

HUD EMPLOYMENT LECTURE SERIES
Lecture #8 Pamphlet
EMPLOYMENT SERVICES FOR HOMELESS VETERANS

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INTRODUCTION

In high school, Jack was ambitious. He made plans for himself, and he got decent grades. When he finished high school, he joined the military. However, while in the military, he began to suffer from asthma. Although he might not have realized it at the time, he was also experiencing depression, and his depression only worsened after he was discharged from the Army because of his asthma. He began to drink to chase away the depression, and his life spiraled downward. He became estranged from his family and ended up homeless.

While homeless, Jack avoided the local VA hospital, having heard rumors about botched surgeries and generally mistrusting the military. He also avoided getting any kind of help for his depression or alcohol dependency. However, to avoid some legal trouble, he agreed to enter an inpatient program for veterans with co-occurring disorders, on a locked unit of the VA hospital. After getting help for his depression and working on establishing sobriety, Jack began a "Compensated Work Therapy." Jack has always been a planner and likes everything to be orderly, but he had totally lost control of his sense of order while he was homeless. Being able to set small goals and work toward them, while in a supportive environment surrounded by other veterans, has helped Jack to slowly regain a work routine.

According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), more than 150,000 veterans are homeless on any given night, with over 300,000 experiencing homelessness over the course of a year. As many as one out of every three men who are homeless at any point is a military veteran.

Homelessness among veterans has many causes, many of which are similar to the causes of homelessness among non-veterans. As many as 70 percent of homeless veterans experience substance abuse problems, and many have co-occurring mental illnesses. It is important to note that the substance abuse problems may often be caused by the mental illness and individual attempts to "self-medicate" symptoms of mental illness, while substance abuse can trigger symptoms of mental illness.

Trauma is also a significant issue among homeless veterans. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is widespread among homeless veterans who have served in combat but can also affect those who had

non-combat duty. Many female veterans (and some men) have experienced trauma resulting from sexual abuse or harassment, both inside and outside of the military.

All of these experiences may be exacerbated for veterans as they leave life in the military and try to assimilate back into civilian life, and they may also lead to behaviors that result in homelessness. This unique interplay of circumstances and transition that most veterans experience may ultimately play a significant influence on the potential service needs of homeless veterans who want to return to the workforce.

Veterans also become homeless due to economic hardship; however, homeless veterans tend to have a higher level of education and more significant job experience (military and non-military) than others who become homeless. As a result, homeless veterans tend to be more likely to be "job-ready" than non-veterans. In many cases, veterans have led successful careers and family lives both inside and outside of the military, only to see their success slip away.

The demographics of homeless veterans can be quite different from the homeless population or the general population of the region. Programs report significant variations by age and by race, with homeless veterans tending to be older and often over-representative of one or more racial or ethnic groups. Additionally, almost all homeless veterans are men.

Many of these demographic trends are changing, however. As more women serve in the military and leave the service, more women veterans are becoming homeless. In some places, this change might be taking place slowly, as women frequently have greater access to housing assistance and related supports and personal support systems. Staff observes that most women veterans who become homeless have either felony convictions or active substance abuse issues that keep them from receiving needed services.

Despite the best effort of the States and the Federal government, younger veterans who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan are becoming homeless. With more reserve and National Guard troops having been deployed overseas, programs serving homeless veterans are seeing an increase in the number of guard and reserve veterans among the veterans they serve.

This pamphlet and the audio lecture that accompanies it are designed to familiarize those in the homeless assistance and employment fields with some of the issues that affect homeless veterans. Many veterans have considerable skills and experience yet face profound barriers to employment due to their special need for services to address emotional and social issues.

As you conduct outreach efforts and provide employment and other services to people who are homeless, it is more than likely that you will encounter homeless veterans. The practices typically used to reach out to people may need to be modified to be effective in reaching out to veterans. Likewise, you may need to expand the types of services offered or modify the way in which services are provided. This pamphlet will help you better understand veterans' experiences and needs, particularly regarding the issues that influence their ability and motivation to find and keep a job, and thus enable you to serve them more effectively.

The pamphlet begins with an overview of the employment-related benefits that are available to certain veterans. Because each program has different eligibility standards, the overview also addresses some of the eligibility issues. Given that many veterans will not qualify for, have access to, or be interested in programs targeted toward veterans, the remainder of the pamphlet discusses how the homeless assistance field can better serve the employment needs of veterans. In the second section, a discussion of some of the individual barriers facing many veterans (such as PTSD) is followed by some of the challenges the providers face in serving veterans, such as matching military experience to civilian jobs. Finally, based on experiences of programs serving veterans, a number of strategies are posed for helping homeless veterans succeed in the workforce.

