

City Models to Ensure All Veterans Have a Place to Call Home

A publication by the National League of Cities in conjunction with our Veteran Housing Partner, The Home Depot Foundation.

This guide focuses on a variety of examples from around the country to illustrate best practices for how city leaders can help better meet the housing needs of veterans with disabilities. With more than 1 million veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan in the coming years, cities and towns across the country will face the challenges of reintegrating these men and women back into the fabric of our communities. These veterans will join more than 21 million living veterans. Our veterans are older than the general population and almost twice as likely to have some form of a disability. Ensuring our veterans have safe, accessible, and affordable homes is a critical step toward stabilizing their lives.

City leaders can help meet the housing needs of veterans in many ways. The first series of case studies focuses on specific housing projects in Glastonbury, CT; Huber Heights, OH; and Port Angeles, WA.

Manny's Place

Glastonbury, CT

Population: ~34,500

Contact: Richard J. Johnson, Glastonbury Town Manager, richard.johnson@glastonbury-ct.gov

In 2006, the town's Marine Corps League building burned down on city owned land. After hearing about the work of Purple Heart Homes, Glastonbury City Manager Richard J. Johnson got in touch with the organization to discuss how they could work together to ensure the land continued to benefit veterans.

Purple Heart Homes (PHH) was founded in 2008 by John Gallina and Dale Beatty, both combat wounded National Guard veterans of the Iraq war. The mission of PHH is to help provide personalized housing solutions for service-connected disabled veterans and their families.



Dale Beatty of Purple Heart Homes with Manny Jimenez at his home in Glastonbury, CT.

PHH spoke with the town's Rotary Club about the project and the needs of Marine Corps Corporal Manny Jimenez. Cpl. Jimenez is a veteran from the nearby town of New Britain, CT who was injured in 2010, while on foot patrol in Afghanistan. To provide Cpl. Jimenez with the home necessary to meet his needs, the Rotary Club partnered with PHH as a community service project and began their work of being the project's coordinating agent and arranging materials and volunteers. Nearly 400 volunteers worked on the project during its development and PHH contributed approximately \$30,000 to pay for materials such as lumber, drywall, and concrete.

The town and PHH came into agreement about how to provide the land to PHH in a way that also protected the town's future fiduciary interests. The town formally conveyed the property to PHH for \$1, but retained a right of first refusal in any future transaction involving either the land or the building. The town retains its right to repurchase the land for \$1, while the value of the building is determined using mutually agreed upon appraisers. If the town forgoes its right of first refusal on both the land and the building, the town will receive the land's appraised value from any transaction. In exchange for receiving the land for \$1 from the town, Purple Heart Homes agreed to only sell the property to a service-connected disabled veteran who would use the property for a single-family residence that is owner-occupied.

Key take-aways:

- City leadership is needed to create community buy-in.
- Identify a coordinating agent to lead a community's efforts.

Maloney Heights

Port Angeles, WA

Population: 19,038

Contact: Brad Collins, Deputy Mayor, City of Port Angeles, bcollins@cityofpa.us

The veteran community of Port Angeles accounts for 14% of the population, compared with the state average of 9%, and it is expected to grow due to its proximity to Joint Base Lewis McChord (JBLM).

To assist homeless veterans, Serenity House, a non-profit housing developer, partnered with the local Habitat for Humanity to build a 28-unit supportive housing development called Maloney Heights. The Habitat affiliate owned a parcel of land next to property owned by Serenity House. In order to maximize the property's use, the parcel needed to be sub-divided, and infrastructure such as access roads and sewer lines were needed. Serenity House and Habitat partnered with the local housing authority and the City of Port Angeles to submit an application to the state for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) money. The funding was approved, allowing the original land to be sub-divided into 15 lots. Habitat used 14 lots for single-family homeownership projects, and the other lot was donated to Serenity House to be used for Maloney Heights. Additional money for the development of Maloney Heights came from the state's Housing Trust Fund, grants from foundations and money raised by Serenity House.

