



VA NATIONAL CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS AMONG VETERANS

A Veteran's Perspective

Debbie Derricks

got connected with one of them. And since then it's been a lot better; a lot better. It's one of the best things that can happen," Thomas Green.

Before entering the Veterans Multi-Service Center's (VMC) Shelter Plus Care Program, Thomas Green, an Army Veteran who served from 1976 to 1983, struggled with multiple episodes of homelessness spanning the past 20 years. Mr. Green bounced between various local shelters, including time spent at the Coatesville VA Domiciliary, before being housed through the Supportive



Mr. Green (left) & Mr. Brinson

actively involved in the 25 Cities Effort, Green is a perfect example of how coordinated services produce positive results.

Unsurprisingly, Mr. Green's outlook on the future has changed for the better since being housed. "[Housing] has just changed me 150%; it changed my whole outlook," said Mr. Green during one recent conversation. Mr. Green is now able to spend time focusing on his finances, health, and employment instead of where he will spend the night, or where he will find his next meal. "I can plan things now," Mr. Green said. "I can see my family more. I don't...

"I was not aware of all the housing programs [the Veterans Multi-Service Center] had, until I finally

Services for Veteran Families Program (SSVF), only to be evicted after losing his income.

With the assistance and ongoing support of his SSVF case manager, Mr. Green has found a stable home in VMC's Shelter Plus Care Program. This program aids clients in maintaining housing stability by providing case management as well as other supportive services to address different health needs.

Collaboration between various VA programs has been integral to finding Mr. Green stable housing and case management services. As a previous participant in SSVF, a current client of Perimeter, a homeless day program funded by the VA Grant and Per Diem program, and having a community

From the Director

Welcome to the National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans newsletter. Much has happened both at the Center and with the Ending Homelessness among Veterans initiative since our last edition.

First, a call-out to Vincent Kane to acknowledge his leadership and stewardship of the Center since its inception, as well as all the great work done by everyone to date. Vince is now serving as a special assistant to Secretary McDonald working on homelessness in Los Angeles and continues to apply his energy and vision to this mission.



Dr. Thomas O'Toole

Second, it is important to note just how much of a game-changer this initiative has been in rethinking what had become an institutionalized national disgrace of Veteran homelessness. Having cities like New Orleans and Houston now report an end to homelessness among Veterans in their communities speaks to the vision, hard work, innovation, and commitment by all involved. As our Secretary has noted, it is all about the team ...

Upcoming Events

The Homeless Evidence and Research Synthesis (HERS) Roundtable Series

Aging & the Homelessness Community

November 19th 1:00-3:00pm EST

Presentations from experts in homelessness research and aging will present research findings and service delivery opportunities.

Following the presentations, a round table discussion will be held with private and federal service providers. Please contact Susan Vieira for more information. Susan.Vieira@va.gov

Continued from cover:

have to go around my family and worry about leaving at a certain time to get back to the shelter system. I don't have to worry about the place giving out the food, I can go home and fix my own food. If I want to sit down and read the newspaper from back to front, which I like to do, I can do it." Housing provides freedom and stability; it provides a foundation off which other challenges can more easily be conquered. It is this belief that drives the sincere and passionate involvement in the Philadelphia 25 Cities Initiative and the Philly Vets Home Coalition.

Another Veteran who faced struggles similar to Mr. Green and exited homelessness with a renewed commitment to improve his life is Delvin Brinson. Brinson has been, and continues to be, an inspiration to Mr. Green, and many others. Brinson, much like Green, enjoyed the structure and comradery he found while serving in the 2nd and 63rd Mechanized Division of the Army from 1979 to 1985.

Mr. Brinson began experiencing homelessness beginning in 1998. Through his involvement in VMC transitional housing, Brinson participated in job training and computer classes and has now moved into permanent housing and found employment through the VMC as a Veteran Outreach Specialist. Today, Brinson is a key asset to the Outreach Team at VMC due to his skills in building relationships and trust with other homeless Veterans through their shared experiences. Mr. Brinson explained: "Once they hear my story and they look at themselves...and see that I've done it and I'm working with this organization, trying to explain to them that [VMC] can help them, then they begin to build a little trust."

Both Green and Brinson agree, trust is paramount for getting Veterans experiencing homelessness connected to service organizations, like the Philly Vets Home partners. These non-profit organizations, and federal and local government agencies, are able to give

Veterans the services they deserve, but Veterans must trust these services and the staff they interact with in order to reach out for help. The two also expressed the need to better inform homeless Veterans of the services available at individual organizations and through the Coalition more broadly.

