



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

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HVRP Grantee Best Practices

Creative Strategies for Serving Justice-Involved Veterans

For homeless veterans, having a criminal background can mean difficulty obtaining employment and supportive services. However, HVRPs can work with clients, partners, and employers to address and mitigate these problems. Effectively managing the issues around justice-involved veterans can be an important factor towards improving employment and housing outcomes.

According to Dana Niemela of Denver Department of Human Services, recidivism is a big issue for justice-involved veterans. Often, “an administrative violation of parole” is usually responsible, says Niemela. An administrative violation could involve inability to achieve proper housing, failing to report to a parole officer, or other issues that are exacerbated by homelessness. Additionally, issues related to mental illness and PTSD can cause problems. Niemela added, “That’s an issue that is behavior-related that we can either provide case management around or counseling to address in the long term to help them keep the job.” By proactively monitoring a client’s actions and progress, recidivism can be avoided.

Sometimes, creative partnerships make the difference between stability and recidivism. Dave Lopez of Swords to Plowshares works with local sheriffs’ departments and veterans’ courts. This helps to forward his organization’s goal of “exiting the veterans from incarceration on day one,” which is more achievable when multiple programs and agencies (e.g. SSVF, HVRP, VA) work together. The funding structure of Swords to Plowshares also allows it to financially assist veterans, “If a veteran has a fine of \$120—for a veteran that has no money, \$120 is the difference between going back to jail or not [...]. This is where Swords can use a lot of our unrestricted foundation support to help these veterans get back on track,” according to Lopez.

Many employers are reticent about hiring justice-involved veterans, and it is incumbent on HVRPs to reach out to and work with employers that are willing to hire justice-involved veterans. Barbara Ousley of Salvation Army Bell Shelter found success working with employers with manufacturing and manual labor positions. “Bell Shelter has developed a relationship with oil refineries. Jobs in oil refineries are typically very dangerous and may require long hours, but the oil refineries are not opposed to hiring veterans with felonies.” Determining which businesses in a community are open-minded and then working with them can make all the difference in placing justice-involved veterans into employment.

Housing is also an issue for justice-involved veterans, both in obtaining housing and in what employment opportunities are near available housing. John Briggs of Ohio Valley Goodwill Industries discussed how sex offenders experience high barriers to housing. He said, “We’ve been working with a program called the EXIT [Ex-offenders in Transition] Program, and by far the greatest challenge in housing is [sex offenders] can’t be near a school, they can’t be near anything within a thousand feet.” Housing opportunities are offered by the EXIT Program, while the employment placement is undertaken by Ohio Valley Goodwill Industries, demonstrating a partnership that includes overlapping services.