

Rocky Mountain Human Services

SSVF Priority 1 “Community Plan” to
End Veteran Homelessness in Colorado
Springs/El Paso County in 2015

February 13, 2015

SSVF Priority 1 “Community Plan” to End Veteran Homelessness

Preface

This “Community Plan” was presented to the Colorado Springs/El Paso County Continuum of Care (CoC) Governing Board in January, 2015. The Board officially endorsed this plan on January 23, 2015.

Introduction

In June, 2010, the federal government announced its strategic plan, *Opening Doors*, to prevent and end homelessness in America. The plan tasked the US Interagency Council on Homelessness, a group of 19 federal agencies, to coordinate planning and efforts at federal, state and local levels to end Veteran homelessness in 2015, chronic homelessness in 2016, and homelessness among children, families, and youth by 2020. On June 4, 2014, First Lady Michelle Obama announced the Mayor’s Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness in 2015, a commitment accepted by Colorado Springs Mayor Steve Bach on October 16, 2014.

A key element in the effort to end Veteran homelessness in Colorado Springs was the award of funding from the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) (via a “Priority 1” Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) grant) to Rocky Mountain Human Services (RMHS), announced on September 30, 2014. This “surge” funding provides additional resources to a total of 56 communities across the US in an effort to meet the national goal of ending Veteran homelessness in 2015.

A stipulation of this award is that grantees develop a coordinated “Community Plan” involving local stakeholders to include VA homeless programs, the community’s “Continuum of Care” coalition, and community homeless services providers. In Colorado Springs, additional stakeholders include local government (ie., the City of Colorado Springs), local membership of national Veteran Service Organizations (eg., Veterans of Foreign Wars/VFW, American Legion, Military Order of the Purple Heart, etc.) and Veteran-specific non-profit organizations (eg., The Home Front Cares, Colorado Veteran Resource Coalition, etc.). Broad community support and engaged community involvement is vital to ending local homelessness; this “Community Plan” provides a road map for coordinated efforts that will end Veteran homelessness in Colorado Springs and El Paso County by the end of 2015.

Local Challenge

Over the past several years, the number of homeless Veterans in El Paso County has stabilized, but has not been significantly reduced. In 2012 the annual HUD-mandated “Point in Time” (PIT) survey tallied 230 homeless Veterans locally (122 sheltered, 108 unsheltered). The number lowered to 150 (101 sheltered, 49 unsheltered) in 2013, but remained virtually unchanged in the January, 2014 count (145 total, 99 sheltered, 45 unsheltered). (Note: While it is generally agreed that PIT numbers are lower than the actual number, the trends are instructive and give some indication of the impact of local efforts over time.)

Another indicator of the scale and trends in local Veteran homelessness is the numbers of Veterans accessing services at the annual Homeless Veteran “Stand Down”, conducted for one

day each year in October. The count for the past three years: 2012 – 185 Veterans, 2013 – 194 Veterans, 2014 – 154 Veterans. These numbers correspond roughly with the annual PIT survey and provide some sense of the scale of Veteran homelessness on a single day in Colorado Springs. However, the numbers of Veterans needing services to prevent or end homelessness over a year’s time is seen by local homeless service provider to be much higher than any one day count.

As the only SSVF grantee in El Paso County, the RMHS “Homes for All Veterans” program (HAV) has served homeless Veterans since October, 2011. During FY2013 (Oct 1, 2012 – Sept 30, 2013), HAV served 340 homeless Veteran households (single Veterans and Veterans with families) and provided prevention to 194 households. Similarly, in FY2014 HAV served 260 homeless Veteran households and 233 households in danger of homelessness.

From a broader community perspective, a review of HUD’s 2014 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) shows that in FY2014 (Oct 1, 2013 – Sep 30, 2014), approximately 320 Veterans spent at least one night in a local emergency shelter, and approximately 180 Veterans accessed either transitional or permanent housing subsidies to prevent homelessness.

Collectively, these figures paint a rough outline of the current scale of Veteran homelessness in El Paso County:

- **On any given night**, we anticipate that **approximately 150 Veterans** are currently homeless, either sheltered (eg. in emergency shelters) or unsheltered.. Of that number, **approximately 50** homeless Veterans are **unsheltered**.
- Over a year’s time, **approximately 300 homeless Veterans** will seek services to **secure permanent housing**.

