

HOMELESS VETERANS



OUR
FORGOTTEN
HEROES

They
Served.
They
Earned.



The San Diego Office of Military & Veterans Affairs is the **vanguard for finding and securing benefits for our Homeless Veterans**

FACING THE CHALLENGE

BY
WHIP
VILLARREAL

Here's why an across-the-board effort is necessary

San Diego is home to one of the biggest populations of active duty service members and veterans in the United States. That means in addition to the San Diego County Office of Military & Veterans Affairs, there are many regional partners that collaborate to help service members transition into civilian life and access the benefits they're entitled to as veterans. But there are still a significant number of vets who fall through the cracks and find themselves facing homelessness.

Several key factors drive the homelessness issue facing the region.

A major factor looming over veterans is the high cost of living across California. The San Diego Union-Tribune recently reported that San Diego County's median home price hit another all-time high of \$640,000 in August 2020. Data from apartmentlist.com shows the median price for a one-bedroom apartment in September was \$1,574 and \$2,042 for a two-bedroom.

Another factor vets face is the challenge of finding adequate, gainful employment to pay for basic needs in expensive urban areas. And in these uncertain times—with COVID-19 running unabated and lockdowns across the state—it has made a tough situation even harder.

However, in the face of peril and uncertainty exacerbating the problem, there is some good news.

"The number of homeless veterans has gone down from the previous year and while gradual improvement has been made, there is still work to be done," says Patrick Prieb, director of the San Diego VA Regional Office. "I think a lot of raised awareness from the community and actions taken by them—along with federal, state and local partnerships—have helped to address the issue."

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Patrick Prieb
Director of the San Diego VA Regional Office

For example, Prieb is excited about the Solid Start program that reaches out and contacts veterans three times per year to check on them, assessing their needs and making sure they are taking advantage of available programs.

"I believe increased collaboration across all levels of government, community partners and nonprofit organizations have helped reduce those statistics," he says. "As this ongoing cooperation continues, I am confident that the homeless veteran population will continue to dwindle as we move forward into 2021."



BY THE NUMBERS

This year, it is estimated there are nearly

1,000
homeless veterans
living in the San Diego area.

A little more than half have access to homeless shelters and the rest are completely unsheltered.

However, the total number of homeless veterans in the San Diego area has reduced by

↓ 12%
from the previous year's count of
estimated homeless veterans
living in the region.

Veterans at risk of or experiencing homelessness are encouraged to visit www.va.gov, where vets can apply for benefits or health care online. Veterans can also directly visit the Mission Valley office where the San Diego Regional Veterans Affairs Office is located at 8810 Rio San Diego Drive. Additionally, veterans can call toll-free 1-800-827-1000 for assistance.



HEALTH CARE AND BEYOND

BY
MELANIE
ANDERSON

The VA assists homeless veterans with health care, housing, employment and more

When people think of the VA, health care typically comes to mind. For veterans who are homeless or at risk for homelessness, reaching out to the VA can unlock a variety of crucial services, from primary care to housing.

"I think veterans are surprised that the VA does more than health care," says Jessica Chamberlain, chief of social work and acting director of Health Care for Homeless Veterans at the VA San Diego.

HCHV was established to help homeless veterans access health care, but the program has expanded to provide assistance with housing, employment, and substance and mental health issues. HCHV is one of the few VA programs that serves veterans without honorable discharge status.

"If (veterans have) never enrolled (in VA health care locally), the homeless program will work to get them enrolled but will also concurrently work to get them needed services," says Chamberlain. "We do that as a parallel process."

VA housing assistance includes connecting veterans to transitional housing—provided by community partners—or enrolling them in HUD-VASH, a permanent supportive housing program that provides housing and case management for qualifying veterans.

"HUD-VASH is what we call a housing first model, meaning veterans don't have to be sober or psychiatrically stable. They just have to be able to be safe in their (housing) unit," says Chamberlain. "The philosophy behind that is if they

can be housed in a safe place, then we can start to treat the other issues, be it substance issues, be it mental health, be it unemployment—whatever it is."