In addition to municipal support for the project's capital costs, the city's support along with the flexibility of the local housing authority and collaboration with county and state officials, allowed the project to avoid being over-reliant on any single revenue stream. The city's backing encouraged the

state to provide McKinney-Vento Supportive Housing Program dollars and Tenant-based Rental Assistance. City support was also helpful in obtaining money from the Supportive Services for Veteran Families program for the development.

Despite the city's support, the project did encounter challenges. While applying for permits, the Department of Public Works (DPW) expressed concern about the development's impact on existing roads. In an effort to protect the city from incurring costs associated with the development of additional roads, the non-profits were required to pay for the improvements. The additional \$130,000 associated with these improvements was contested as being unnecessary by the non-profits, who cited other local developments. To settle the issue, DPW required a traffic study be completed.

When the traffic study found no need for additional roads, the permits were issued, and work moved forward. Stakeholders noted the importance of ensuring that all city officials, elected leaders and department managers have a clear understanding of a city's commitment to supporting housing projects for veterans.

Key take-away:

- Elected leaders and municipal staff must have a clear understanding of a city's commitment to supporting veterans.

Habitat for Humanity – Repair Corps

Huber Heights, OH

Population: 38,101

Contact: Diane Graham, Executive Director, Habitat for Humanity of Dayton, dgraham@daytonhabitat.org

In November 2011, the Habitat for Humanity in Dayton, OH (HFH-Dayton) participated in Repair Corps, a pilot partnership between Habitat for Humanity and the Home Depot Foundation aiming to help rehabilitate housing for disabled veterans in need. With the financial assistance offered by the Home Depot Foundation HFH-Dayton leaders expanded their work to include a rehabilitation/modification project and explore the potential for adding this type of activity on an on-going basis to the organization's efforts.

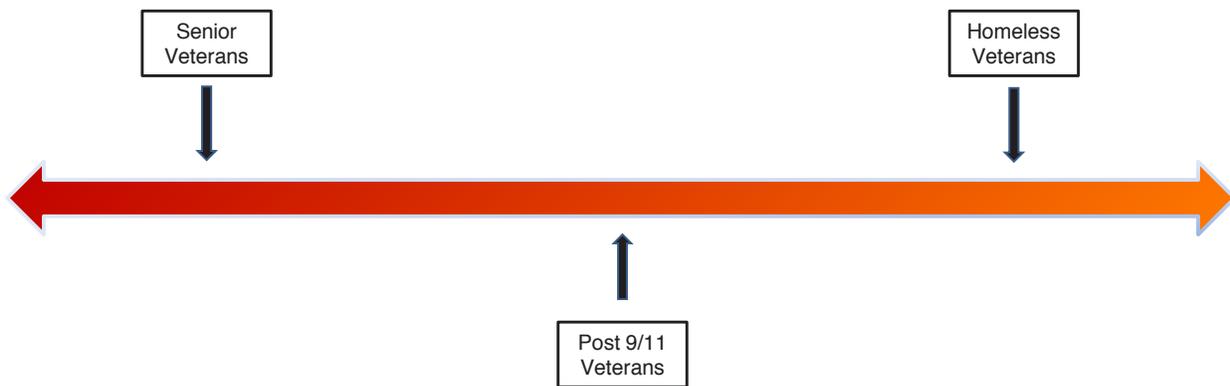
Using relationships developed from working on other projects, Habitat for Humanity reached out to the Dayton VA medical center's social service department to identify a veteran in need. Social workers identified a 16-year Air Force veteran with two children who had a consistent need to use a wheelchair. Despite her regular need for assistance, there were times when she was able to be mobile without a wheelchair. The lack of a permanent need for mobility assistance prevented her from meeting the eligibility guidelines for federal VA programs traditionally used to make a veteran's home fully accessible.

HFH-Dayton worked with the veteran to identify the modifications her home would need in order to help make the structure more accessible, including lowering the kitchen cabinets, installing an internal chair lift, and shoring up the home's back porch. Without the relationship between the VA and HFH-Dayton, this veteran would have been determined ineligible for assistance and may have had her needs left unmet.

Key take-away:

- Veterans ineligible for benefits to help meet their needs are able to be served when working relationships are established across all levels of government and the local non-profit community.

