

Ending Veteran Homelessness on Long Island

By Ralph Fasano, MEd, CRC
Executive Director
Concern for Independent Living

In 2011 President Obama, Department of Defense Secretary Eric Shinseki and HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan announced a five year plan to end veteran homelessness in the United States. The announcement was backed up by record funds to help achieve this goal. VASH vouchers (Veterans Administration Supportive Housing) were made available to serve as a rental subsidy for veterans so that they could afford housing. Case managers were assigned to the veterans to help them find the housing and services needed to remain housed. SSVF (Supportive Services for Veteran Families) were distributed in an effort to prevent veterans from becoming homeless. Halfway into this plan the results have been significant. Veteran homelessness has been reduced by 17.2 percent.

Earlier this year Concern for Independent Living together with the Long Island Coalition for the Homeless, United Veterans Beacon House, The Community Development Corporation of Long Island, Suffolk County United Veterans and the Northport Veterans Administration took part in a "Boot Camp" in Philadelphia. Six different regions from across the country came together to strategize on



Ralph Fasano, MEd, CRC

developing a plan to end veteran homelessness by December, 2015. We received training from the Rapid Results Institute and the 100,000 Homes Campaign. After three long days we came up with the Long Island Plan which is currently in the implementation stage.

The essence of the plan is simple. If you can house more people every month

than the number of people who become homeless you can reduce the number of homeless by that number every month until no one remains homeless. Efforts can then focus on rapid re-housing to house any veterans who become homeless. Prevention activities are also key.

The creation of permanent affordable housing with flexible services is an important component of our plan. Concern is currently in the process of developing 60 units in Amityville and 59 units in Ronkonkoma. All of the units in Amityville will serve homeless veterans and their families. About half of the units in Ronkonkoma are for homeless veterans with the balance aimed at housing veterans who need affordable housing. Capital funding from the New York State Office of Mental Health, NYS Homes and Community Renewal, NYS Homeless Housing Assistance program, The Federal Home Loan Bank of New York and Suffolk County made this housing possible.

Concern has been working with the Northport VA, CDC of Long Island and United Veterans Beacon House to house homeless veterans who are given VASH vouchers. To date we have housed 47 veterans in permanent housing. Supportive services ensure that the veterans' needs are met. Two of the veterans have secured jobs and no longer need the vouchers to pay their rent. Others are in the process of receiving training that will help them get

jobs. In several cases where rental housing was difficult to find, Concern purchased the sites and is renting them to the veterans. Home Depot donated \$300,000 to help fund these acquisitions and The Long Island Community Foundation gave us a \$25,000 start-up grant.

Another exciting development is the creation of a Community Resource Center alongside the Amityville housing. The Long Island Coalition for the Homeless is renovating a 40,000 sq. ft. building that will house approximately seven nonprofit agencies. United Veterans Beacon House, SUS, Family Service League, Suffolk County United Veterans, Concern and others will be joined together under one roof and will focus on coordinating our regional efforts to end veteran homelessness.

While there must be overall plans to achieve goals it always comes down to individuals and our ability to connect with them. For over a year now we have been working with a 71 year old veteran who spent many years living in the woods. After months of engaging him, he finally decided that he liked what we could offer him – an apartment in a safe, comfortable place where he could maintain his dignity and begin to rebuild his life. One year later his health has improved and he is working part-time. He was able to pay off debts and save money to purchase a

see Homelessness on page 41

Homelessness from page 31

vehicle. He spends part of his free time engaging homeless veterans who can benefit from some guidance from one who has been there.

Another veteran celebrated his 42nd birthday this month with his 16 year old daughter in his two-bedroom condo that he rents through HUD VASH. His daughter attends high school and she is doing well in school for the first time in years. He began a self-designed weight loss plan in November, has lost 15 pounds, and recently decided to start using the gym at his condo complex to get back into shape. He has been adding “decorative touches” – artificial flower arrangements, framed pictures, candles, and a blue and white runner for his dining room table – to his new home for the last month. He’s saving for a washer and dryer; a car for his daughter is next. He planned and enjoyed cooking holiday meals at Thanksgiving and Christmas time, and served his Concern case manager his “special” brewed tea on Christmas Eve. Despite suffering from severe anxiety, he is happy, feels secure and safe in his home and is starting to venture out

to public places after being a virtual hermit for several years. He has recently begun receiving financial compensation from the VA for his service-related disabilities, and combined with his social security disability benefits earned during all the years he worked as a truck driver, he has a monthly income sufficient for his needs.

Ending Veteran homelessness on Long Island will take a concerted effort using all of the resources available in the best manner possible. We are determined to work with our partners to help make this happen.

Photos Below:

Photo #1: 60 units of housing for homeless veterans in Amityville will open in mid-2014.

Photo #2: In cases where finding rental housing for veterans with VASH vouchers proved difficult, Concern purchased sites and is renting them to the veterans.

Photo #3: Adjacent to the 60 units of housing that Concern is developing will be a large Community Center where a number of non profits will provide support services to homeless veterans.





Introducing

1-844-ONE-CALL

The JBFCs toll-free, easy-access line for counseling services

1-844-ONE-CALL offers clients a toll-free, quick, efficient way to learn about our services and schedule appointments for individual, group, family, or couples therapy and psychiatric services.

JBFCs offers evidence-based therapies for most mental health and behavioral issues, including trauma. Services are available in many languages. We welcome referrals. Visit us at jbfc.org.

JBFCs has Article 31 mental health clinics, plus additional satellite locations, across the five boroughs:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>BRONX
 J.W. Beatman Counseling Center
 521 West 239th St.
 Riverdale, NY 10463</p> <p>Harry Blumenfeld Counseling Center
 750 Astor Ave.
 Bronx, NY 10467</p> <p>Bronx R.E.A.L. Center
 55 Westchester Sq.
 Bronx, NY 10461</p> | <p>Mid-Brooklyn Counseling Center
 2020 Coney Island Ave.
 Brooklyn, NY 11223</p> |
| <p>BROOKLYN
 Bay Ridge Counseling Center
 9435 Ridge Blvd.
 Brooklyn, NY 11209</p> <p>Boro Park Counseling Center
 1273 53rd St.
 Brooklyn, NY 11219</p> <p>Break-Free Adolescent Services
 2020 Coney Island Ave.
 Brooklyn, NY 11223</p> <p>Coney Island Center
 2928 West 36th St.
 Brooklyn, NY 11224</p> <p>Crown Heights Counseling Center
 1055 St. Johns Place
 Brooklyn, NY 11213</p> | <p>MANHATTAN
 Child Development Center
 34 West 139th St.
 New York, NY 10037</p> <p>Dr. Eugene D. Glynn Manhattan North Counseling Center
 5030 Broadway, Suite 201
 New York, NY 10037</p> <p>Greenberg Manhattan West Counseling Center
 135 West 50th St., 6th Floor
 New York, NY 10033</p> |
| <p>QUEENS
 Pride of Judea Community Services
 243-02 Northern Blvd.
 Douglaston, NY 11362</p> | <p>STATEN ISLAND
 Morris L. Black Counseling Center
 2795 Richmond Ave.
 Staten Island, NY 10314</p> |