"We have huge success stories of people who...really embrace the services and really thrive."



Jessica Chamberlain
Chief of social work, HCHV, VA San Diego

The VA provides comprehensive health care, including mental health services and substance abuse treatment. The VA also has strong, longstanding partnerships with community organizations that provide residential treatment.

HCHV has a primary care team that serves homeless veterans and a recuperative care program that provides a place to recover from an illness, injury or surgery after being discharged from the hospital. "It's designed for veterans who...



A VETERAN SUCCESS STORY

"Our approach is to meet veterans where they are. If veterans are willing and ready to accept help, which is oftentimes coupled with treatment, it gives them an opportunity to turn it around and resolve their homelessness," says Jessica Chamberlain, chief of social work, VA San Diego.

"We have folks who were in our programs who now are very successful and work for the VA. In my early days as a social worker, I worked at Stand Down, the big three-day community event put on by one of our community partners that treats homeless veterans. I met a veteran there [and] through that event he got into the VA's alcohol and drug treatment program, got clean and stayed clean. I run into him at the hospital (where he works) about once a year and this is 22 years later."

need a bit more time to recuperate, but they don't need to be in the hospital," says Chamberlain.

Veterans can access employment assistance through VA employment specialists or community referrals. The VA also partners with the legal system to provide treatment courts, which offer qualifying veterans the choice to enter a structured treatment program in lieu of incarceration for misdemeanors.

"We have huge success stories of people who have been very ill, be it with mental health or substance use, and who really embrace the services and really thrive," says Chamberlain.



For more information on Health Care for Homeless Veterans, call this national hotline number 1-877-424-3838 or the VA San Diego: 619-497-8988.

The Aspire
Center facility
PHOTO COURTESY OF
ASPIRE



ONE FACILITY'S ALL-HANDS APPROACH

BY KRYSTA
SCRIPTER

The Aspire Center is doing things differently when it comes to treating vets with PTSD, depression and anxiety

“I’m not aware of another one in the nation like it,” says Dr. Carl Rimmele, Ph.D., Aspire Center director. Dr. Rimmele is a psychologist who’s worked with Veterans Affairs for more than 30 years.

He says the Aspire Center was designed with a very specific mission: “That is to address the problem of veterans returning from the most recent conflicts and their difficulty engaging in care.”

Aspire residents are usually vets from conflicts in Iraq or Afghanistan suffering from PTSD and combat theater trauma. “So it could have been they were dealing with bodies, it could have been they were aboard ship,” explains Rimmele. “It could have been some other kind of trauma that happened.”

Aspire vets also must have been deployed since the early ‘90s, or since 9/11. This means most of the patients are a lot younger than other vets. Many of them have families, Dr. Rimmele says, and are married with minor children.

“But what that provides is that when these veterans come in, they look around the room and they don’t see grandpa across the room,” he says. “They see their squad, they see the people that they served with, and so they’re much more at ease and much more able to engage in what’s a very difficult treatment to treat their PTSD.”

Vets who come to Aspire typically have not responded well to other types of treatment. What makes Aspire different

is its three-stage treatment plan. First, vets come and live at Aspire for about five or six months. During that time, vets work with trained professionals, and sometimes other vets, to manage their emotions in healthy ways. The second is skills

“What are six months compared to the years you’ve been living with this?”



Carl Rimmele, Ph.D.
Aspire Center director

acquisition, where Dr. Rimmele says the team either tweaks the skills vets already have or provide them with new skills to better manage anxiety and other issues.

“And then where I think we excel is we take their third phase, and we try to engage them in the activities they’ll be

doing when they leave,” he says. “So if they want to work, we get them working. So they may be working full-time. They get up in the morning, get breakfast, and go off and work and come back and live.”

Aspire creates a safe environment where vets’ needs are met, both physically and emotionally. “The ideal scenario would be that when they leave, the only thing that changes is where they sleep and who cooks their food so that the transition is much smoother,” Rimmele says.

