



A HOME FOR THE BRAVE

Northern Nevada Veterans Resource Center
helps vets escape homelessness and get support



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David Perez is site director for Northern Nevada Veterans Resource Center. PHOTO BY ERIC MARKS



GIVING BACK TO THOSE WHO'VE SERVED

NORTHERN NEVADA VETERANS RESOURCE CENTER HELPS VETERANS OBTAIN HOUSING AND MORE

by MIKE BLOUNT

How NNVRC helps vets

Northern Nevada Veterans Resource Center comprises two of the 14 resource centers located throughout Nevada, California and Arizona that are operated by the nonprofit organization Veterans Resource Centers of America.

In its mission to serve veterans in our local community, especially those who are very low-income and experiencing housing instability, NNVRC offers three core programs:

Supportive Services for Veterans and Families

This homelessness-prevention and rehousing program serves very low-income veterans and their families, providing outreach, case management and other services that promote housing stability and community integration. The program is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Behavioral Health Center

This 90-day transitional living program offers assistance and treatment for mental health concerns and substance abuse disorders. By addressing these problems, which can be barriers to stable housing, NNVRC provides veterans the support they need for long-term stability. The program is funded through a contract with the Veterans Health Administration.

Veteran Service Officer Program

Two full-time Veteran Service Officers at the Resource Center assist veterans in identifying and filing claims for VA benefits they may be eligible for. Providing this one-on-one support can prove tremendously helpful for successful claim outcomes. This program is funded through Washoe County.

When men and women of the military complete their service, the transition back to civilian life can sometimes be daunting. Without support, many veterans may be at risk for becoming homeless.

According to an estimate from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, nearly 50,000 veterans are currently living on the streets on any given night. The staff at Northern Nevada Veterans Resource Center work to address the root causes of homelessness for veterans by providing access to wraparound services and benefits that can help get them back to self-sustainability.

NNVRC Site Director David Perez believes the only way to eliminate veteran homelessness is to have an organization like the center dedicated to the cause. Since the center opened in 2012, it has served 500 veterans each year. Most of the staff at the center are also veterans themselves.

"Veterans are underserved and there are not a lot of resources for them," Perez says. "We can prevent veterans from becoming homeless by putting them in stable housing. We believe in getting them in housing first so they can become financially responsible and work on other issues like substance abuse or mental health."

The center's services are available to any veteran without a dishonorable discharge whose

income is less than 50 percent of the area median income, and is currently homeless or at risk for homelessness.

In the last few years, Northern Nevada has experienced an increase of eligible veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. While there are other organizations in the community that can help veterans, Perez says staff at the center specialize in veterans benefits.

"Many veterans come in and they don't know they are eligible for benefits," Perez says. "Health and Human Services might not know all the benefits veterans are eligible for. We understand the process and we can focus on helping the veteran population specifically."

Perez says there is a "no wrong door" policy, and no veteran will be turned away from the center. Perez says staff will help all veterans who

come in understand the benefits they are eligible for and help them apply.

"It doesn't matter what they come in for — we're going to get them referrals," Perez says. "We make sure to cast a wide net so we can capture as many resources as possible and stabilize them."

Read on to learn more about the services and benefits available to veterans in our area, and the work that Northern Nevada Veterans Resource Center is doing to help.

"We can prevent veterans from becoming homeless by putting them in stable housing."

DAVID PEREZ
Site director for Northern Nevada Veterans Resource Center

A HELPING HAND

NAVY VETERAN AND FAMILY GET HELP AFTER BECOMING HOMELESS

by MIKE BLOUNT



Navy veteran Ruffner Gunn became homeless after his wife, Martha Gunn, lost both of her legs from diabetes and their medical bills piled up. Thanks to help from NNVRC, the Gunn family is now in stable housing again, and things are looking up.
PHOTO BY ERIC MARKS

When Ruffner Gunn got out of the Navy in 1975, he decided to move back to his hometown of Los Angeles. He met his wife and they had three children together. The last of his children was born with mental and physical disabilities from hydrocephalus and cerebral palsy, requiring around-the-clock care. Gunn decided to stay home with his son while his wife became the sole income provider.

When Gunn's youngest child turned 15, he became very ill. He had to be taken to the doctor for checkups often and needed a feeding tube inserted into his stomach and cleaned every day. Though the family never had any savings, they were still able to get by. But in 2009, everything changed when Gunn's wife became very ill from diabetes. She had a heart attack and had to have one of her legs amputated. She could no longer work and the family lost their home. They had no family members who could help them. Their youngest son was placed into a group home.