Goals, Objectives, Strategies, Activities

The VA is challenging communities who are receiving “Priority 1” SSVF “surge funding” to meet two goals, one near-term goal and one long-term goal:

Near-Term Goal: End Veteran homelessness by the end of 2015. Ending Veteran homelessness locally requires resources and processes that permits every homeless Veteran to choose a path that leads to stable, permanent housing. Reaching “**functional zero**” means no Veterans are forced to remain unsheltered because of lack of resources, and all Veterans seeking housing are matched quickly and securely with resources and services that eventually result in long-term housing stability.

Long-Term Goal: Optimize local systems to ensure homelessness among Veterans is prevented when possible, and when it does occur, it is rare and brief. Maintaining local Veteran homelessness at “functional zero” requires collaborative local systems that provide rapid, simplified access to programs and resources for Veterans who experience a housing crisis.

The following objectives, strategies and associated activities will allow our community to meet these strategic goals in Colorado Springs/El Paso County.

Objective 1. Connect unsheltered homeless Veterans with emergency shelter and/or transitional housing; reduce unsheltered Veteran count to <10 by January, 2016 PIT.

Strategy 1.1. Conduct outreach and sustained engagement with unsheltered homeless Veterans.

Activities:

- 1.1.1. Enlist, train, organize and manage community volunteers to conduct outreach and sustained engagement. *Trained RMHS volunteers will provide the “boots on the ground” presence to engage unsheltered Veterans, build “by-name” relationships and vector willing Veterans into emergency shelter and/or transitional housing options.*
- 1.1.2. Develop and maintain a “by-name” database of unsheltered homeless Veterans. *“By-name” relationships are needed to build trust that encourages unsheltered Veterans to seek emergency shelter and/or transitional housing.*

Strategy 1.2. Develop enhanced temporary housing & emergency shelter options.

Activities:

- 1.2.1. Establish a “Hotel Voucher” emergency shelter program funded by private donations and supported by local hotel partners. *RMHS will develop local partnerships with private funders and hotel/motel management to develop short-term emergency shelter options in local hotels/motels.*
- 1.2.2. Develop temporary “Bridge Housing” options using SSVF grant resources. *RMHS will develop processes with the Colorado Springs Housing Authorities needed to ensure that leases funded by SSVF become a true Rapid Re-Housing option for Veterans that are eligible for Permanent Supportive Housing through HUD-VASH or HUD Section 8 voucher programs.*

Strategy 1.3. Conduct coordinated shelter/transitional housing placement for 50 unsheltered homeless Veterans in 2015.

Activities:

- 1.3.1. Establish on-going “coordinated assessment & program placement” process between VA Homeless Program staff and RMHS/HAV staff for unsheltered homeless Veterans. *This process will ensure Veterans are quickly vectored to the program*

that best meets their needs and that best enhances their long-term housing stability.

- 1.3.2. Connect each unsheltered homeless Veteran with Supportive Services that address an individual's barriers to housing stability and that prepare the individual for Permanent Housing placement. *Supportive Services provided by the VA, RMHS/HAV and other community agencies are vital to increasing housing stability.*

Objective 2. Connect sheltered homeless Veterans with Permanent Housing; reduce sheltered homeless Veteran count to <30 by January, 2016 PIT.

Strategy 2.1. Optimize local Veteran homeless services to lower barriers and minimize time needed to increase housing stability and obtain Permanent Housing.

Activities:

- 2.1.1. Develop and maintain a community "single point" access office location for homeless Veterans to access Veteran-specific programs and services. *RMHS will establish a Veteran Housing Resource Center as a community "one-stop" service access point for Veterans needing housing assistance with VA, SSVF and other programs.*
- 2.1.2. Develop and maintain a coordinated intake/screening process for access to VA, SSVF and other Veteran-specific housing resources. *This process will ensure Veterans are quickly vectored to the program that best meets their needs and that best enhances their long-term housing stability.*
- 2.1.3. Integrate all community Veteran homeless programs intake/screening processes with the CoC Coordinated Assessment/Housing Placement (CAHP) process. *This activity will ensure Veteran-specific programs are integrated with all other community homelessness programs.*

Strategy 2.2. Develop enhanced Permanent Housing options, both supported and independent.

