



# VETERAN HOMELESSNESS Report

October 2013

**OVER 300**  
 U.S. Dept. of VA-  
 sponsored for SSVF  
 Programs contribute  
 to the president's  
 mission of ending  
 vet homelessness



## The Importance of Employment in Ending Veteran Homelessness

Welcome to the second issue of the IVMF Veteran Homelessness Report. Throughout the country, almost 150 U.S. Department of Labor-VETS funded Homeless Veterans Reintegration Programs (HVRPs) and over 300 U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) sponsored Supportive Services for Veterans and Families (SSVF) programs are contributing to the president's mission of ending veteran homelessness by 2015.

Key to ensuring that no veteran or their family experiences homelessness is helping to increase their available income through jobs at a living wage. We know from research and experience that housing and supportive services alone are insufficient to help veterans and their families avoid the risk of homelessness, and to permanently exit homelessness. Employment, however, has been most typically introduced later in the sequence, after stable housing has been secured and often after veterans have addressed their disability-related issues, including mental health and/or co-occurring substance abuse disabilities. The VA in particular, by encouraging employment services as a component of SSVFs, while not a required service, understands that veterans and their families who are at risk of homelessness often get to that situation because their income has fallen short of their daily living needs.

Our featured editorial is by Hilda Heady, senior vice president for Atlas Research, an award-winning Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business based in Washington, DC. Heady draws important comparisons between the principles and practices of 'Housing First,' which both the VA and Department of Labor-Vets have embraced and incorporated into their program development strategies as well as 'Supported Employment' that is long acknowledged as an evidence-based practice that enables people with disabilities and/or disadvantages to return to work. This issue also highlights a partnership project in Pinellas and Pasco Counties initiated by the public defender's office to address veteran homelessness, particularly among those with criminal justice backgrounds. The team of public and private stakeholders, including staff from multiple agencies and volunteers, helps veterans transition from their living situations in homeless encampments with legal advocacy and provides access to homes and jobs. Two veterans offer their stories about how well that partnership worked for them.

Please send your comments to [ivmfcommunity@syr.edu](mailto:ivmfcommunity@syr.edu), share this report with others who may have an interest, and subscribe to receive future issues by [vets.syr.edu/sign-up](http://vets.syr.edu/sign-up).

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# From Encampment to a Home and a Job for Veterans with Criminal Justice Backgrounds

*Criminal justice system involvement is one of the greatest challenges faced by veterans who are homeless. Having a criminal record can affect a veteran's ability to get a home or a job, and makes it more difficult to make an effective, sustained transition from homelessness. This report highlights an effective partnership that is helping homeless veterans with criminal justice issues in Pinellas and Pasco Counties, Florida get a home and a job.*

## THE PUBLIC DEFENDER'S OFFICE TAKES THE LEAD

When Bob Dillinger was elected as the public defender (PD) for the 6th Judicial Circuit of Pinellas and Pasco counties, he was confronted with an exponentially growing number of homeless citizens, including veterans who were facing criminal justice issues. First-hand observation in homeless encampments and in the courtroom convinced him that the cycle of homelessness was fed not only by lack of housing, but also by unemployment, repeated incarcerations and disability. He also knew that the criminal justice system could not address these issues alone, and that partnerships were needed to address these issues. His office reached out to partners like the Boley Centers Inc. to provide vocational and employment programs through its U.S. Department of Labor-VETS Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP). Other partners included the Pasco County Commissioners, assistant public defender Raine Johns, and other community volunteer groups to address the health challenges faced by many veterans who are homeless. Sheriff Gualtieri and state attorney Bernie McCabe agreed to provide an unprecedented level of law enforcement and community policing cooperation to provide alternatives to incarceration programs.

Dillinger and his team work onsite in the homeless encampments where veterans live and sleep. They developed a detailed "grid map" of over 350 precise homeless bivouac locations where veterans live. Outreach workers use this information to follow, find and work with veterans and get the information needed to withdraw outstanding warrants, support successful compliance with court-ordered treatment and conditions of probation, and help them through the process of getting a home and a job. The 6th Circuit Safe Harbor facility is a project partner that provides housing and supportive services for over 400 residents and a "Milieu Therapist Program" staffed

by over 25 senior university psychology students from a number of Florida universities. Its "Chronic Homeless Jail Diversion Program" provides intensive case

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management and placement services with a special emphasis on helping veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder and other combat related challenges. Emergency housing and financial assistance is provided by project partner St. Vincent de Paul Society's VA-funded, Supportive Services for Veterans and Families (SSVF) program. Dillinger and his team realized that helping criminal justice involved veterans to make a successful transition from homelessness must be a well-coordinated effort with partners that contribute their respective knowledge, expertise and resources to help veterans transition to a home and a job.