The Philly Vets Home 2015 Coalition has placed approximately 1,100 Veterans into housing so far, an amazing achievement, but there is still a lot to accomplish, especially considering the goal of ending Veteran homelessness in Philadelphia by Veterans Day 2015. Still, as the Coalition presses forward, it's integral that the public and the broader community become a part of the mission. If the community comes together, there will be even more good news stories to share, like those of Mr. Brinson and Mr. Green. Philly Vets Home partners believe that nobody who fought for this country should have to fight for housing, a job, or the healthcare that they need and deserve.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), in partnership with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), launched the [25 Cities Effort](#) in March 2014. Philadelphia is one of 25 Cities identified by the Department of Veteran Affairs with exceptionally high concentrations of homeless Veterans and selected to intensify and integrate local efforts to end Veteran homelessness by the end of 2015. Philadelphia's 25 Cities Effort has culminated in the Philly Vets Home 2015 Coalition.

Debby Derricks is the Director of Development for The Philadelphia Veterans Multi-Service Center. Debby serves the organization in a dual capacity by managing communications and development efforts, specifically, event management and corporate partnerships.

From the Director, page 1:

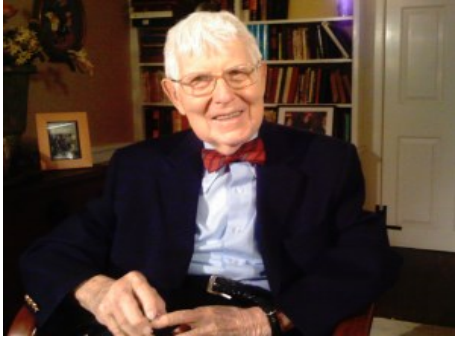
and our collective efforts in getting the job done. I am very proud of the role the Center has played and continues to play in this effort – from developing innovative models, conducting rigorous evaluations and projections to help inform policy, educating our care teams within VA and our partnered communities, and conducting research that advances our understanding and knowledge. The synergy of these efforts with the Homeless Program Office is core to our Center mission and focus.

In this issue we highlight efforts and accomplishments within the Center. The Cognitive Behavioral Therapy pilot and training initiative in partnership with the University of Pennsylvania Aaron T. Beck Center is one such example. The newly launched Homeless Evidence and Research Synthesis (HERS) symposium brings together the nation's the best and brightest minds to tackle problems and issues we face in ending veteran homelessness. This past symposium on "homeless enumeration", or how we count who is homeless, was both timely and informative on an issue that will be getting increasingly more attention. Additionally, in the past six months alone, Center researchers have either published or have in-press, seventeen peer-reviewed journal articles and five policy papers.

While much has been accomplished in these past five years, we have much more to do in order to sustain and codify our gains and anticipate the challenges and needs moving forward. With the hard work and commitment from all those working at the Center and those supporting our efforts, we are well positioned to contribute to these goals.

NCHAV Education

Over the past several years, the National Center on Homelessness among Veterans has partnered with the Aaron T. Beck Psychopathology Research Center at the University of Pennsylvania to initiate a national



Aaron T. Beck, MD

staff training program in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) specifically designed for staff working with homeless Veteran populations. This CBT training program, CBT-H, was developed to provide intensive, competency-

based training for VA HUD-VASH program clinicians who work with Veterans experiencing chronic homelessness.

CBT is a structured, skill-focused, and evidence-based psychotherapy for depression and related problems and an ideal treatment option for Veterans experiencing chronic homelessness. Given the short-term, goal-oriented focus of CBT, the treatment addresses present day problems that Veterans experience that can interfere with their ability to maintain housing. The primary aim of this initiative is to enhance direct services offered Veterans in HUD-VASH and, ultimately, improve clinical symptoms and housing sustainability.

To date, this program has trained 56 clinical case managers across 11 different HUD-VASH programs; 84% of trained clinicians reached competency in CBT and successfully completed the program. In addition, evaluation data show that the depressive symptoms and housing stability of the Veterans who were seen by clinicians during the training program significantly improved over the course of treatment.

Clinicians have emphasized that being trained in CBT helps them more effectively function in their role as case managers and believe it helps them empower the Veterans that they serve. Clinicians report that teaching Veterans specific skills within the context of CBT helps Veterans take a more active role in their recovery, overcome barriers to maintaining housing and, ultimately, reach their goals.

Clinicians have also reported sharing information they learned in staff conferences, huddle meetings and clinical

supervision with the rest of their team. Information shared has related to better understanding the appropriate treatment targets in depression and concrete strategies for addressing those targets. CBT-H trained clinicians report that their colleagues have expressed an interest in participating in the full training program.

Welcome to Our New Education Lead

Brenda Johnson, LCSW joined the National Center on Homelessness among Veterans on October 5th as Management and Program Analyst. She will develop, promote, implement and oversee educational initiatives.

Mrs. Johnson comes to us from the James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital in Tampa, FL where she served as a Training Specialist for the Education Office, primarily managing leadership and employee development programs.

Prior to this position, Mrs. Johnson served as a Social Work Section Chief, where she led a talented team of case managers working with spinal cord and traumatic brain-injured Veterans and service members. She also spent a large number of her 22 years in VHA as a clinical social worker at the Tampa and Atlanta VA Medical Centers and clinics.

Mrs. Johnson is completing her Ph.D. in Adult Education at the University of South Florida and holds a Master of Social Work from the University of Georgia, a Master of Science from Georgia State University, and her Bachelor of Social Work from Eastern Michigan University.