Most of the magic from this program comes from how veterans are in treatment together, rather than being isolated to one or two meetings a week. “Whereas on an outpatient basis, anyone can hold it together for an hour at a time in the group and look good,” he says. What a patient is like during those other 23 hours is critical, and a residential facility allows vets to be treated in all aspects of their anxiety or PTSD.

It is a significant commitment, Dr. Rimmele says, and he understands how some veterans may be apprehensive about an intense program. But for him, the benefits are worthwhile. “Where else can you put together some sort of a comprehensive program that is going to look truly at making this kind of difference?” he asks. “What are six months compared to the years you’ve been living with this?”

VVSD LEAVES NO ONE BEHIND

BY
ELISSA
EINHORN

Just like the military they served, this nonprofit makes sure everyone is accounted for

In 1981, five Vietnam combat veterans realized they weren't receiving the services they needed or felt they were eligible for, so they channeled their collective energy into something positive and created Veterans Village of San Diego.

Four decades later, VVSD assists 3,100 vets annually through a variety of individualized programming. While vets who walk through the doors have been active-duty during varying eras and in different conflicts, what they have in common is service to their country.

"Veterans are proud individuals who feel guilty and anxious about needing services," explains Lisa Record, VVSD's vice president of development. "It's difficult to ask for help."

But help is exactly what they get—according to a continuum-of-care model that includes mental health services, housing, employment and rehabilitation. All VVSD services are guided by the vision "Leave No One

Behind," adapted from the military philosophy of never leaving anyone in the field.

Mental health services are provided at VVSD's on-site Cohen Clinic, where personalized case management takes each vet's life

"Vets deserve our support. The world is a better place because we appreciate what our veterans have done for us."



Lisa Record
Vice president of development, VVSD

in different locations and working through how to keep the family together."

Additionally, vets receive a variety of housing services that help them and their families avoid homelessness, employment and training services, and even an IT certification program that has resulted in vets working for Apple and Tesla. There is also a state-licensed rehabilitation center that addresses substance use, and a Homeless Court, which works with the District Attorney and Public Defender's offices to help vets with mounting fines and fees.

VVSD also participates in "Stand Down," an annual intervention program that supports veterans and their families at risk of or experiencing homelessness. The volunteer-run event takes place in 300 locations across the U.S. and serves hundreds of vets, including 150 in the San Diego area who receive everything from mental health services and spiritual guidance to personal hygiene services, such as haircuts and massages.

"Vets deserve our support," Record says. "The world is a better place because we appreciate what our veterans have done for us."



A VETERAN SUCCESS STORY

After an Army vet was referred to Veterans Village of San Diego by the Wounded Warrior Project, a veteran service organization, she literally walked into VVSD's Cohen Clinic. The 58-year-old woman was suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder as well as agoraphobia due to enduring sexual trauma during her military service.

She received 16 sessions of Cognitive Processing Therapy (a specific behavioral psychotherapy that is often effective with PTSD), monthly psychiatry appointments to monitor her medication, and case management sessions to help her organize her life. She was able to return to work as a nurse and reconnect with her mother.

Today, she has had a decrease in all symptoms—flashbacks, nightmares, and others—and feels "emotionally stable for the first time in forever."

circumstances into account—everything from employment and education to child care, caregiver support and legal assistance. Therapeutic treatment addresses depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, grief, substance use and relationship difficulties.

"Military families experience stress at every level, from deployment to spouses who have to reacclimate when a vet returns home," Record says, noting how during COVID-19, critical mental health services have been provided via telehealth. "Sometimes this means meeting with a husband and wife who are

For more information about Veterans Village of San Diego, visit www.vvsd.net or call 619-393-2000.



VVSD's "Stand Down" event
COURTESY OF VVSD

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

HVSC gives homeless veterans a hand up **BY ANNE STOKES**

Being homeless is hard. Fighting your way out of homelessness can be just as difficult. For veterans working to get back on their feet, the Hawley Veterans Services Center is a jumping-off point where they can find the support they need to make a home for themselves.

"Our goal is to help clients resolve any short-term barrier they have to housing so they can move rather quickly into a permanent housing situation," says Steve Anderson, Hawley Veterans Services Center program manager. "We really believe that if you live in a stable environment, the other problems will be easier to solve."

