of the village, the need for “community” is every bit as important as the need for housing. This need for community is, in all probability, true for people who have never been homeless.

What a Revelation:

A vision of shared communal space combined with private dwellings could be the prototype for housing many other groups of people. It takes into account three vitally important features: affordability, environmental sustainability and community. What a winning combination.

Please recognize that this was a very complex project that challenged the community in many ways. None of the contributors began this journey with expertise in establishing a village like “*Quixote Village*” along with developing a robust system of self – government. In addition they created and developed a non profit community and faith based organization to support it.

All of this has resulted in the former homeless that now enjoy Quixote Village, realizing a new vision for themselves that includes a better life. Quixote Village is now a reality and they celebrated their grand opening in February of 2014.

Their hopes for their future and their daily demonstration of mutual support and generosity call us all to respond to the best within us and to help them create what Martin Luther King dreamed of: the beloved community.

*Jack Doxey
Chairperson, Homeless Veterans Work Group (HVWG)*

13. Vets Turn to Gardening *(April 5, 2014)*

Source: Excerpts from the “Progressive Magazine” dated December 2013/January 2014

Contact: Steven Acheson,

Phone: 912-980-8241

Email achewop@gmail.com

Website; www.popsca.com

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/POPsCSA>

Brief History:

Steve Acheson spent nearly five years on active duty. He saw the Iraq war up very close. He went on over 400 combat escort missions in an eleven month period. He put in over 18,000 miles as lead driver through Sadr City. He was 28 years old at the time and he said: “It changed me a lot”. He witnessed kids having to walk through their own sewage water because we (US military) destroyed their entire public infrastructure. He said:” it really pulled at my heartstrings”.

When Steve returned to the States he spent four years agitating for peace with fellow members of Iraq Veterans against the War. He became angry and frustrated about how little progress he and his fellow veterans seemed to be making.

It was only after returning to his home town of Madison Wisconsin, that Steve found his calling by connecting with the owners of “Gardens for Goodness” in the summer of 2013.

It was there amongst the tomatoes that he discovered something his weary rattled brain could not have summoned during his most angry years immediately following his discharge from the service.

Steve Acheson learned that he” loved to farm”. He advises other soldiers to get back to your roots and get some soil on your hands because it can have a healing effect.

The Process:

Garden of Goodness is a CSA, which stands for “community supported agriculture” in which consumers agree ahead of time to buy a quantity of produce every week from a farmer. After three month of working hard at the Garden of Goodness farm just out side of town, Acheson decided to take things into his own hands and decided to set things up in such a manner that he and other vet farmers could be in charge of their own destiny. He took over the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and ran it for himself along with some other vets that wanted to get into farming.

Starting this spring (around late May and early June) the city of Madison Wisconsin will have its own veteran run organic CSA and he couldn't be any happier. He is hoping that it will become more than just a business. He envisions it to become a national center for veterans wanting to get into the farming business.

Other veterans got wind of what Acheson was doing and wanted to get into the act as well. Veterans from as far away as Killen, Texas heard about the project. Some vets have joined him and help with such chores as clearing the fields, preparing the facilities and getting the place ready for when they open to the public this coming spring.

At present, members of the Iraq Veterans against the War and the Veterans for Peace are assisting him and enjoying the whole process.

Steve said: “The whole process of farming is invigorating because you feel that you're doing something tangible. I'm thinking come out to Madison and you can actually see it happening. It doesn't get more grass roots than what we are trying to do here.”

If you need more information and want to contact Steve Acheson, please see the contact information at the beginning of this article.

*Jack Doxey
Coordinator for: Homeless Veterans work Group (HVWG)*

14. Providing Meals to Homeless People on the Streets in Downtown San Diego

(April 6, 2014)

Source: Bethel Memorial AME church, 3085 K street San Diego, CA 02102

Contact: Ken Edwards, Founder

Phone: 619-402-8794

E-mail: Kenedwards@juno.com

Brief History:

San Diego, due to its moderate weather, has now the third largest homeless population in the United States (1000 downtown and (9000 county wide) During the summer of 2008 Ken Edwards, a member of Bethel Memorial AME Church in San Diego, found that the number of homeless people near his jobsite in downtown San Diego was increasing significantly. Ken along with other interested members of the congregation, started making small quantities of sandwiches and giving them out to the homeless. The outreach gained support, and was named the “We Dare to Care” project.

They made their first large batch of hot food and bag lunches on the last Friday of September 2008.