Mrs. Johnson can be reached at (813) 558-7629 or by e-mail: Brenda.Johnson4@va.gov.



NCHAV Researcher Focus

Ann Elizabeth Montgomery, PhD, MPA, MSSW



Since its inception in 2009, Ann Elizabeth Montgomery has worked with the National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans (NCHAV) to develop and implement a research agenda that emphasizes homelessness prevention, interventions to end homelessness among high-need Veterans, and the demography, epidemiology, and services utilization of Veterans

experiencing homelessness. Her work—including research, evaluation, and policy analysis—informs VA programs and policies at the national level and focuses primarily on identifying homelessness and risk among Veterans seeking healthcare, assessing interventions intended to mitigate this risk, and studying vulnerable populations and related health disparities.

To support VA's initiative to end homelessness among Veterans, Dr. Montgomery led a team in the development of a universal screen for homelessness and risk that is administered to all Veterans accessing outpatient healthcare at VA facilities across the United States. In addition to developing and validating this instrument, Dr. Montgomery has used Veterans' responses to this screen to assess risk factors for homelessness, uptake of health and social services following a positive screen for homelessness or risk, and characteristics associated with persistent homelessness. This work, initially funded by a pilot grant from the VA Center for Health Equity Research & Promotion (CHERP) has led to a number of publications and presentations as well as a 3-year, \$1 million grant from VA Health Services Research & Development (HSR&D) to further validate this instrument, assess its effectiveness, and develop a tool to more accurately assess homelessness risk.

Prior to joining NCHAV, Dr. Montgomery conducted research and evaluation in a number of settings including an academic research center, a private consulting firm, and a non-profit agency specializing in community and organizational development. Her work has emphasized vulnerable populations including individuals experiencing homelessness, persons living with HIV/AIDS, pregnant and parenting adolescents living in poverty, adults with co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorders, persons living in rural areas, and women. Dr. Montgomery received a Master of Social Work and Master of Public Administration from Columbia University as well as a doctorate in health behavior from the University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Public Health.

Recent Center-Affiliated Publications

- Byrne, T., & Culhane, D.P. (2015). Testing alternative definitions of chronic homelessness. *Psychiatric Services*, 66(9): 996-999. doi:10.1176/appi.ps.201400240.
- Byrne, T., Treglia, D., Culhane, D. P., Kuhn, J., & Kane, V. (2015). Predictors of Homelessness Among Families and Single Adults After Exit From Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Programs: Evidence From the Department of Veterans Affairs Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program. *Housing Policy Debate*, (online version ahead-of-print), 1-24. doi: 10.1080/10511482.2015.1060249.
- Byrne, T. H., Montgomery, A. E., & Fargo, J. D. (2015). Unsheltered homelessness among Veterans: Correlates and profiles. *Community Mental Health Journal*. (online version ahead-of-print) doi: 10.1007/s10597-015-9922-0.
- Finlay, A. K., Binswanger, I. A., Smelson, D., Sawh, L., McGuire, J., Rosenthal, J., Blue-Howells, J., Timko, C., Blodgett, J. C., Harris, A. H. S., Asch, S. M., & Frayne, S. (2015). Gender differences in mental health and substance use disorders and treatment entry among justice-involved veterans in the Veterans Health Administration. *Medical Care*, 53(4 Suppl 1):S105-11.
- Gundlapalli, A.V., Fargo, J.D., Metraux, S., Carter, M.E., Samore, M.H., Kane, V., Culhane, D.P. (2015). Military Misconduct and Homelessness Among US Veterans Separated From Active Duty, 2001-2012. *JAMA*.314(8):832-4. doi: 10.1001/jama.2015.8207.
- McInnes, D.K., Fix, G.M., Solomon, J.L., Petrakis, B.A., Sawh, L., Smelson, D.A. (2015). Preliminary needs assessment of mobile technology use for healthcare among homeless Veterans. *PeerJ*, 3(1096). <https://dx.doi.org/10.7717/peerj.1096>.
- O'Toole, T.P., Johnson, E.E., Borgia, M.L., Rose, J. (2015). Tailoring Outreach Efforts to Increase Primary Care Use Among Homeless Veterans: Results of a Randomized Controlled Trial. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 30(7): 886-98. doi: 10.1007/s11606-015-3193-x.
- O'Toole, T.P., Johnson, E.E., Redihan, S., Borgia, M., Rose, J. (2015) Needing Primary Care But Not Getting It: The Role of Trust, Stigma and Organizational Obstacles reported by Homeless Veterans. *Journal of Health Care for the Poor Underserved*. 26(3):1019-31. doi: 10.1353/hpu.2015.0077.
- Peterson, R., Gundlapalli, A.V., Metraux, S., Carter, M.E., Palmer, M., & Redd A, et al. (2015). Identifying Homelessness among Veterans Using VA Administrative Data: Opportunities to Expand Detection Criteria. *PLoS ONE* 10(7): e0132664.