Funded by the Veterans Administration, HVSC is a 20-bed, short-term transitional housing program. While there, veterans are connected with a comprehensive foundation of support that helps them transition from homelessness to permanent housing, including:

- Health and mental health care
- Substance abuse treatment
- Financial assistance through the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) and Supportive Services For Veterans Families (SSVF) programs
- Job readiness and employment through the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program, which is located on-site

"We let them come off the streets, stabilize and focus on the next step," Anderson says. "We help them resolve any barriers that might come up with them moving forward or connect them with any long-term support they might need to maintain that permanent housing once they leave here."

Anderson says individualized support is the key to ensuring veterans' short- and long-term success, whether that's addressing substance abuse, physical or mental health struggles, or any other obstacles veterans may be facing.

"Because we're so small and personalized, we're able to really work with clients who might not be able to make it in a larger shelter or a less personal place," he says. "We're very proud that we can take clients who might have a difficult time at other places. We try to be as inclusive as we can to help all the different barriers that they might be struggling with."

Anderson also notes that veterans' camaraderie can be an added level of support that benefits their rehabilitation.

"One of the side effects of being homeless is that you're really disconnected from a social network and social structure that's supportive," he says. "By coming here and living with other veterans, it allows them to connect, feel more comfortable and let down their guard because there's somebody else there who understands them, that supports them, who knows where they've been and where they're going."

"We really believe that if you live in a stable environment, the other problems will be easier to solve."

Steve Anderson
Program manager, Hawley Veterans Services Center



A VETERAN SUCCESS STORY

When Robert Slay came into the Hawley Veterans Services Center three years ago, the U.S. Air Force veteran says he was at rock bottom. Today, he helps other veterans turn their lives around as a case manager.

"I had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and I also have pretty significant PTSD. I had a lot of trouble accepting that diagnosis so there were several years where I just went downhill," he says. "When I walked into Hawley Vet Center, everything changed. ... They took me under their wing, they gave me a place that I could decompress and do some self-evaluation. They helped me get to my doctors to get on the right meds. They assisted me in getting a part-time job, which I never thought I would be able to do again. With all the help that they gave me, it turned my life around. I can't even put it into words what a significant change this made in helping me get my head back in the right place."

Case manager
Robert Slay
PHOTO COURTESY OF
THE HAWLEY VETERANS
SERVICES CENTER



For more information about the Hawley Veterans Services Center, visit www.voasw.org/veteran-housing-communities or call 619-561-9808.

A PATH HOME

This local nonprofit helps veterans find housing and stabilize their lives

BY MELANIE
ANDERSON

For veterans who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, PATH San Diego provides a lifeline in the form of housing assistance. In addition, the nonprofit helps veterans and families create sustainable household budgets and access benefits and services.

"Everything (we do) is geared toward, 'How do we increase your ability to stay in housing for the longer term?'" says Hanan Scrapper, regional director of PATH San Diego. "We're really creating a housing stability plan and...looking at budgeting on a monthly basis to help (veterans and families) get to financial stability."

PATH helps determine eligibility for programs such as SSVF (Supportive Services for Veteran Families), rapid rehousing or permanent supportive housing through HUD-VASH, as well as disability and employment assistance.

"We have specific resources for veterans and make sure our team is really knowledgeable about what those resources are, based on the person's discharge status and whether or not they have VA healthcare," says Scrapper. "We make that linkage in a quick manner."

When a veteran calls PATH, the first step is often speaking with a rapid resolution specialist, who talks through possible ways to resolve housing issues outside the system. If PATH's assistance is needed, veterans are matched up with a case manager and housing specialist. For those with an urgent need for housing, PATH has an interim shelter.

"The case manager will meet with them immediately after the referral is made and gather more information on what could they qualify for," says Scrapper. "What does a housing stability plan look like? It's client-driven with the plan of what they would like to accomplish."