"We ended up on the streets," Gunn says. "We had nothing. My wife became sick again and when we went to the hospital, she had to have her other leg taken off. She was placed into a nursing home for a year, and all that time I needed to take care of her and be there for her."

When Gunn's wife was healthy enough to leave the nursing home, they moved into a motel and stayed for two years because it was all they could afford.

"It was a bad place," Gunn says. "There were bed bugs and drugs and crazy people living there. My wife's wheelchair wouldn't even fit because it was just one little room. She mostly stayed in bed the whole time we were there. I started trying to do anything I could so we could eat."

Gunn had gone to several other charitable organizations, but was never able to get the help he and his wife needed. He heard about the Northern Nevada Veterans Resource Center and decided to give it a try. There, he met case manager Ed Crawford.

"When I met Ed, he immediately took me in and started helping me get everything straight," Gunn says. "He already had an apartment ready for us and they rented to us right away. God, it felt so great. The only difference is that I decided to go pay them a visit."

Gunn and his wife not only got a new place, they also received things like a microwave, towels and silverware. Gunn, 62, says they are doing much better now. While they still don't have a lot of money, he says he is happy they can live

like human beings again. He is thankful for the help they received at Northern Nevada Veterans Resource Center.

"We were so lost and depressed, I never thought we'd make it out of that situation," Gunn says. "They've done more for us than I could have ever imagined."

"They've done more for us than I could have ever imagined."

RUFFNER GUNN
Navy veteran

A place to feel safe

When a veteran becomes homeless, the most important thing staff of NNVRC's Supportive Services for Veterans and Families rehousing program can do is provide shelter as soon as possible, according to Site Director David Perez. Without having to worry about food and where to sleep, veterans can begin to work with staff to address their long-term needs.

"The first thing we do is assess them and find out what their barriers are," Perez says. "Through our case management program, we can then tie them back to resources in the community and wraparound services to help them. Without housing first, none of that is possible."

Case managers help each veteran develop a plan with attainable goals to get them back on their feet, with each client's plan being unique to the individual.

"We want to empower the veteran and give them the confidence to overcome their barriers to housing," Perez says.

For more information about NNVRC's Supportive Services for Veterans and Families rehousing program, visit www.vetsresource.org.

A NEW BEGINNING

by MIKE BLOUNT

When 59-year-old Army veteran Jack Hopkins became sick in 2014, it was the beginning of a dark period in his life. Hopkins had hardly ever gone to the hospital before, but that November he found himself in need of emergency medical care for diabetes.

"All blood flow had stopped to my leg," Hopkins says. "My friends said I looked like a ghost. My mouth was constantly dry. I had blisters and an unquenchable thirst. I didn't want to go to the doctor, but I had to go."

Hopkins had gone from 208 pounds to 174 pounds in just two weeks. Doctors informed him that they needed to amputate his left leg. Hopkins says the news was devastating.

"I knew that everything I did normally in life would become a challenge," Hopkins says. "I knew that my life was going to be different."

Hopkins says that after he became sick, several bad things happened in succession. He and his wife got a divorce. His two dogs died. He couldn't work and lost his job. He began living in a motel and lost his car. He also ran out of unemployment benefits.

"Every time I thought I was at the bottom of the barrel, it turned out not to be true," Hopkins says. "I would lose something else. I was very depressed."

Hopkins was pointed in the direction of the Northern Nevada Veterans Resource Center by a social worker at the hospital. Staff at the center was able to get Hopkins into a home for veterans where he could receive both medical and mental health treatment.

Natalie Stering, certified clinical staff and counselor with the Veterans Resource Center Behavioral Health Center, says Hopkins has come a long way since he first came to the home.

"Jack was dealing with a large adjustment disorder due to the loss of his leg," Stering says. "A lot of his treatment was based on building a stronger support group and learning coping skills to deal with depression and connect more with fellow veterans."

Stering says that Hopkins has been able to find strength in reaching out to help others. Connecting with peers helps him focus less on his own struggles. Through his treatment, he has also become more independent.

Though Hopkins now lives in his own apartment, he often returns to the veterans home to help other veterans.

"Jack comes by here often and all clients who are discharged are encouraged to continue to come to group support," Stering says. "He's made several friends and is doing well."

