Homelessness Training

Overview

Training healthcare providers, shelters, veteran service organizations, and nonprofits to understand veteran issues and resources is critical to ensuring that the military community has an effective support network.

Community organizations that serve the homeless population deal with many complex issues. Caring for the homeless within the military community adds a whole new array of issues and resources to understand. Though these organizations may be able to properly care for general homeless, additional knowledge about the military community and its distinct culture may substantially improve their ability to provide for veterans and other military-affiliated homeless.

By raising awareness among homeless-centered organizations and creating a network of existing programs, communities can improve the standard of services available to the military-affiliated homeless, increase their general well-being, and even strengthen their ability to secure permanent housing.

There are two basic steps: 1) Create a Training Manual and 2) Identify Major Service Providers in the Community.

Is it being done already?

Conduct an analysis of your community to find out what, if any, services already exist. Be sure to do your due diligence to locate programs focusing on veteran homelessness (possibly grant funded by the Departments of Veterans Affairs or Labor). What kind of training, education and awareness needs to be in place? If you still are not sure, ask the leading organizations in your community what activities they know of in the healthcare realm for veterans. This community solution is focused on filling in the knowledge gaps of your community to make sure that all existing services for the homeless and for the military community are working together to ensure whole-person health.

Step-by-Step Implementation

Step 1: Create a Training Manual

The first step towards improving the ability of the community to care for homeless individuals in your community is the creation of a training manual to be distributed to local shelters and care providers. The following steps should provide guidance as you develop your manual:
• **Topics:** You must first determine the range of information your training materials will cover. Generally speaking, you should seek to encompass a broad range of possible issues. The following topics, however, are among the most important:
  
  o **Trauma:** Many who seek homeless services have histories of trauma-inducing experiences. These experiences are often the leading cause of mental health conditions, substance abuse, and contact with the criminal justice system. Your materials should include substantial information about common sources of trauma in the military community, such as traumatic brain injuries (TBI) and other behavioral health disorders. A knowledge of these issues will allow providers to better shape their care to the particular needs of the military community.
  
  o **Permanent Housing:** Inform service providers of housing opportunities available for homeless veterans in your community. Ensure that they understand getting this population into permanent housing is often the first step to helping them, since having permanent housing creates a preferred environment for healing to begin in other areas of the homeless person’s life.
  
  o **Available Resources:** Provide a listing those resources within your community that offer support and services to the military-affiliated homeless. The following general resources should also be included in your materials:
    
    ▪ **2-1-1:** Organized by United Way, the 2-1-1 Information and Referral Service provides free and confidential help with food, housing, employment, health care, counseling, and more.
    
    ▪ **National Resource Directory:** a website that connects wounded warriors, Service Members, Veterans, their families, and caregivers to programs and services that support them. It provides access to services and resources at the national, state and local levels to support recovery, rehabilitation and community reintegration.
    
    ▪ **Warrior Gateway:** Warrior Gateway is a non-profit whose mission is to connect individuals in the military, veterans, and their families with federal, state, and local government programs as well as non-profit organizations in their local communities.
  
• **Gather Information:** Rely on existing sources of information within the community to assist in the development of your materials. Online resources are also an excellent resource.
  
  o Ask local veteran service organizations if they have materials on healthcare, legal assistance, shelters, housing assistance, behavioral health, and/or personal financial issues specific to veterans and their families.
    
    ▪ If so, would they be willing to share these resources with you?
    
    ▪ If not, would they be willing to assist you in creating these resources?
    
    ▪ Find out where these community service providers meet regularly and ask if you can be included in a meeting. It is often difficult to get various providers to come to you due to the complex and time-consuming nature of their work.
By meeting them where they are, you are setting up an environment of true collaboration. The easier it is for the information to travel to them, the more likely providers will be to take advantage of it.

- **Compile Information:** Once you have gathered your information, you should seek to compile it in an accessible, distributable form. This form could be as simple as a brochure or as complex as a presentation. It may be most beneficial to create multiple methods of distribution; this ensures that your information will reach the largest possible audience. For some examples, please see Additional Resources at the end of this document.

### Volunteer Opportunities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Content Coordinator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Research training information and compiles it in a succinct manner for placement in various training materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributes</td>
<td>Articulate, organized, and devoted to the military community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who</td>
<td>Consider a student who is a veteran, a local service provider or someone who works in the veteran space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours</td>
<td>Eight to 40 over one to two months</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Training Material Designer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Design the various documents for each training method.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributes</td>
<td>Creative, organized, and devoted to the military community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who</td>
<td>Consider a graphic design student who is a veteran, a designer from the general community or someone with design experience who works in the veteran space.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours</td>
<td>15 to 20 over one month</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Step 2: Find Out Who the Main Service Providers Are In Your Community

To find service providers to train, contact known providers, shelters, veteran service organizations, other nonprofits, and social services offices and identify currently available options for the homeless population in your community. Ask if they know how to help someone who is from a military background. Give them a specific scenario to assess how they will handle the issue and if there is room for improvement. Ask if their social workers would be willing to receive some information about the unique issues that veterans, Reservists, National Guardsmen and their families face. Provide them with an array of training options from which to choose.
Measure of Success

Tracking impact is important for several reasons. Most of all, if everyone understands the ultimate measures of success, volunteers and participants become more focused in their activities. Additionally, this data will help you consider any potential improvements if you conduct future trainings in any other impact area. Lastly, it will help identify national best practices, which can be shared across communities.

