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Spare Change

Helping the Homeless Help Themselves

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PROJECT PLACE:
Reaches Out to
Homeless Veterans

- page

Project Place Reaches Out to Homeless Veterans

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Spare Change News

Military service provides men and women with the discipline, leadership, and problem-solving skills that are desired by civilian employers. Unfortunately, the transition from a military base to an office park is not always an easy one, and some former soldiers end up on the streets with little hope of becoming employed.

Project Place, a Boston-based organization that finds stable housing and employment for homeless adults, launched a new program in July of 2009 that aims to alleviate joblessness among homeless veterans. The Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) allows veterans at Project Place to receive many of the services that other Project Place clients receive, such as career services, computer training and education. However, the program is distinct in that it also assists veterans in obtaining discharge papers (DD214) and helps them find out if they are eligible for benefits they do not know about.

HVRP is a nationwide initiative that awards non-profit organizations with government grants to build employment assistance programs for veterans. A report on the U.S. Department of Labor website explains the importance of HVRP. "HVRP programs

severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), long histories of substance abuse, serious psychosocial problems, legal issues, and HIV-positive status. These veterans require more time-consuming, specialized, intensive assessment, referrals, and counseling than is possible in other programs that work with veterans seeking employment."

Project Place is a fitting home for the new veterans program, as it employs 15 staff members that provide information, training, and referral services to 800 homeless individuals each year. Rickey Simmons, Director of Program Services and Outreach Coordinator for Project Place, stated that the organization runs three businesses that act as transitional employment to homeless clients. "These businesses provide a point of reference for individuals that have been out of work and allow them to fill a gap in their resume." The businesses include Project Pepsi, a vending machine service business; Clean Corners...Bright Hope, a maintenance service; and Home Plate, which offers catering and food services.

Bruce Heerter, a police officer and former U.S. Army Ranger, believes strongly in the work that Project Place is doing. "Veterans have heroically served their country, and we have a responsibility as a society to take care of them, the veterans and their families."

While some Project Place clients work

ing for homeless individuals may include internships, customer service and interpersonal training, and classroom and computer instruction. Each client is evaluated individually and is provided with the assistance that would benefit him or her most.

When veterans "graduate" from Project Place and have attained employment, they receive after care and follow-up support services that are vital to a successful future. Simmons explained, "We do quarterly phone calls to check in and see if they are still working and housed. They are always allowed to come back to use a computer, to get help tailoring their resume for their next potential employer. If their goal is to go back to school, we work with them on that.... One part is to get a job, another part is to keep the job, but then we ask, 'What's next?'" For two years after veterans complete their training, Project Place tracks their progress with the goal of obtaining pay increases and benefits.

The Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program at Project Place has successfully placed 27 veterans in jobs. According to Simmons, "They're doing a number of different things: IT [Information Technology], food service, public housing, maintenance, it runs the gamut." Simmons explained that it usually takes two years for a person's life to stabilize.

Project Place has worked with over 108

recruit homeless veterans. "We do outreach at a number of the residential programs in Boston; we do employment luncheons and veterans expos.... We also get the message out through word of mouth; the veterans let others know about the resource." Homeless veterans interested in taking part in HVRP can attend the next employment luncheon on February 9th at 12:00 P.M.

Information for Veterans

If you are a veteran looking to take part in HVRP at Project Place, you can stop by 1145 Washington Street in Boston or call (617) 542-3740. You can also attend an Employment Luncheon at 1145 Washington Street, held at 12:00 p.m. on the first Tuesday of every month. The luncheons are also attended by employers that are willing to hire veterans.

Getting Involved with the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program

There are many ways to contribute to Project Place and HVRP. If you are an employer, please consider hiring Project Place clients to help end joblessness for homeless veterans. Project Place accepts volunteers to help with outreach or for tutoring clients in computer skills, reading, writing, math skills, and many other subjects. To