HOMELESS HEROES: PROJECT H3 VETS SURVEYS HOMELESS VETERANS

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Project H3 VETS

Over 150 community volunteers surveyed during the holiday week of Veteran's Day 2011 to identify homeless veterans with the most urgent needs and to get an up-to-date count and accurate snapshot of the current homeless veteran population in Phoenix.

Homeless Heroes: Project H3 VETS Surveys Homeless Veterans

On any given night, there are as many as 2,213 veterans experiencing homelessness living on the streets in Arizona. Another 4,200 veterans have spent at least one night in emergency shelter or transitional housing programs located throughout the state. Consider the fact that over fifty percent of the homeless veteran population lives in Maricopa County, and clearly, you see a growing problem walking the Valley streets. But there is a solution. Project H3 VETS hopes to work towards that solution.

Project H3 VETS is a special initiative modeled after Project H3: *Home, Health, Hope* and the 100,000 Homes campaign to house chronically homeless veterans. Project H3 VETS volunteers used an assessment tool to prioritize the most vulnerable homeless veterans living on the streets or in shelters in the Phoenix Metro area. The project will utilize the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program to provide permanent housing and supportive services which includes case management, social support, and mental health services to chronically homeless veterans. Project H3 VETS kicked off surveying efforts during the Veterans Day Holiday week and will continue to survey till the Arizona Veteran StandDown on February 5, 2012, in an effort to conduct approximately 1,200 surveys, the estimated number of homeless veterans living throughout Maricopa County, to identify their housing and service needs.

Complementing the efforts being made by local Public Housing Authorities and the Phoenix VA Health Care System, Project H3 VETS will assist in the effort to unite vulnerable veterans experiencing homelessness with community partners, navigation teams, and local, state, and federal agencies. The initiative will utilize the processes and practices learned during Project H3 to house chronically homeless veterans in an expedited time and assist in housing retention and recovery efforts.

Project H3 VETS is a collaboration of the Arizona Coalition to End Homelessness, Phoenix VA Health Care System, Arizona Department of Veterans' Services, the City of Phoenix and community based non-profits.

Project H3 VETS Survey Week

During the week of Veteran's Day Holiday in 2011, more than 150 community volunteers and stakeholders spent three mornings combing Valley streets, alleys, and vacant lots. They surveyed shelters and transitional housing programs in the afternoons and evenings. Volunteers included several formerly homeless veterans, those that served in the Armed Forces, and many outreach professionals. Their goal: To identify homeless veterans with the most urgent needs and get an up-to-date and accurate snapshot of the current homeless population.

Surveyors used a health assessment currently used by over 101 communities across the country as part of the 100,000 Homes Campaign, led by Community Solutions, a national non-profit organization. Project H3 VETS also aligns local efforts with the VA's national Homeless Veterans Outreach Campaign.

"These men and women wore the uniform in defense of our country and now they live on the streets," said Joan Serviss, Executive Director of the Arizona Coalition to End Homelessness, the collaborating agency overseeing Project H3 VETS. "There are many homeless veterans with health issues so acute that, unless they are moved into housing and provided appropriate care immediately, they will die. Our goal is to identify and help those most in need, but the effort doesn't stop with providing housing. We need our community's ongoing help to make this project a long-term success."

Project H3 VETS Survey Results

Surveyors interviewed 216 veterans over the course of the week. Interviews were completed on 60 veterans living on the street and 156 veterans living inside shelters or transitional housing programs. Veterans living on the streets were two times as likely to be medically vulnerable and experienced homelessness nearly 3 ½ times longer than those living in shelters. Nearly 7 percent of the Valley's homeless veterans served in Iraq or Afghanistan, up from 3.2 percent last year. Of the 216 veterans surveyed, 52 percent, have an acute health condition. The vast majority of all veterans surveyed, 88 percent, were honorably discharged and have been homeless, on average, 3.2 years.

Age

- 29 (13%) are 60 years or older.
- The oldest respondent was 77 years old and has lived on the streets for 36 years.
- The youngest respondent was 23 years old, an Iraq war veteran, and has been homeless for less than a year.
- 23 veterans have been homeless for more than 10 years.

Violence

- 54 or (25%) were victims of a violent attack since becoming homeless.

Duration

- The average years homeless for the vulnerable veterans surveyed in the shelters is 3.39 years.
- The average years homeless for the vulnerable veterans surveyed on the streets is 7.86 years.

Needs

- 73 (34%) reported a dual diagnosis of mental illness and substance abuse.
- 142 (66%) reported a history of substance abuse.
- 95 (44%) reported signs or symptoms of mental illness.
- 164 (76%) reported at least one behavioral health issue.

Health System Impacts

- Estimated inpatient and ER costs combined total more than $1.4 million a year.
- 120 ER visits were reported in the last three months, for a cost of $151,800.
- 52% have VA healthcare. 32% surveyed are enrolled in AHCCCS. 20% have no health insurance.
- 33 (15%) veterans report suffering from a traumatic brain injury.
- 72 (33%) veterans suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Project H3 VETS Next Steps

Survey results will be used to target resources to those most in need. With the help of 90 federally funded Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) vouchers, the veterans most in need will begin housing placement. But the vouchers are only a first step to a successful transition out of homelessness. Project H3 VETS is looking for corporate and community partners and generous individuals willing to help these homeless heroes leave the streets behind.

To donate to Project H3 VETS, please visit www.azceh.org/donation. Your donation will be used to sponsor a homecoming for a veteran.

To learn more about Project H3 VETS, please visit www.azceh.org/project-h3-vets

The Arizona Coalition to End Homelessness and Project H3 VETS are on Facebook and Twitter at:

www.facebook.com/azceh

www.twitter.com/azceh

www.facebook.com/projecth3vets

www.twitter.com/projecth3vets

To learn more about the national efforts, please visit www.100khomes.org and www.va.gov/HOMELESS

To connect a Veteran to care, please call 1-877-4AID–VET (424-3838)