Intended Audience

This pamphlet and companion lecture will benefit those who provide services to the target population described below, including the following:

- Case managers
- Staff of transitional and permanent housing

- Employment specialists at One-Stop Career Centers and other workforce development centers
- Employment specialists at homeless assistance agencies
- Program managers
- Vocational rehabilitation staff

Target Population

This pamphlet and lecture are intended to guide the provision of employment-related services to military veterans, both male and female, who are experiencing homelessness. Homeless veterans have served in wartime or peacetime, and they have been honorably discharged or discharged under other classifications. Additionally, homeless veterans might or might not experience some sort of disability related to military service and might or might not qualify for special benefits for veterans. These materials try to present an overview of the complex picture of veteran homelessness and how flexible employment services can respond to the unique needs of the individual.

UNDERSTANDING BENEFITS AVAILABLE TO VETERANS

Federal and State governments and private organizations have created a number of programs that benefit veterans. Depending on various eligibility factors, veterans might qualify for cash assistance, health care, housing, and specialized employment assistance. This section will briefly examine some important eligibility criteria and discuss some of the employment-related opportunities that are uniquely available to eligible veterans.

With many veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, changes to benefits programs occur on a regular basis, and the overall system of benefits is quite complex and beyond the scope of this publication. However, information about veterans' benefits is available from a wide range of sources, including the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), State departments for veterans' services, and nonprofit organizations typically called Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs),¹ many of which hold contracts and grants for providing services to veterans.

For information about non-employment-related benefits, there are sources listed at the end of this pamphlet.² Additionally, some of these benefits were discussed in an earlier lecture on work incentives, which explored the impact of work on veterans' benefits.³

Eligibility Factors

When working with veterans, it is important to understand whether you will be able to refer veterans successfully for benefits specifically for veterans or whether you will have to rely completely upon the same types of resource available to non-veterans. The ideal situation will typically include accessing as many resources as possible in order to fully address the individual's needs. A number of factors influence a veteran's eligibility for various benefit programs. Knowing some basic information about an individual can help you understand whether they are likely to be eligible for benefits and can help speed the process of enrolling veterans in employment programs:

- How long did the veteran serve? Some benefits require a certain period of service, unless the veteran was discharged due to an injury or disability.
- Has the veteran served on active duty during times of armed conflict? Veterans who have served during periods of conflict are entitled to enhanced benefits.
- Does the veteran have a "service-connected" disability, and if so, at what level? People who have a disability that is directly attributable to military service are entitled to disability compensation based on a percentage rating system that is generally not dependent on one's ability to work. With certain "invisible" disabilities, such as PTSD, veterans often require help in establishing the degree of the disability and its connection to military service. Attorneys and VSOs can assist veterans with such proceedings. Demonstrating that a disability is service-connected greatly benefits the veteran, who can become eligible for cash assistance and health care regardless of income, assets, or ability to work.
- What is the veteran's discharge status? The categories of military discharge are: honorable, general (under honorable conditions), other than honorable, bad conduct, and dishonorable. Estimates suggest that about nine out of every

ten homeless veterans has been discharged honorably.⁴ Honorable and general discharges do not affect a veteran's eligibility for benefits, while the other types of discharge limit or bar a veteran's access to benefits. Additionally, military discharge status affects applications for employment, security clearance, and credit. Veterans can appeal to have their discharge status changed, a process with which attorneys and VSOs can help.

The good news about work and veterans' benefits is that eligibility for some important benefits, particularly disability payments and health care for those with a service-connected disability, is not generally affected by the veteran's work status, and veterans with service-connected disabilities work in a wide variety of jobs. Thus, the eligible veteran can work toward employment goals while having a "safety net" in place.

There are circumstances, however, in which returning to work could affect a veteran's benefits. Some veterans receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Income (SSDI), and thus the work incentives for those programs would govern how returning to work would affect benefits. In order to understand the how benefits connected to veterans' benefits, SSI, SSDI, food stamps, housing subsidies, and earned income impact each other, it is very important to have a working relationship with a VSO or other organization that has a certified benefits specialist on staff.

Employment-related Benefits

Military service requires skill and dedication and provides the soldier with valuable experience. However, the transition from military life back into civilian life is often not smooth, and unemployment among veterans is often higher than among the general population. In addition to the obvious economic impact, there is a significant personal impact upon the person who has served his or her country (as well as family members) and is unable to find suitable employment. In recognition of this problem, the States and the Federal government have created a number of programs to help veterans find work. Keep in mind that these programs typically have eligibility requirements linked to discharge status.