## FROM THE ENCAMPMENT TO A HOME AND A JOB



Ira Grumm is a Vietnam War veteran whose homelessness was due to a long history of chronic substance abuse and depression. Grumm and the outreach met regularly at the encampment and over time, a trusting relationship was developed. When

Grumm asked Dillinger and his staff for help, the PD team responded quickly and intervened on his behalf in court to reduce past charges that could clear the way for housing and job applications. Project partners worked together to provide personal, one-on-one therapy combined with transportation assistance, medical appointments at the VA and placement in both inpatient and outpatient programs. Today, Grumm is proud to say that he is sober, receiving lifesaving medical care, living independently in his own apartment and following his treatment regimen. Grumm says that he can now see the possibility of having a regular job again, and has decided to rebuild his work skills and self-confidence for now by working as a handyman. He is not sure if this will one day lead to his own business, or be a stepping-stone to a wage-paying job. For now, he is regaining self-confidence and believes that his employment future can be whatever he decides to achieve.

## LINKING EMPLOYMENT AND HOUSING TO END VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

Lisa Heil is a U.S. Army veteran who worked with the Florida Department of Corrections (DOC) for 13 years in many court officer roles before coming to Boley. She learned how homeless veterans cycle through the criminal justice system and the system's effects on housing and employment stability. As Boley's employment supervisor for Veterans Integration Assistance (VIA), Heil and her team conduct outreach in homeless encampments and work with the Probation and Pre-Trial intervention (PTI) program to obtain the legal advocacy necessary to remove or reduce barriers to a home and a job. Helping employers become aware of the PTI program can help ease their concern about hiring veterans who are homeless with criminal justice backgrounds. For example, one veteran enrolled in HVRP told staff that he let a potential employer know that he was in

the PTI Program. The employer contacted Boley to inquire about that program and was provided with information on how employment is a program requirement. Boley also let the employer know that the veteran was supported by a strong team to help him maintain a job. With these types of assurances, the employer made the commitment to hire the vet. Boley also works closely with the U.S. Department of Labor-VETS Disabled Veterans Outreach staff (DVOP) at the Pinellas One Stop Career Center, who helps veterans prepare their resume and match their skills to employers' hiring needs. The SSVF program provides emergency financial assistance, help with housing and access to benefits planning while the vet pursues employment. This wrap-around approach has helped other veterans establish housing and employment.

### A VETERAN FINDS A NEW HOME, A NEW CAREER AND RENEWED HOPE FOR THE FUTURE



Donald Williams, a Hawk missile crewman, was honorably discharged from the Army in 1978. He had a Class A CDL license and found civilian employment as a truck

driver; however, because of his probation reporting obligations following a drug sentencing charge, he could not meet the 24/7 availability for work required by the trucking company and lost his job. Not long after that, he was served with an eviction notice for not paying his rent, and was in jeopardy of violating probation for not paying the necessary fines. Boley's veterans outreach team, Ted Murray and Frank Magazu, enrolled Williams in the HVRP program for help with finding another job. They quickly met Williams' immediate housing needs by finding him a place to live by connecting him to project partner St. Vincent de Paul's SSVF and Grant per Diem programs while referring him to employment counselors Maurice Harris and Leila Stinnette for job development assistance. Williams also received advocacy with the probation unit to find ways to meet their requirements while also meeting the requirements of a future job. The employment team

contacted Southern Comfort Furniture, a privately owned business in Clearwater, Fla., that manufactures furniture sold in independent retail stores. Boley offered On the Job Training (OJT) employer incentives and worked with owner Barri Baucom to place Williams on the payroll within a few weeks of contact. Williams expects to have his financial obligation paid to the DOC soon and hopes to be released early from supervision. He is grateful for

the opportunity that Southern Comfort Furniture has provided him, a veteran with no upholstery experience but with the ambition to try a new career. Follow-up support by employment consultant Scott Macksam helps Williams remain focused on maintaining employment. Williams speaks highly of Baucom as well, saying, "When I feel discouraged, she gives me a pep talk to keep me motivated."

#### SUMMARY: THE IMPORTANCE OF INTEGRATION AND A JOINT EFFORT TO SERVE

The partnership developed in Pinellas and Pasco counties demonstrates the importance of joint planning, leveraging resources and open and ongoing communication among diverse partners to help veterans who are homeless with criminal justice backgrounds to obtain housing and jobs. How well can these types of partnerships work? Since July 2013, 16 of 30 Boley HVRP enrollments have some type of criminal charges, mostly felonies. Five are currently on probation. At this writing, 16 veterans have been placed into community-based jobs and, of those, eight have felony records and three are on probation. Some general principles for addressing criminal justice and housing, employment and supportive services for veterans who are homeless are provided below:

##### Create and articulate a vision

Dillinger championed the effort and brought other partners to the table. These partners championed the effort within their own circles to continue widening the partnership.

