

At Your Service**Snapshot of Service****Understanding Veterans – Lingo, Culture, and Respect**

Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) grantees know that while every client who enrolls in services is unique, veterans share a unique military culture and language. Although different generations of veterans and branches of service lead to varying experiences in the military, several core components of military service remain after transition to civilian life. Service providers like HVRP grantees that work with veterans successfully navigate this culture to build a foundation of trust with the veterans they serve.

Many HVRP grantees start at the beginning – they sit down and have a conversation with each veteran to learn more about what their service means to them. Tammy Bellofatto of the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless (CCH) uses this first step to learn their lingo, discuss their actions, and understand their expectations. Often, she notes that these components are different than those of non-veteran homeless clients. By recognizing the pride many veterans feel about their service and offering respect for their service, Ms. Bellofatto develops a relationship of trust with veterans in her programs.

Hiring veterans, including formerly homeless veterans, to do outreach, assessment, and case management can help HVRP grantees to built trust with veteran clients. Darryl Harper of Career and Recovery Resources, Inc. emphasizes veteran status in his hiring processes, noting that veterans in his programs seem to be more honest and open-minded with other veterans. Mr. Harper emphasizes the important role these veteran staff members can play in guiding veteran clients as they develop short-term goals that lead to long-term sustainability. The program is committed to meeting veterans where they are and partnering with them on their journey forward, a process facilitated in part by having veterans on staff.

Successful HVRP grantees, like WayStation, Inc. in Maryland, focus in on empowering veterans to be part of their community, like they were during their service. According to Tom Walker, while the WayStation provides high quality employment and housing services, veteran clients are responsible for engaging and committing to their own progress. As Mr. Walker explains, once a veteran has a nice place to stay or earns a pay check, he starts to feel like a contributing member of society. The resulting sense of empowerment fuels further progress and success.

HVRP grantees know that the pathway to success and empowerment for veterans who are homeless is paved with open communication, trust, and respect for veteran culture.