- **Participation:** These numbers are important in giving your volunteers goals, a sense of achievement, and targets to surpass at the next training. Good measures include information like the number of providers trained.
- **Outcome:** A month or two after training, distribute a survey to the providers who participated to measure their increased knowledge. Ask providers if they have had patients for which the training was applicable. Ask if they have changed their services based on information provided to them in the training. See *Surveying Guideline Tool* for more information.
Additional Resources

- **2-1-1:** [http://www.211.org/](http://www.211.org/)
  - Organized by United Way, the 2-1-1 Information and Referral Service provides free and confidential help with food, housing, employment, health care, counseling, and more.

- **Center for Deployment Psychology:** [http://deploymentpsych.org/](http://deploymentpsych.org/)
  - To better fulfill the unmet deployment-related behavioral health needs of Service members and their families, the Center for Deployment Psychology (CDP) was established in 2006. The CDP is a Tri-Service center initially funded by Congress and now a component center of the DoD’s Defense Center of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury. The CDP’s mission is to train military and civilian psychologists, psychology interns/residents and other behavioral health professionals to provide high quality deployment-related behavioral health services to military personnel and their families.

  - Defense Centers of Excellence (DCoE) assesses, validates, oversees and facilitates prevention, resilience, identification, treatment, outreach, rehabilitation and reintegration programs for psychological health and traumatic brain injury (TBI). DCoE also provides a centralized location where providers can see upcoming webinars, conferences, etc. in the fields of health care for the military community.

  - MedlinePlus is the National Institutes of Health’s Web site for patients and their families and friends. Produced by the National Library of Medicine, it brings you information about diseases, conditions, and wellness issues in language you can understand. MedlinePlus offers a distinct section with comprehensive information on behavioral health issues commonly afflicting veterans.

- **National Health Care for the Homeless Council:** [http://www.nhchc.org/](http://www.nhchc.org/)
  - The National Health Care for the Homeless (HCH) Council is a home for those who work to improve the health of homeless people and who seek housing, health care, and adequate incomes for everyone. In the National HCH Council, agencies and individuals, clinicians and advocates, homeless people and housed people come together for mutual support and learning opportunities, and to advance the cause of human rights.

- **National Resource Directory:** [https://www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov/](https://www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov/)
  - The National Resource Directory is a website that connects wounded warriors, Service Members, Veterans, their families, and caregivers to programs and services that support them. It provides access to services and resources at the national, state and local levels to support recovery, rehabilitation and community reintegration.

- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration:** [http://www.samhsa.gov/](http://www.samhsa.gov/)
The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) was established in 1992 and directed by Congress to target effectively substance abuse and mental health services to the people most in need and to translate research in these areas more effectively and more rapidly into the general health care system. Over the years SAMHSA has demonstrated that prevention works, treatment is effective, and people recover from mental and substance use disorders.


- **Veterans Health Administration**: [http://www.va.gov/health/default.asp](http://www.va.gov/health/default.asp)

- **Warrior Gateway**: [http://www.warriorgateway.org/](http://www.warriorgateway.org/)

- **Trauma-Informed Care for Women Veterans Experiencing Homelessness: A Guide for Service Providers**, also known as the “Trauma Guide,” was created to address the psychological and mental health needs of women veterans. The guide is also a compilation of best practices aimed at improving effectiveness in engaging female veterans. Written for service providers, the guide offers observational knowledge and concrete guidelines for modifying practices with the goal of increasing re-entry outcomes.

- **Veterans Health Administration**: [http://www.va.gov/health/default.asp](http://www.va.gov/health/default.asp)

- **Warrior Gateway**: [http://www.warriorgateway.org/](http://www.warriorgateway.org/)

- The Veterans Health Administration is home to the United States’ largest integrated health care system consisting of 152 medical centers, nearly 1,400 community-based outpatient clinics, community living centers, Vet Centers and Domiciliaries. Together these health care facilities and the more than 53,000 independent licensed health care practitioners who work within them provide comprehensive care to more than 8.3 million Veterans each year.

- **Warrior Gateway**: [http://www.warriorgateway.org/](http://www.warriorgateway.org/)

- Warrior Gateway is a non-profit whose mission is to connect individuals in the military, veterans, and their families with federal, state, and local government programs as well as non-profit organizations in their local communities.