For some, that means receiving short-term rental assistance from PATH. "Sometimes they just need a little hand up and they're good to go," says Scrapper. "Other times, we need to look at the unit they're living in. If you're paying 70-80% of your income toward rent, if anything happens—such as medical or car issues—there isn't money to help

"Sometimes (clients) just need a little hand up and they're good to go."



Hanan Scrapper
Regional director, PATH San Diego

you problem-solve. All those things can really snowball."

PATH's housing specialists help clients find housing that fits their budgets and, whenever possible, is within their communities. To support clients in their new homes, PATH typically pays the deposit and up to nine months of rent.

"Our goal is to improve the lives (of veterans) as much as we can," says Scrapper. "We want...to remove any barriers that are preventing them from living that successful, thriving life."



A VETERAN SUCCESS STORY

"Last summer, I was at the (Veterans Village) tents on Pacific Highway. Then when COVID hit, I ended up at the convention center," says veteran Darryl Sikkila. "At the end of July, PATH brought me to a different highway."

"(First) they took me to the Old Town Inn. I loved it over there. I'm now at the Peachtree, which is closer to my job. (On the day) I moved to my new room, my case manager Sharon called me a Lyft from my hotel—and (PATH housing specialist) Christian was right down the street. It was just heaven sent."

"In 2016, I hurt my back. After the tents, I was so sick at heart. I just can't say enough (about PATH). They helped me out so much."

For more information about PATH of San Diego, visit www.PATHSanDiego.org or call 619-810-8668.

BACK TO CIVILIAN LIFE

One small organization makes a big difference

BY KRYSTA SCRIPTER



Kelly Luisi created an organization after realizing how many homeless vets there were in San Diego, and how the system wasn't meeting their very specific needs.

"I just saw that there weren't any good systems in place to take them from point A to point Z and beyond in helping them transition out of the military and back into the civilian world," says Luisi, founder of Homeless Veterans of San Diego.

HVSD works with veterans one-on-one, assigning a case manager, and taking each case uniquely. Last year, they were able to get 30 veterans off the streets and into permanent or bridge housing. They also assist with navigating the Veterans Affairs system and job placement. But each case is different, and Luisi says this small-scale, individual approach is what makes the program successful.

"It definitely is the one-on-one interaction. It's not a nine-to-five job for us Monday through Friday. It's a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week job. My case managers are well aware of that coming into this," Luisi says. "Life happens, and people often have crises or situations that come up that they need somebody at all hours of the night."

From helping vets go to the DMV or even helping figure out why their dog is sick, HVSD prides itself on being there in whatever capacity a vet needs. This highly personal, incredibly detailed service is what makes vets come back,

Luisi says. When doing assessments with veterans, Luisi says they commonly joke about allowing the vet to break up with HVSD if they feel uncomfortable or don't trust them. "And they always laugh," she adds. "We let them

"Nobody needs to go through being homeless or having housing insecurities by themselves."

Kelly Luisi
Founder, Homeless Veterans of San Diego

know that it's a two-way street and a two-way relationship. And it's really all based on communication and trust."

Luisi shared one such story about a 29-year-old veteran father of two who was addicted to meth. He came in and out of HVSD, never fully committing to the program.

"And we were persistent and consistent with him in that, whenever he would call, we would pick up the phone,

we would let him know, 'Hey, we're still here. We're willing to help you.' But we realized that it needed to be in his time," Luisi says.

Two years later, Luisi said this vet is now sober, going to school, and working toward a better relationship with his daughters. "And that's success stories that we love to see," Luisi says.

Luisi created this organization to serve veterans in the ways they need, and she can't think of a better group to help. "Nobody needs to go through being homeless or having housing insecurities by themselves. There's help out there," she says. "They are not alone in their situation. And I encourage them to reach out and to just talk to us."

For more information on
Homeless Veterans of San Diego, visit
www.homelessveteransofsandiego.com
or call 760-383-1685.

JUST ONE PHONE CALL

This organization can link veterans to the right services anywhere in the region

BY WHIP VILLARREAL

Courage to Call is a little of everything. But most importantly, it acts as one of the main connectors for all the social services available to veterans in San Diego. This veteran-staffed organization offers free, confidential services to all military and veterans, including guidance and referrals for food, shelter, rent and housing.