##### Partnerships are key

Boley, Safe Harbor, St. Vincent de Paul and other courts, PDs, shelters, law enforcement offices, VA centers, the DVOP, employers, and volunteers developed a strong collaboration. The PD office brought their clout in the legal system to provide legal advocacy, Boley addresses employment and housing, St. Vincent de Paul brings its SSVF and Grant and per Diem programs, Safe Harbor provides housing, treatment and support and universities provide expert volunteers and staff.

##### Integrated services are key

Boley prioritizes employment and housing simultaneously; legal system partners link court-related advocacy to encampments. Safe Harbor connects housing and employment to access to treatment and wellness services. Staff of these programs communicate as integrated services teams.

##### Celebrate accomplishments

Sharing success stories like Ira Grumm's and Donald Williams' can provide hope and inspiration to other veterans who are homeless.

**Learn more about Safe Harbor and the PTI and the 6th Judicial Circuit of Pinellas and Pasco counties at [www.wearethehope.org](http://www.wearethehope.org) ('Contact Us') and more about the Boley HVRP by contacting Lisa Heil at (727) 821-4819 Ext: 5705.**

#### REFERENCE

On any given day, veterans account for nine of every hundred individuals in U.S. jails and prisons. Taken as a whole, veterans are not overrepresented in the justice system as compared to their proportion in the United States general adult population. Veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan) and Operating Iraqi Freedom (Iraq) constitute a small proportion of all justice-involved veterans. The exact numbers are unknown – the most recent data on incarcerated veterans are from 2004 for State and Federal prisoners and 2002 for local jail inmates. (<http://www.samhsa.gov/co-occurring/topics/military-justice/veterans-justice-system.aspx>)

## CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

# Addressing Veteran Homelessness by Integrating Supported Employment and Rapid Housing

By Hilda R. Heady, Senior Vice President, Atlas Research

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Hilda R. Heady is senior vice president for Atlas Research, an award-winning Service Disabled Veteran Owned Small Business based in Washington, DC, where she leads a practice group concerned with marginalized veterans including those who are homeless, disabled, women, rural and minorities.



Roughly 1,000 days remain to reach President Barack Obama and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Secretary Eric K. Shinseki's goal of ending veteran homelessness by the end of 2015. The five-year plan designed to reach this goal includes a range of benefits and services, provided by a multitude of both federal and non-federal partners, who manage a complex array of services needed by veterans and their families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. For years, national experts have called for evidence-based practices and the integration of housing and employment services to end and prevent homelessness among veterans. These experts have outlined solid strategies, corroborated by empirical research, to offer simultaneous prevention and intervention through the pathway to permanent housing and competitive employment. The ultimate goal of these, and other strategies, is for veterans to achieve optimal independent living that is characterized as being: (1) socially integrated into their communities through their personal engagement in community activities and services, (2) permanently housed, and (3) competitively employed and/or having a stable source of income. The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) fully supports and identifies evidence-based and integrated approaches to ending homelessness in their national, comprehensive Opening Doors strategy to end homelessness for all populations. USICH annually reports progress of the plan and notes that the number of homeless veterans shows the most significant drop at 18 percent from 2010 to 2012.

The paradigm that promotes a step-wise approach to ending homelessness (housing, followed by treatment and supportive services, including benefits planning, and finally, employment) continues to be the continuum of choice for federal and state investors and the provider community. Federal government agencies do, however, recognize the importance of employment in assisting states to end veteran homelessness through projects like the VA Homeless Veterans Supported Employment Program (HVSEP), their Supportive Services for Veterans and Families (SSVF) programs, and the U.S. Department of Labor VETS Homeless Veterans Reintegration Projects (HVRPs). It is increasingly evident that equal and simultaneous priority on housing and employment as an integrated approach could address veteran homelessness. The stage is already set in principle and practice for integrating these approaches to address homelessness because 'Housing First' and 'Supported Employment' share the same core principles:

| Supported Employment Core Principles               | Housing First Core Principles                           |
|--|---|
| ■ Competitive work in the community                | ■ Permanent housing in the community                    |
| ■ Rapid initial emphasis on job development        | ■ Rapid initial emphasis on permanent housing placement |
| ■ Veterans drive employment options                | ■ Veterans choose housing options                       |
| ■ Integrated work setting/integrated teams         | ■ Integrated housing setting/integrated teams           |
| ■ Ongoing supports from service agency             | ■ Ongoing supports from service agency                  |
| ■ Addresses most significant employment challenges | ■ Addresses most significant housing challenges         |

The current care environment is supportive of building on recent successes with integrated, high quality employment and housing practices, and seems poised for change. This could be the right time and the right approach for integrating strategies and surrounding veterans with committed employers, landlords, and community-based services, in order to achieve permanent housing and competitive employment as one path for helping the VA achieve its goal of preventing and ending homelessness. I challenge all of us who are engaged in helping to end veteran homelessness to consider how best to provide housing and income stability coincidentally because, as we know, and as veterans across the country tell us, housing alone will not end homelessness. Veterans need the income, self-esteem, social connections and confidence that having a meaningful job at a living wage can provide.