

Rx:Housing Veterans

Report to Mayor Fischer on Ending Veteran Homelessness in Louisville, Kentucky December 5, 2014

On September 20, 2014, Mayor Greg Fischer called together several community leaders to issue a challenge of ending veteran homelessness in Louisville. Mayor Fischer was one of the first mayors in the country to sign the national pledge and he asked the group to work together to create a plan for how it could be done and to report back with: 1) a number needing to be served, 2) a list of resources already in place, 3) changes to take place to reach the goal and 4) any barriers preventing success. The group, now called Rx: Housing Veterans, met three times after September 20, 2014. They also applied for and were named one of 25 cities to be part of the national Zero: 2016 campaign created to end veteran and chronic homelessness by 2016. Here is their plan:

Agencies represented in Rx: Housing Veterans include: The Office of the Mayor, The Coalition for the Homeless, St. Vincent de Paul, Interlink Counseling Services, Volunteers of America (VOA), Louisville Metro Housing Authority (LMHA), Veterans for Peace, Restoration Center, Louisville Metro Community Services, Robley Rex VA Hospital Homeless Programs (VA), Family Health Centers (FHC), St. John Center, The Kentucky Department of Veterans Affairs (KDVA), Legal Aid Society, the Brain Injury Alliance, VCAL and Seven Counties Services.

Number of Homeless Veterans in Louisville: The Louisville Homeless Management Information System and U.S. Veterans Administration data have shown a steady decrease of homeless veterans in Louisville over the past four years. Much of this is due to increased resources provided by the U.S. Veterans Administration including the VASH housing voucher program targeted to chronically homeless veterans. The Robley Rex VA Hospital Homeless Programs staff took lists of homeless veterans from the Veterans Administration, Louisville Continuum of Care (CoC) Common Assessment, Louisville CoC Homeless Management Information System and St. John Center, created a single database, removed all duplicates, deceased and housed persons to create a final list of **360 known homeless veterans in Louisville, Kentucky**. This number of veterans includes anyone who meets the national Zero2016 definition of veteran which is anyone who wore the uniform of any of the military

forces (it does not include National Guard members who were never called up for service.) National research shows that approximately one-third of this group will need permanent supportive housing, one-third will need a short term subsidy, and one-third will need community supports and linkages to employment plus a deposit to make it into housing.

Outreach to Homeless Veterans and Waiting Lists for Housing: The Robley Rex VA Hospital has five outreach staff that visit homeless programs and those living on the streets to locate and assist homeless veterans. Family Health Centers also has a common assessment team that works to identify, assess and rank any homeless persons in the community. These two teams have agreed to make several changes in procedures to insure that homeless veterans access all services they qualify to receive:

- 1) The Louisville CoC common assessment team will refer all veterans immediately to the VA for assessment. This will be a warm hand off making sure the VA knows the client is coming and can do the assessment. The VA will in return notify the common assessment team of anyone who does not qualify for the VASH program so they can be referred back to housing in the CoC. This will again be a warm hand off to make sure no clients are dropped.
- 2) The Louisville CoC will provide a preference in housing for veterans so that those veterans not eligible for a VASH voucher get served first on the CoC permanent supportive housing waiting list.
- 3) The VA and Louisville CoC will get signed waivers from all clients to allow them to make direct referrals to each and share information as needed.

Emergency/Transitional Shelter: Because it takes 30-180 days for homeless veterans to access permanent housing, emergency/transitional housing options are needed. There are presently 154 per diem beds at shelters funded by the VA at Interlink Counseling Services, Salvation Army, St. Vincent de Paul and Wayside Christian Mission. Interlink also has 80 treatment beds for homeless veterans and hopes to add 100 more. Restoration Center is creating an 8-unit transitional house in west Louisville and is interested in expanding to 60 handicapped accessible apartments if property were available for expansion. The VA has agreed to make the following change:

- 1) The VA is opening all emergency/transitional per diem beds and homeless services to all veterans except those with a dishonorable discharge. They will also look into this change for dental. This will insure that more veterans are eligible for these services.

Services, Benefits and Employment: Volunteers of America has received \$3 million in new Social Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) grant funding expected to help 125 families per year with deposits, debt, start up funding for housing needs and case management. The Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) also managed by VOA helps veterans integrate in the community through assistance with employment, housing stability, substance

abuse counseling and employment. The VA operates case management for all VASH clients and has a Veteran Career Center. Legal Aid Society has two attorneys that work with veterans on expungements and other needs. Rx: Housing Veterans partners agreed to coordinate these changes to insure that each veteran receives all the benefits and services he/she should in the following ways:

- 1) The Kentucky Department of Veteran Affairs will create a flyer to post at all shelters and homeless agencies to ask all case managers to check on the benefits status of ALL homeless veterans because some benefits are now more easily available to those who may have been denied in the past.
- 2) The common assessment team and VA will refer all veterans to the VOA SSVF and HVRP programs to determine if they qualify for services.
- 3) All programs will make referrals to the Legal Aid Society for expungements and to the VA Career Center for employment. Referrals will also be made as appropriate to the Brain Injury Alliance.