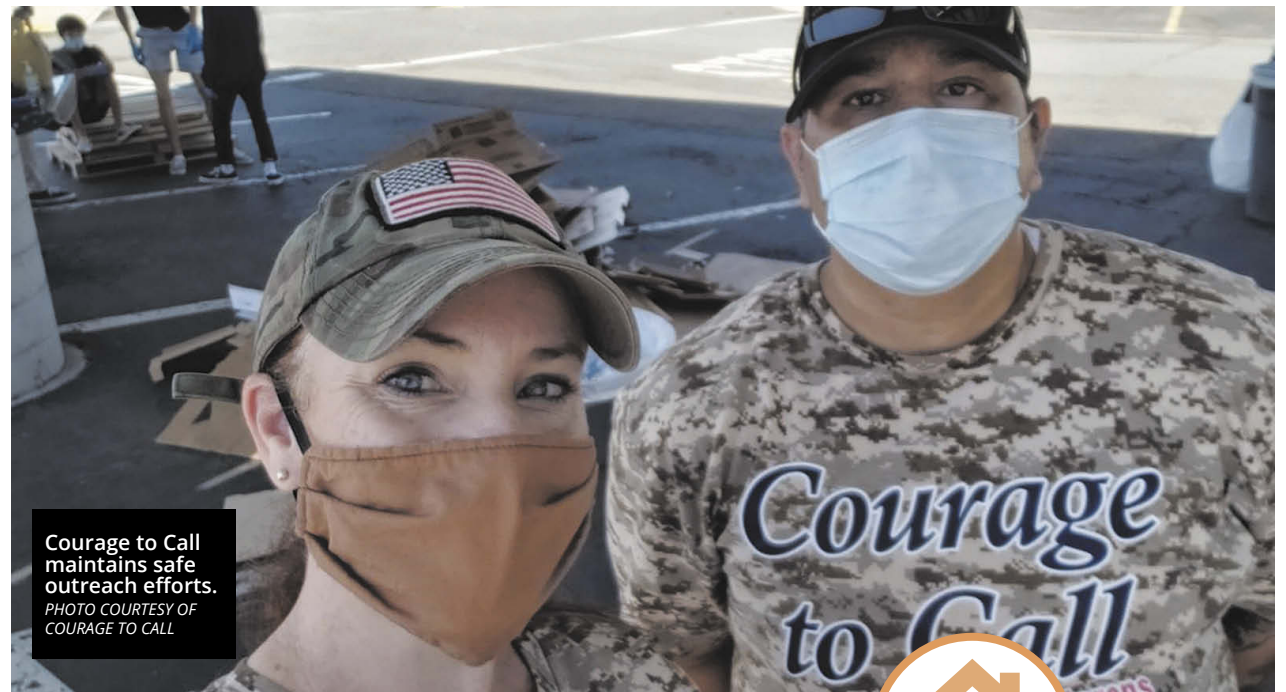
Instead of calling five different places to see where to get help for any issue, vets can call Courage to Call and its screeners are trained to find the best options available for them, explains RanDee McLain, LCSW, program manager for Courage To Call.

However, because of COVID-19, there have been some challenges for the organization in continuing to offer its hands-on, robust services.

"Initially, when the pandemic took hold, we really had to modify our tactics for the safety of our staff and halted face-to-face interactions," says McLain. "We did see an increased need for assistance as the crisis unfolded, so our food distributions had to bulk up to serve more than 600, where we would normally serve 200. That has started to level off since the last distribution; it was just under 300 but the need is still high. Meanwhile, we were restricted on the same level of engagement with clients because of the pandemic, so we had to shift gears and communicate through different means. Instead of face-to-face interactions, we at times used social media and broadcasted live feeds as a way to connect with some clients."

She added that last summer, the organization resumed direct services through its Homeless Outreach Team, but with masks and social distancing in mind; its staff meetings are still limited to online only.