While cities can help directly meet the housing needs of veterans, additional supports are needed for veterans to maintain their housing. These needs are not all the same. Whether a veteran is an aging senior, recently returned from Iraq and/or Afghanistan, or homeless, their unique needs for housing and other services fall along a “disability spectrum.”



Senior veterans may include Vietnam veterans dealing with injuries stemming from their exposure to Agent Orange, as well as veterans whose diabetes or other illnesses have progressed to the point that they need mobility assistance such as wheelchairs and walkers. These veterans may have injuries that are age-related injuries, but not connected to their service, such as hip and knee replacements. These veterans may be eligible for VA assistance, but others may not.

Another category are recently returned veterans with service-connected disabilities such as blindness, deafness, spinal cord injuries, post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injuries, and amputations. These last three injuries are recognized as some of the hallmark injuries of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Whether or not these two broad categories of veterans are eligible for VA assistance, they need similar types of assistance, such as handrails installed, perhaps chair lifts, or wheelchair ramps and other home modifications such as lowering counters and light switches, widening doors and retrofitting bathrooms.

Finally, many veterans who are homeless have disabilities, but not all. The needs of the homeless are unique compared to other veterans, but their needs are not homogenous.

To better meet the needs of these veterans, a community-wide, holistic approach is necessary. Several cities have recognized this fact. We highlight efforts to meet the needs of veterans beyond housing in Eugene, OR; Houston, TX; and Colorado Springs, CO.

Veterans Housing Project

Eugene, OR

Population: 156,185

Contact: Jon Ruiz, City Manager, jon.r.ruiz@ci.eugene.or.us

In the fall of 2011, community leaders came together to address the challenges many veterans face in making the transition to civilian life after deployment. They recognized that finding a suitable place to live, while a veteran and their family put in place the stable and sustainable pieces of a successful transition, can be one of the biggest barriers to reintegration.

To help meet this need, the Veterans Housing Project (VHP) was created. Comprised of local, regional, and federal government agencies, businesses, non-profits, service clubs and others, the VHP provides veterans and their families with an affordable rental home for up to two-years while family members are connected to the resources they may need to secure and maintain housing on their own.

The VHP's first four homes for veterans and their families have been purchased and rehabilitated thanks to an initial public investment of approximately \$220,000. In addition to public capital, local businesses, service organizations, and other community organizations have donated thousands of dollars in material and thousands of working hours to renovate the properties. As a result, rents for these units have been able to be kept below market rate, while also generating enough revenue to cover repayment costs and provide money to a pool of resources dedicated to purchasing additional properties for the VHP. Occupants for the homes are chosen from clients already engaged with participating organizations, such as the Veterans Administration and St. Vincent DePaul Society of Lane County.

In addition to housing, community leaders recognized the need to connect families to the other resources needed to reintegrate into the community. As part of the social service alignments that had been started in 2004 to better serve the homeless, mental health and substance abuse counselors worked closely with employment training and placement program officials, as well as client case managers. The community coordination (or "social capital") achieved by improving service delivery for the homeless and transitionally housed veterans, has resulted in improved opportunities for returning veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq participating in the VHP.



Firefighters volunteer as part of the Veterans Housing Project in Eugene, OR.

Key take-aways:

- City leadership is needed to create and sustain community buy-in.
- Better serving veterans can happen by tapping into existing sources of community collaboration (e.g. service coordination already in place to meet the needs of the homeless).

Returning Veteran Initiative

Houston, TX

Population: 1,593,227

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Tom Mitchell of US Vets with a Rolling Thunder Volunteer and Buddy Grantham, the Executive Director of the City of Houston's Office of Veterans' Affairs in Houston, TX.

The City of Houston and the surrounding five counties are home to nearly 370,000 veterans, almost one in four of all veterans living in Texas. An estimated 22,000 of these men and women are veterans of the wars in Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom) and Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom), one of the largest populations of OEF/OIF veterans in the country.

In early 2007, the need to coordinate services to better serve returning veterans became a cause of concern for area leaders, including former Houston Mayor Bill White. To begin a

conversation about what could be done, leaders from the military, faith-based community, non-profits, educational institutions, service organizations, and all levels of government convened to hear directly from returning soldiers, as well as experts and other concerned parties.