The following are barriers identified by Rx: Housing Veterans that if addressed could help coordinate services so that all veterans get help receiving benefits and opportunities for employment:

- A) The VA is seeking a building of approximately 15,000 square feet to develop a veteran resource center. This one-stop center would house approximately 50 VA and other community service staff serving veterans. While the VA has funding for the operations of this facility, they do not have funding for the building itself. If developed, the VA would offer space in the facility to other veteran service agencies at no cost.
- B) Funding is needed for an additional staff person who can assess each veteran to see if they qualify for but are not receiving general, not just veteran benefits, like food stamps and SSI.
- C) Many in the community need to hear about the importance of hiring veterans. The Mayor could speak to this issue in the community and ask local business owners to hire veterans whenever possible.

Permanent Supportive Housing: If the national research holds true in Louisville, we will need at least 120 additional units of permanent supportive housing for veterans with long-term disabilities making it difficult for them to be fully employed in the future. The Louisville Metro Housing Authority and VA operate 364 VASH vouchers (44 awarded in 2014). As of November 1, 2014; 293 VASH vouchers were utilized and six were looking for units. This leaves 65 available for homeless veterans on the list and an application was just submitted for 5 more VASH vouchers. Additionally LMHA set aside 40 new vouchers matched with a \$1.5 million SAHMSA grant awarded to Family Health Centers. This leaves a balance of at least 10 vouchers needed for this population plus more for future veterans who become homeless. Rx: Housing Louisville has agreed to work to fill this gap in the following ways:

- 1) HUD has just announced 100 vouchers for Kentucky communities where the mayor has signed the pledge to end veteran homelessness. If eligible to apply, LMHA will apply for as many as possible.
- 2) The Louisville CoC will provide a preference in housing for veterans so that those veterans not eligible for a VASH voucher get served first on the CoC permanent supportive housing waiting list. This includes 40 additional vouchers coordinated through the new FHC SAHMSA grant.
- 3) LMHA is adding up to 16 units of housing for veterans to the Smoketown development and will make available 10 vouchers for persons existing CoC and VASH programs so that these vouchers can be freed up to support housing for additional chronically homeless veterans.
- 4) LMHA will work to insure that the most lenient policies are used in each housing subsidy program to insure that as many veterans qualify as possible. The VA will refer anyone who does not qualify for their programs to Shelter Plus Care.
- 5) Rx: Housing Veterans will create a committee to review the cases of veterans that do not fit in any available programs to create a community-based solution for their cases.

Catholic Charities has also expressed an interest in creating a supportive housing development for homeless veterans. They have identified the following barrier to development:

- D) Catholic Charities is interested in developing a 35-40 unit housing project for homeless veterans. They are seeking financial and community support for this project through resources like the HOME Program and the Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

Rapid Re-Housing and Other Short Term Subsidies: If the national research holds true in Louisville, we will need at least 120 additional slots of Rapid Re-housing or other short-term subsidies for homeless veterans who need approximately 12 months of assistance to get back on their feet. The VOA SSVF program can serve up to 125 veterans, but all who have this need may not qualify for the program. Rx: Housing Veterans agreed to coordinate the following:

- 1) VOA will work with any veterans or families that do not qualify for SSVF to insure that they are referred to Louisville Metro Community Services' Rapid Re-housing Program. Louisville Metro Community Services will give priority to veterans in this program. The committee also recommends that VOA use as much of their SSVF funding as possible for Rapid Re-housing versus Homeless Prevention in order to help those already homeless.

Deposits and Household Items: All 360 identified homeless veterans will need access to an average of \$650 in security deposits and approximately \$1,100 in household items. The VOA SSVF program can serve approximately 125. The KDVA can help with deposits for approximately 10 and The Coalition for the Homeless has funding raised through Give-a-Jam to

serve approximately 20. This funding is the area where Rx: Housing Veterans feels the corporate and private members of our community could do the most to support the effort to end veteran homelessness. Therefore, we have done the following:

- 1) The Coalition for the Homeless has submitted a proposal to Leadership Louisville asking for a group to help recruit business groups to help in raising funds for deposits and household items for veterans.
- 2) Rx: Housing Veterans will ask VCAL, Auxiliary Groups and others to support funding for these items.
- 3) The VA found a website where donors can purchase kits to start up new homes at www.lodgingkit.com
- 4) The Office of the Mayor has approached the Community Foundation about managing any funds for this purpose and they have agreed.
- 5) Louisville Metro Community Services will provide housing deposits for veterans identified and served by the recently announced SAMHSA vouchers. Participants must be CSBG eligible.

We have identified the following barrier where the Office of the Mayor and city could help:

- E) Rx: Housing Veterans needs to recruit corporate and other private entities interested in veterans' services to access the flexible funding needed for this effort. Funding is especially needed for furniture (something to sit on, eat on and sleep on) and household items like sheets and dishes as well as deposits to access new apartments.

For up-to-date information regarding the status and progress of Rx: Housing Veterans, please see www.louhomeless.org or follow the Coalition for the Homeless on Facebook at www.facebook.com/LouHomeless.