The objective of Courage to Call's peer-navigated program is to get homeless vets into a place they can sustain on their own. That may also mean helping find employment opportunities, providing food and health benefits, as well as



other services, until they get to a place of sustainability. The programs are designed to help them stay on track with case management for up to 18 months.

McLain says she's observed some clients improve their lives in as little as six or nine months and do well on their own long after receiving services. Often, after they finish going through case management, they come back and volunteer to help pay it forward to their fellow veterans who seek assistance from the organization.

Instead of calling five different places to see where to get help for any issue, vets can phone Courage to Call and its screeners are trained to find the best options available for them.

RanDee McLain
Program manager, Courage to Call

For more information about Courage to Call, visit www.courage2call.org or phone 858-636-3604.



A VETERAN SUCCESS STORY

"I got involved with Courage to Call through the Veterans Court Program," says U.S. Army veteran Billy W. "This was an intense rehabilitation outreach program that has made me a better person, helped me better my life and become an active member of society."

"I was given a Courage to Call mentor, Mr. Michael Johnson, who has supported me and has gone above and beyond anything that anyone has (ever) done for me. He came to all my court dates. He called me all the time just to check up on me as well as my girlfriend. I was working for Caltrans when I found out that I was going to be a father in October 2020. I needed a better job and had to find something. Mr. Johnson gave me a work referral for the company where I am currently employed now. I did however need steel-toed boots for the job...and I could not afford them. Courage to Call provided me with the boots that I needed to keep my job. The last thing that Mr. Johnson did for me was give me a lead to an apartment in Escondido. On March 12, 2020 we moved in, and Mr. Johnson and Courage to Call also donated to us a big bag of diapers and a big bag of clothes. We were not expecting this."

"Without all the support that has been given from them, I might not have been here today."

IT TAKES A TEAM

Veterans find support with each other

BY ANNE
STOKES

Veterans know sometimes it takes teamwork to get the job done. Even after transitioning into civilian life, those who've served still understand the importance of working together to achieve victories large and small. The Veterans Moving Forward program leverages that camaraderie to help veterans who find themselves in legal trouble get their lives back on track.

"What we've seen...is that veterans who are housed together, who are connected and are invested in treatment, have a higher rate of success of not returning back to custody," says Patricia Cabellos, assistant manager of the reentry services division with the San Diego County Sheriff's Department. "We try to build an environment of support, hope and encouragement. No matter where the veteran is, we're going to be there to meet them and help develop a plan they can work on and they're invested in. It's not a 'you will,' it's 'let's come up with a plan that we can work on *together* and move forward.'"

The VMF program runs a special housing unit at the Vista Detention Center that houses and serves 64 veterans. A dedicated correctional counselor works with veterans and community service providers to offer workshops and college courses with transferable credits, as well as therapy to help veterans while they're in custody. They also develop a plan for after they're released, which can include substance abuse treatment, housing, health care, mental health care, employment and more.

"With every veteran being different, we try to tailor their reentry plan to meet the needs of that veteran," says Cabellos. "[It] is really rallying around them and creating this support system. They're not alone, they have resources, they can rely on each other and they can support each other."

Even after veterans have been released, they can still rely on VMF and their fellow veterans for support. Connecting them with resources through the Veterans Administration or county services—including transportation, job readiness and employment—can help ease their transition back into the community.

"They're not alone, they have resources, they can rely on each other and they can support each other."

Patricia Cabellos

Assistant manager of reentry services division, San Diego County Sheriff's Department



"Any veteran who's released from the veteran program can call back their correctional counselor and say, 'This didn't work out, I need some support, can you link me somewhere else?'" Cabellos says. "Many of the graduates who have left have become mentors themselves and reconnect with us in that way. That model has been very successful because it's not *us* telling the story of success, it's the participants coming back, talking to the veterans and sharing their stories of success and how it's possible."



SUPPORTING VETERANS AND THEIR COMPANIONS

San Diego Humane Society's Community Pet Pantry is one of the country's largest. It works with 35 other agencies—including San Diego Food Bank, Feeding San Diego and Veterans Village of San Diego—to provide free pet food and other supplies to any owners in need. Quinn Douglas-Hiley, community engagement program distribution coordinator, says the program serves many veterans as clients.