VETERAN GETS HELP BREAKING THROUGH MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

Six-year Army veteran Jack Hopkins, left, received support from Natalie Stering, right, certified clinical staff and counselor at NNVRC's Behavioral Health Center, to overcome depression he experienced after having his left leg amputated. He's now in a position to help other veterans.

PHOTO BY ERIC MARKS



Hopkins has been able to find strength in reaching out to help others.

A healthier state of mind

Northern Nevada Veterans Resource Center offers several wraparound services for mental health and substance use disorders, including group therapy, a rehabilitation unit and life-skills training. Veterans in need of these services are entered into a 90-day program that provides treatment, located at NNVRC's Behavioral Health Center.

Site Director David Perez says veterans can develop mental health issues like post-traumatic stress disorder simply by living on the street. Wraparound services

allow staff to help the veteran address any issues to self-sustainability and find mutual and spiritual support from other veterans.

"Not knowing where your next meal is going to come from or where you're going to sleep can definitely develop PTSD," Perez says. "After eight years of homelessness, it also might not be a good idea to hand over keys to an apartment and overwhelm them. Our 90-day program addresses all these issues so they don't return to being homeless."

For more information about NNVRC's Behavioral Health Center, contact the Reno or Carson City offices listed on the back page.

Or visit www.vetsresource.org for more information on behavioral health programs.



Army veteran John Kerlin was exposed to the dangerous chemical Agent Orange during the Vietnam War. With help from a case manager at Northern Nevada Veterans Resource Center, he was able to receive the benefits he was owed. PHOTO BY ALLISON YOUNG

LIFE-CHANGING BENEFITS

CASE MANAGEMENT HELPS VETERAN GET WHAT HE EARNED

by MIKE BLOUNT

Making it easier to get support

At Northern Nevada Veterans Resource Center, each veteran has a dedicated case manager that works directly with the individual to help obtain the service-connected Veterans Affairs benefits he or she has earned. Staff are trained on the most current information on filing claims and stay up-to-date with frequent training.

Veteran Service Officer Nick Lazzarino says one of the most important assets of the center is its partnership with the state of Nevada. Many veterans benefits come directly from the state, and Lazzarino says that partnership allows the center to streamline the application process for its clients.

Case managers can help veterans obtain a variety of benefits, including education benefits, home loans, service-connected disability financial support, tax breaks on automobile purchases and registration, burial benefits, and spousal and dependent benefits.

"I'm really happy to help veterans," Lazzarino says. "The bottom line is it's a constant evolution and we're always striving to do the best that we can do."

John Kerlin was drafted into the Army to fight in the Vietnam War in 1967. The next year he was sent over to Vietnam and stayed there for two years, where he became a door gunner on a helicopter. Kerlin came back to the United States in 1970.

More than 30 years later, Kerlin's health took a turn for the worse. He learned he had contracted hepatitis C while he was stationed in Vietnam. His liver was not functioning properly and he had lost a lot of weight. He was also diagnosed with psoriasis, high blood pressure and an enlarged prostate gland.

Kerlin's doctor prescribed him an experimental new drug for his hepatitis C, but it packed a hefty price tag of \$1,800 a pill. He also received medication for his high blood pressure. Kerlin believed many of his health problems stemmed from his service in the military. With his medical bills mounting, he sought help from a local veterans organization to file claims with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

"Right off the bat, everything has to be service-connected and you have to show some kind of proof to them," Kerlin says. "I was denied at first. According to the VA, I wasn't exposed. It was such a bizarre situation."

Kerlin says he felt like his country didn't want to help him, despite his service and sacrifice. Determined to get what he felt he was owed, Kerlin received another doctor's evaluation and the veterans organization filed another claim on his behalf, which was also denied. It was only after filing four claims in four years that his benefits were finally approved — but he only received a fraction of what he asked for.

"I received some benefits for tinnitus and post-traumatic stress disorder," Kerlin says. "It wasn't until later that I learned the organization that was helping me wasn't filling out the paperwork correctly. That's why I had been denied so many times."

Frustrated, Kerlin decided to seek help elsewhere. He heard good things about the Northern Nevada Veterans Resource Center from another veteran and decided to go there instead. Instantly, he was impressed.

With help from his case manager, Nick Lazzarino, Kerlin was able to obtain the benefits he had earned.

"The center is a great place to get help for your claims because they take the time to listen to your problems and they know what to do to get you help," Kerlin says.