After several convenings it was recognized that four committees, the Logistics of Living; the Interaction with Public Assistance; the Education and Career; and the Mentoring Committee could best analyze how to meet the varying needs of veterans by segmenting the veteran population into general categories. These categories included recently returned OEF/OIF veterans, disabled veterans; active military/guard and reserves; women veterans; military children and family members; post-Korean/pre-retirement veterans; post-retirement veterans; homeless veterans; ex-offender veterans; and ROTC/local university students.

A needs assessment recognized a need for a one-stop location of information. As a result, the city opened an Office of Veterans' Affairs in October 2007 to assist veterans with advocacy, referral, and counseling, in cooperation with the County Veteran's Services Officer, veteran service organizations,

and other community partners. Understanding that the needs of veterans change and evolve, the city has an OEF/OIF Community Council made up of active and former OEF/OIF veterans who currently either work or volunteer in transition assistance to provide expert advice and insight into needs.

As a result of municipal leadership, veteran inclusion, cross-jurisdictional collaboration, and multi-sector engagement the work of the City of Houston and the surrounding area has been recognized by the Department of Defense and the Department of the Army as a national best-practice. Through city-led coordination, the community identified the services that were in place and the gaps that needed to be filled in order to better meet the needs of all veterans and their families.

Key take-aways:

- Committed and consistent municipal leadership is needed to initiate dialogue and ensure service improvements are made in a timely fashion.
- On-going, community-based coordination of services is necessary to meet evolving needs in the most effective and efficient manner.

Peak Military Care Network

Colorado Springs, CO

Population: 310,492

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The region around Colorado Springs has a large military footprint, including the Army's Fort Carson and the U.S. Air Force Academy among others. In particular, the number of personnel stationed at Fort Caron has doubled since 2006. As a result, community leaders gathered to discuss what planning steps they could take to better support the increase in population. Out of the planning process emerged the understanding that there existed a needed for a more collaborative system of care to meet the needs of service members, veterans, and their families.

To help establish a centralized point of information for available resources, local service providers gathered available resources and posted information in a centralized online location. To help determine how the community could best meet the varying needs of veterans, leaders developed a service framework with nine areas of focus, including social services and child welfare, behavioral health, domestic violence, medical/physical health, substance abuse, crisis intervention, workforce readiness, education, and advocacy. After segmenting veteran needs and available community resources into these areas, leaders began to identify how best to leverage scarce resources.

Rather than attempting to make broad changes, leaders have started by focusing their attention on better meeting the behavior and mental health needs of recently returned veterans, including those dealing with traumatic brain injuries. The goal is to develop a network of tools and processes that support a more integrated service system. Lessons learned by working with this particular veteran population can later be applied to other segments of the veteran population.

Key take-aways:

- Centralized location of information and resources that is consistently updated.
- Begin work by focusing on an agreed segment of the veteran population to learn initial lessons about what works best in your community.

About This Publication

Since 2009, the National League of Cities and the Home Depot Foundation have partnered to help build better cities. Beginning in 2011, the Foundation announced their commitment of \$30 million over 3 years to ensure all veterans have a safe place to call home. In September 2012, the Foundation announced it had completed its initial commitment, which impacted over 4,200 units of housing for veterans and their families, and announced pledge of additional \$50 million in next 3 years.

This resource is part of the on-going partnership between NLC and the Foundation to help provide local officials with resources to assist in rehabilitating housing for returning military veterans and veterans with disabilities. To learn more visit www.nlc.org/veteranshousing.

About the National League of Cities

The National League of Cities is the nation's oldest and largest organization devoted to strengthening and promoting cities as centers of opportunity, leadership and governance. NLC is a resource and advocate for member cities and the 49 state municipal leagues, representing 19,000 cities and towns and more than 218 million Americans.

Through its Center for Research and Innovation, NLC provides research and analysis on key topics and trends important to cities, creative solutions to improve the quality of life in communities, inspiration and ideas for local officials to use in tackling tough issues and opportunities for city leaders to connect with peers, share experiences and learn about innovative approaches in cities.

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