

Community Training to Ensure Whole-person Health

Training healthcare providers, shelters, veteran service organizations, nonprofits and social service teams on veteran issues and resources to ensure the military community has an effective support network.

Overview

Community organizations that serve the homeless population deal with many complex issues, but those who also serve homeless veterans, Reservists, National Guardsmen and their families often have a different set of issues and resources for which they must be aware. Though these organizations may have a good understanding of the issues surrounding homelessness, they may benefit from an understanding of issues related to military service. By raising awareness among community organizations and creating a network of these existing services, the military community can fully benefit from receiving holistic care tailored to their needs and use it to better their standard of living, and potentially decrease their stress, increase their general wellness and eventually secure permanent housing.

There are three basic steps: 1) Create a Training Manual; 2) Find Out Who the Main Service Providers Are In Your Community; and 3) Train and Provide Continuing Support.

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 promising practice 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

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? Use that information along with online sources to create a simple brochure, fact sheet or brief presentation. For examples of appropriate training material see **Other Resources**. Find out where these community service providers meet regularly and see if you can be included in a meeting. It is often difficult to get various providers to come to additional meetings due simply to the complex 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. Ensure consistency by using the same information in all training methods.

Topics to Include:

- **Trauma-informed care:** 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. A trauma-informed service provider community better understands the potential triggers of trauma survivors that traditional approaches to service may worsen.
- **Permanent supportive housing:** Inform service providers of housing opportunities available for homeless veterans in your community. Ensure they understand that 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. See the *Housing First* promising practice for more information.

Somewhere in the training, provide a short list of the resources within your community that offer supportive services to veterans and their families who are either homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Use search databases such as the National Resource Directory, Warrior Gateway and 211 Directory to find specific services in your community.

Volunteer Opportunities

Title: Content coordinator

Task: Researches training information and compiles it in a succinct manner for placement in various training materials

Attributes: Articulate, organized

Who: Consider a student who is a veteran, a local service provider or someone who works in the veteran space

Hours: Eight to 40 over one to two months

Title: Training material designer

Task: Design the various documents for each training method

Attributes: Creative, organized, self-starter

Who: 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.

Hours: 15 to 20 over one month

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 find out what options are currently available 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 example to see how they deal with it 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 to choose from.

Step 3: Train and Provide Continuing Support

Provide the training according to the training method the providers requested, and provide continuing support by directing them to the correct source if they call you with questions down the line.

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 beat next time. 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.

Other Resources

- U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Health Care: <://www.va.gov/health/default.asp>
 - The VA has a list of health services available to veterans and where to find those services
- Medicine Plus: Veterans and Military Health: <://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/veteransandmilitaryhealth.html>
 - A service of U.S. National Library of Medicine, this website discusses differences between standard health care and health care tailored for the military community
- National Health Care for the Homeless Council (HCH), Veterans: <://www.nhchc.org/resources/clinical/tools-and-support/veterans/>
 - The National Health Care for the Homeless Council is a resource for those who work to improve the health of homeless people and who seek housing, healthcare and adequate incomes for everyone
- Homeless Veterans & Health Care: A Resource Guide for Providers: <://www.nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/HomelessVetsHealthCare.pdf>
- Trauma-Informed Care for Women Veterans Experiencing Homelessness: A Guide for Service Providers <http://www.dol.gov/wb/trauma/>
 - Also known as the “Trauma Guide,” was written for service providers to address the psychological and mental health needs of women veterans
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA) Trauma-Informed Care and Trauma Services: <http://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma.asp>
- National Resource Directory: <://www.nationalresourcedirectory.gov/>
- Warrior Gateway: <://www.warriorgateway.org/>

- The 211 Directory: [://www.211.org/](http://www.211.org/)
- Center for Deployment Psychology: [://deploymentpsych.org/training/online-courses](http://deploymentpsych.org/training/online-courses)
 - Free web-based training to educate professionals working with service members and their families