"The center is a great place to get help for your claims because they take the time to listen to your problems."

JOHN KERLIN
Army veteran

SERVING OUR VETERANS

Q & A WITH CASE MANAGER SHANE WHITECLOUD

by MIKE BLOUNT

What does a case manager do for veterans?

A case manager evaluates and assesses vets that come in the door who have a specific need to try and help them with wraparound resources and whatever they need to make their lives more successful and sustainable. A typical situation is we have homeless veterans come in that are sleeping on the street — especially when it gets cold outside. We work with property managers who notify us when they have a vacancy and are veteran-friendly. They are often able to put the veteran into a home quickly, so they can get off the streets. We can pay the first month's rent if they meet specific requirements and work with the veteran so they can save their money and work on the barriers that kept them from being housed, like gambling, substance abuse or mental illness.

Who is eligible?

You need to be a veteran and have served at least one day of active duty and not have a dishonorable discharge. You need to make under 50 percent of the median average income of the area where you live and be homeless or at risk of being homeless.

How do case managers act as “guides” to help veterans become stable again?

A case manager develops a housing plan, financial plan and employment plan to help them to get back on their feet. If someone is only making \$700 a month, they can't afford an apartment. We can help them get into a home, so they can work on getting a better job. We help them with résumé writing and other life skills, such as budgeting and computer skills. We get them food and clothing through donations from people and local organizations. We really rely on community participation through volunteers and donations to be able to cover all of the veterans' needs outside of housing.

How do case managers help veterans achieve long-term stability?

We help them by developing plans to help them meet their goals that they agree to, but we also need to be flexible. If something in their life changes, we have to be able to adapt to their needs. We are mobile, so we can go to their home, the hospital or anywhere else if we need to. We can meet them anywhere if they are unable to come into the office. The idea is to be there for veterans through the entire process and do whatever we need to until they are stable again.

How are case managers trained?

We attend community events on a regular basis, like Project Homeless Connect, so we can link with other organizations who work with homeless. We also have an in-depth training program for new case managers with a lot of hands-on training that is very well-developed. New case managers are also shadowed by more experienced case managers in the beginning to help them learn the process.

How is Northern Nevada Veterans Resource Center unique?

There are several organizations that deal with the homeless. Our grant only allows us to work with veterans and their families. By dealing with the veteran population alone, we can focus on that specific population and we specialize in helping them. Many of the people who work here are veterans themselves. Through our prior military service, we're more knowledgeable about veterans services and things like applying for benefits.

Shane Whitecloud is a case manager and outreach specialist for the Northern Nevada Veterans Resource Center.
PHOTO BY ERIC MARKS



“The idea is to be there for veterans through the entire process and do whatever we need to until they are stable again.”

SHANE WHITECLOUD
Case manager and outreach specialist

AMERICA'S VETERANS NEED YOU!

NNVRC DONORS AND VOLUNTEERS PLAY VITAL ROLE IN HELPING VETS

by ANNA QUINLAN

When Tessa Rudy began volunteering with the Northern Nevada Veterans Resource Center in August 2015, her grandfather, a Navy Vietnam veteran, had recently passed away. Rudy was in between jobs and felt like serving veterans in her community was the perfect use of her time.

Having previously worked as a property manager, she was the ideal candidate for the Resource Center's Housing Specialist volunteer position. In this role, she established a database of housing options that were suitable for veterans who faced barriers such as having a limited rental history or owning a pet.

Volunteers and donors are an essential part of the NNVRC team. Many feel moved to help homeless veterans out of a sense of shared responsibility and gratitude to those who've given so much to serve our country.

"We're really a local nonprofit," says Program Support Manager Cristina Crawford. "When people in our community support us, that all goes directly to local veterans right here. It stays in the community."

The center has a roster of 10-15 volunteers assisting them at any time, serving in roles from Housing Specialist, like Rudy, to working the front desk, where they are a veteran's first impression of the center. Volunteers also assist with organizing special events in the community and implementing outreach efforts for veterans

who are in need of items like personal hygiene kits or jackets.

Volunteers are also a valuable resource for the NNVRC in building relationships within the community, both with individuals and with organizations that are also interested in supporting local veterans.

"We try to get as many services as we can in one place to assist our veterans," says Crawford.

By establishing partnerships with local barber shops and the SPCA, for example, the NNVRC is able to offer veterans the ability to fulfill a variety of needs all at once.