"They might be on the streets, they might be struggling...but having that pet might be what's keeping them grounded," he says. "Being able to support that person by supporting their pet is everything for us. ... We could all be a couple life setbacks away from being in the same situation."

Donation needs and available resources

- Wet or dry food, especially cat food (open bags are accepted in original packaging)
- Kitty litter
- Leashes
- Collars
- Beds
- Crates
- Toys
- Monetary donations are always welcome

Where to go

5500 Gaines St.,
San Diego

3500 Burnet Drive,
Escondido

572 Airport Road,
Oceanside

Campus sites are open Tuesday through Sunday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. For more information on resources or donations, visit www.sdhumane.org or call 619-299-7012.



HOME AT LAST

The county works with federal programs to secure landlord partners and housing assistance for veterans

BY THEA MARIE ROOD

Ideally, your monthly housing cost should be 30% or less of your income. But in expensive areas like San Diego, especially among low-income residents, that is sometimes impossible. Either renters are paying far more than a third of their paychecks to their landlord, or aren't able to qualify for a rental unit to start with.

This is also a big reason people are at risk of or experiencing homelessness. And it can make it extremely difficult for people who are homeless to find a permanent home.

For veterans in San Diego, however, the county's Health & Human Services Agency has experts who can steer them around this issue. Nicholas Martinez, the deputy director of Housing and Community Development Services, explains how.

"VASH (Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing) is a joint venture between HUD and the VA," Martinez says. "It authorizes rental assistance vouchers to local housing sources. The VASH program is a dedicated resource for veterans."

Most important are the guarantees it offers, both to veterans and their landlords. "Veterans only pay 30% of their income to rent," he says, no matter how much the veteran makes and no matter how much the actual rent is. This rental assistance is also combined with services. "They are not out there on their own," says Martinez. "If they've been living on the streets, they may have trauma from their service and from being on the streets. They need support. When case management and wraparound services are tied to housing, you get the best chance for success for veterans."

Part of that support involves identifying rental units for veterans, rather than making them search on their own. It also means developing landlord partners. "The county offers incentives to landlords," Martinez explains, as well as damage

"When case management and wraparound services are tied to housing, you get the best chance for success for veterans."

Nicholas Martinez
Deputy director, County of San Diego HCDS



reimbursement. Lastly, the rent is guaranteed when landlords rent to veterans using VASH. "Especially now, with the rental market what it is, people losing jobs and unable to pay rent, landlords' income is not stable," he says.

But the real winner in Martinez' opinion are the veterans, who are able to establish themselves in permanent homes and begin unwinding their other issues. "We have many a success story where a vet is flourishing and doing a great job, and no longer even needs a case manager."

For more information about the VASH program here in San Diego County, visit www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/sdhcd/veterans-services/vash.html or call 858-694-8789.

CLAIM YOUR BENEFITS

If you are at risk of or experiencing homelessness, or are struggling with other issues, the Office of Military & Veterans Affairs is an important resource for veterans and their families in San Diego County.

To receive benefits counseling, follow up with a claim or acquire housing—or to determine what benefits you are owed and how to acquire them—give OMVA a call at 858-694-3222.

RECEIVE SUPPORT FROM YOUR PEERS

Military veterans, active service members and their loved ones can receive even more support from 2-1-1 San Diego. Upon contacting the 24/7 confidential helpline, callers reach a Peer Support Specialist who is dedicated to making their very first call productive and fulfilling. Find solace in the staff of veterans that are able to empathize and assist from direct experience.

For support, call
2-1-1

For more
information, e-mail
[support@
211sandiego.org](mailto:support@211sandiego.org)



County of San Diego Office of Military & Veterans Affairs

5560 Overland Ave. #310
San Diego, CA 92123
858-694-3222

MVRC Escondido	760-740-5604
MVRC National City	619-731-3345
MVRC Oceanside	442-262-2701