Activities:

- 2.2.1. Develop and execute a coordinated "landlord engagement campaign", led by the SSVF Housing Specialist. *Establishing and maintaining strong relationships with local landlords enhances housing options for Veterans seeking permanent housing.*
- 2.2.2. Develop and maintain a coordinated Permanent Housing options database, shared by VA Homeless Programs and RMHS/HAV

staffs. *A local shortage of affordable housing dictates that housing option information be shared to ensure best fit between Veteran, housing program and local housing options.*

- 2.2.3. Complete a Memorandum of Understanding between the City of Colorado Springs and RMHS/HAV to give Veterans priority for Tenant-Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) support managed by the Colorado Spring Housing Authority. *TBRA provides an option for Veterans who need assistance beyond SSVF grant limitations but who do not need long-term case management to enhance their housing stability.*

Strategy 2.3. Conduct coordinated Permanent Housing placements for 300 formerly homeless Veterans in 2015.

Activities:

- 2.3.1. Establish on-going coordinated program/housing placement process between VA Homeless Program staff and RMHS/HAV staff for Veterans entering Permanent Housing. *This process will ensure Veterans are vectored to the program that best meets their needs and that best enhances their long-term housing stability.*
- 2.3.2. Integrate all community Veteran homeless program housing placement processes with the CoC Coordinated Assessment/Housing Placement (CAHP) process. *This activity will ensure Veteran-specific programs are integrated with all other community homelessness programs.*

Objective 3. Activate broad community involvement and support to end Veteran homeless.

Strategy 3.1. Develop a commonly-agreed operational definition for “functional zero” homelessness within the community.

Activities:

- 3.1.1. Present a proposal for “functional zero” homelessness to the CoC Governing Board; obtain consensus on an agreed definition. *Community consensus is vital to establishment of community goals and performance measurement standards that focus local efforts and enhance local collaboration and coordination.*

Strategy 3.2. Conduct comprehensive public information campaign to raise awareness of Veteran homelessness and to enlist support for referrals to local Veteran-specific homelessness programs.

Activities:

- 3.2.1. Conduct informational briefings to community partners (including local chapters for Veteran Service Organizations, local Veteran-oriented non-profits, and community housing/supportive service providers) about the Community Plan to end Veteran homelessness. *RMHS/HAV conducted the first informational briefing to community partners on December 8, 2014.*
- 3.2.2. Conduct update briefings to community partners on progress toward ending Veteran homelessness during 2015. *RMHS/HAV will provide update briefings to community partners every three months beginning in April 2015.*
- 3.2.3. The Office of the Mayor will continue to provide advocacy and updates on the Mayor's Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness. *RMHS/HAV will continue to collaborate closely with the Office of the Mayor to provide updates on ending Veteran homelessness in Colorado Springs/El Paso County.*

Strategy 3.3. Garner private financial donations, material donations and individual volunteer support to foster public participation in the Community Plan to end Veteran homelessness.

Activities:

- 3.3.1. Solicit and manage private donations to support development of emergency/temporary housing options for formerly unsheltered homeless Veterans. *This activity supports Activity 1.2.1., establishment a "Hotel Voucher" emergency shelter program for unsheltered homeless Veterans.*
- 3.3.2. Solicit development of partner organizations to provide material donations as "housing startup kits" to formerly homeless Veterans. *Veterans entering Permanent Housing often do not have the resources to secure furniture and other essential households goods. This activity enhances Veterans' housing stability once in Permanent Housing.*
- 3.3.3. Solicit and organize community volunteers to conduct outreach to unsheltered homeless Veterans. *This activity supports Activity 1.1.1., outreach to unsheltered homeless Veterans.*

Conclusion: End of Homelessness in El Paso County

As of this writing, other communities in America are declaring an end to Veteran homelessness. Salt Lake City and Phoenix were perhaps the first to galvanize broad public support and community focus to bring all Veterans "home" in their cities. Other locations such

as Houston and Seattle have made significant progress and are well on their way to reaching their goals. Since 2010, Congress has provided strong bipartisan support for federal program funding to prevent and eliminate Veteran homelessness as demonstrated by increased HUD-VASH capabilities and increased funding for the VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program. The end of Veteran homelessness in Colorado Springs/El Paso County is in sight . . . if the community can provide the energy and commitment to succeed.