Organizations such as The Salvation Army, Catholic Charities USA and Vietnam Veterans of America have also donated services and products to the NNVRC, allowing the center to offer wraparound services beyond just their

core programs. Ultimately, the hope of NNVRC staff is that the veterans they work with will be able to utilize every benefit and service that is available to them.

"Once you tell people about what we do, they want to help however they can," Rudy says. "These veterans have put their lives on the line, it's our duty as Americans to give back to them."

There is no minimum hourly requirement or previous experience required to volunteer with the NNVRC.

"This just feels like the least I can do," Rudy says.

**"This just feels
like the least
I can do."**

TESSA RUDY
NNVRC volunteer



Tessa Rudy began volunteering with NNVRC as a Housing Specialist in August 2015. NNVRC relies on donations and volunteer support to serve as many local homeless or at-risk veterans as possible.
PHOTO BY ERIC MARKS

Help a veteran today

NNVRC helps veterans in our community every day, but they can't do it alone. There's a way for everyone to help a vet today — let's not turn our backs on those in our community who served our country and now need our support.

Volunteer!

Individual volunteers can help in one of the center's offices and volunteer groups can lend a hand during the organization's major events.

Contact Outreach Specialist Shane Whitecloud to find out more about volunteer opportunities: Call 775-360-2580 or email swhitecloud@vetsresource.org.

Donations support programs

NNVRC thanks its donors for their generous contributions, which help keep the center's programs and services running effectively.

To donate goods and services to homeless and very low-income vets, contact Outreach Specialist Shane Whitecloud at 775-360-2580 or swhitecloud@vetsresource.org.

For more information about donating funds to NNVRC, visit www.vetsresource.org/how-to-help.html.

Become a partner!

Your organization can help fight veteran homelessness. Current partners include Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion Department of Nevada and the Student Veterans Organizations of the University of Nevada, Reno.

Call 775-284-VETS (8387) or email nvrc@vetsresource.org for more information.

NORTHERN NEVADA VETERANS RESOURCE CENTER PROVIDING HELP FOR VETERANS IN NEED

Since the Northern Nevada Veterans Resource Center opened its doors in October 2012, the center has helped more than 500 veterans each year exit or avoid homelessness. The center works to combat veteran homelessness by providing services under three program areas:

REHOUSING AND HOMELESS PREVENTION

Case management, resource referrals and funding to obtain housing.

BENEFITS

Veteran Service Officers help clients file claims.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Substance abuse and mental health assistance; clients are referred the Behavioral Health Center from the Reno or Carson City offices.

The center serves veterans living in rural areas by sending a mobile case manager to assist them.

Reach out

If you or someone you know is a veteran who is homeless, at risk of becoming homeless or has very low income and would benefit from these services, contact NNVRC today.

NORTHERN NEVADA VETERANS RESOURCE CENTER

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www.vetsresource.org

www.facebook.com/NorthernNevadaVeteransResourceCenter

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CARSON CITY OFFICE

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Carson City, NV 89701

775-360-2155



NNVRC staff are passionate about helping homeless veterans and their families get the support they need.

PHOTO BY ERIC MARKS

You can help our veterans!

By offering vital services, Northern Nevada Veterans Resource Center changes lives every day for veterans. But there is still much more to do. NNVRC relies on support from the community to continue serving those who have served. There are a variety of ways to help, so everyone can play an important part in serving veterans!

VOLUNTEER

Do you want to make a real difference for the vulnerable veterans in your community? Individual volunteers can help in one of the center's offices and volunteer groups can lend a hand during the organization's major events. Contact Outreach Specialist Shane Whitecloud at 775-360-2580 or swhitecloud@vetsresource.org for more information.

DONORS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Recent veterans are more likely to be unemployed than their civilian counterparts. More than 50,000 veterans are estimated to be currently living on the streets. The support of donors makes a difference in the lives of veterans. Northern Nevada Veterans Resource Center receives 100 percent of credit card donations and no administrative fee is charged. For more information about donating to NNVRC, visit www.vetsresource.org/how-to-help.html.

BECOME A PARTNER

NNVRC works with many partners to prevent and curb homelessness in our community. Partners include the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion Department of Nevada and the Student Veterans Organization of the University of Nevada, Reno. If your organization wants to help fight veteran homelessness, contact the Reno office by phone at 775-284-VETS (8387) or email at nnvrc@vetsresource.org for partnership opportunities.

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