Since then the church members, Veterans for Peace and volunteers from other churches in San Diego have prepared both hot meals and bag dinners on the last Friday of each month for distribution around 6 to 8 pm by church members and supporters on the streets in downtown San Diego. “We Dare to Care” celebrated its 5th anniversary in September 2013 when it gave out 525 bag dinners as well as hundreds of hot food meals, the largest monthly total to date.

The Process:

Funding:

Funds are constantly being raised at Bethel Memorial AME Church via church member donations as well as a program to collect recyclable bottles and cans that members turn in for cash. Additionally the Veterans for Peace chapter take pledges from their members the week before the monthly event, which provides a cash deposit to the account. This allows Ken Edwards our founder to go shopping at Costco and Smart and Final just prior to the 1:00pm food preparation time. People who pledge during the week mail checks to the pledge record keeper or reimburse him at the 1:00 pm food preparation event. Between \$250.00 and \$500.00 is collected each month.

Shopping for Meal Supplies:

It has been determined that Costco and Smart and Final offer the best value for the supplies needed to allow for the meal preparation. Items purchased each month include good quality wheat bread, peanut butter, jelly (not jam) bologna, cheese mayonnaise, individual chips / Fritos, oranges or other soft fruit, and 12 oz. bottles of water. If donations allow or if goods are provided, cookies or individual cake portions are sometimes added.

Additional items needed each month to allow for the preparation of meals include latex gloves for workers, sandwich bags for sandwiches, paper sacks for each meal, styrofoam or heavy-duty paper bowls, forks and napkins for hot food, heavy duty plastic spatulas and large plastic margarine tubs (to whip the jelly for easier spreading) are used, washed and re-used each month. Historically, all of the above items are purchased in large quantities (usually 250 to 400) for about \$1.00 per meal.

Bag Dinner Preparation:

The food is generally purchased and delivered to the church just prior to the 1:00 pm arrival of volunteers. Bread is divided into two equal piles to make sure that the same amount of peanut/butter and jelly and bologna and cheeses sandwiches are made. One of each goes into each meal to provide variety. Volunteers show up at 1:00 pm and proceed to set up tables to suit the work required. There is typically one large table with 4 workers making bologna, cheese and mayonnaise sandwiches and another table with 4 workers making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. One to two additional workers sit at the end of each table and place the sandwiches into plastic zip lock bags.

They pass them on to another large table where they pile up until we finish all the sandwiches. A plastic table cloth is placed on each table and later discarded due to the big mess created in making the sandwiches. Prior to the sandwich making the tables are cleaned with hot soap and water to make sure that the surface is clean.

Once the sandwiches are all made they are placed into the plastic bags and added to the two growing piles of other item that go into the bag dinners. A production line is set up which allows the workers to assemble the bag dinners. One of each item is placed into the paper sack. One person stands at each line and adds their item to the bag as they go by. Bottle water stays in the delivery van so as to not cause for additional staging. Completed bag dinners are folded over and placed into large cardboard boxes or cloth tote boxes. These boxes are loaded into the delivery van.

The tables are than cleaned and spatulas, tubs and any other reusable items are taken home by a volunteer who clean and recycle them. Lastly, the meals are carried to the delivery van and that night the vehicles head downtown and they actually distribute all the meals.

Hot Food:

While the bag lunches are being made, two or three volunteers are making hot meals in the church kitchen. Pans often contain rice, turkey, chicken, vegetables and gravy. Many of the volunteers arrive with large amounts of food some of which is prepared at their homes. Entire chickens or turkeys are cooked and the meat removed from the bones and added to the pan meals.

Some month's spaghetti and meat balls, green beans and home made corn bread are prepared. The rest of the food is taken out, and put into the back of available vehicles to allow for easy serving on the streets. Sometimes loaves of bread are set aside to be given out along with the hot food. On each trip the church tries to bring along one person who has a certified food handling license.

Actual Distribution of Food Downtown:

The church van and other private vehicles arrive about 6:00 pm when church members get off from work. Three to four sites are already mapped out where they distribute both the hot meals and the bag lunches. At times we run afoul of people who live in the neighborhood because the streets sometimes become littered after everyone is served but it is not a significant problem. The hot food is handed out from the back of an SUV

Sometimes the food is taken to the San Diego Homeless Shelter (225 beds) they appreciate it because they do not provide food for their guests.

If you have more questions please contact Ken Edwards, the founder of this project. His contact information is listed at the front of this article.

A special thanks to VFP member Gil Field who was responsible for this article