Hiring Preferences

In recognition of veterans' service to their country, many jobs at all levels of government give preferential treatment to veterans who either served during a time of active conflict or have a service-connected disability. Veterans have priority over other equally-qualified applicants for most Federal jobs, and many States have similar laws, which typically extend the preference to city and county jobs. Eligibility depends on discharge status, with Federal preferences extending only to veterans discharged under honorable conditions.

Job Training and Vocational Rehabilitation

Veterans have access to some job training and vocational rehabilitation programs especially for veterans. Some programs are targeted toward homeless veterans, while veterans who have service-connected disabilities can qualify for additional services. In general, however, veterans who have been dishonorably discharged are not eligible for these initiatives.

Under the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP), DOL awards grants to State and local Workforce Investment Boards, public agencies, for-profit/commercial entities, and non-profit organizations, including faith-based and community-based organizations. Veterans who served on active duty and were not dishonorably discharged can qualify for a wide array of services, including employment training and case management. All HVRP services are employment-focused, but they are often provided by multi-service agencies that are also able to address mental health, substance abuse, housing, and other needs. In 2007, grantees in 32 States and the District of Columbia received HVRP funding.⁵

Veterans with service-connected disabilities of at least a 10 percent rating and who have a discharge other than dishonorable can qualify for the VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program, which provides the following services, depending on an individual's need:

- Comprehensive rehabilitation evaluation to determine abilities, skills, interests, and needs
- Vocational counseling and rehabilitation planning

- Employment services such as job-seeking skills, resume development, and other work readiness assistance
- Assistance finding and keeping a job, including the use of special employer incentives
- Training such as On the Job Training (OJT), apprenticeships, and non-paid work experiences
- Post-secondary training at a college or a vocational, technical or business school
- Supportive rehabilitation services including case management, counseling, and referral⁶

The VA Healthcare system also provides employment support to veterans who are eligible for VA health benefits through its Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) program. The VA enrolls veterans in the VA health care system based on priority levels such as having a service-connected disability or low income level. Veterans with dishonorable discharges are ineligible. Additionally, to qualify for CWT, veterans must have a psychiatric or medical condition limiting the ability to work and must want to pursue employment. The programs, administered by local VA Healthcare facilities, provide employment training in a non-competitive environment, and the stipend paid generally does not affect other benefits. A few VA Healthcare facilities offer CWT in conjunction with a Transitional Residence (TR) that teaches independent living skills.

Employer Incentives

Employers who hire veterans who have participated in VA-sponsored vocational rehabilitation can qualify for financial incentives.⁷ Under the OJT program, the VA will pay a portion of the participant's salary that decreases over time. Additionally, employers can qualify for a Work Opportunity Tax Credit⁸ that can be worth several thousand dollars for hiring a veteran in the following categories:

- Completed a vocational rehabilitation program
- Part of a family receiving Food Stamps or TANF
- Disability rating of at least 10 percent and released from duty in past year

- Disability rating of at least 10 percent and unemployed for at least 6 months in past year

However, some programs report that they do not discuss hiring incentives with employers, as the discussion tends to stigmatize the participant, and some employers retain participants only long enough to qualify for the incentive.

On the other hand, some programs have access to funding to purchase uniforms, tools, safety equipment, and the like for successful job applicants. Employers see this as a bonus because they know that the employee will show up equipped to work.

Additionally, some veterans qualify for free health care through the VA. Employers who typically bear the cost of health care for employees see this as an asset, and all employers are assured that these veterans have access to care that can keep them on the job.

Services through One-Stop Career Centers

Some organizations serving veterans have noted that the One-Stop Career Centers' performance goals have traditionally made it difficult for veterans with significant barriers to employment to be served adequately by the workforce system. In response, the workforce system has developed services targeted to veterans. One-Stop staff offers assistance to veterans under two important targeted initiatives:

- **Local Veterans' Employment Representative (LVER).** The LVER advocates on behalf of veterans (regardless of disability), ensuring that veterans get the preferences in hiring to which they are entitled, promoting their participation in federally-funded employment training, and working with community service providers to obtain needed supports for veterans. Some workforce systems place these employees at VSOs or VA facilities rather than at One-Stops.
- **Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP).** Under DVOP, staff provides more intensive support to veterans with disabilities, particularly service-connected disabilities. Activities include case management for participants in VA-funded vocational rehabilitation and other federally-funded training programs; promoting hiring of veterans, including apprenticeships and on-the-job training; and providing follow-

along services after veterans are placed to support retention. DVOP staff might be stationed at veterans' organizations, homeless service organizations, or community colleges rather than One-Stops; in California there are several DVOP staff members located at "wellness centers" that provide comprehensive mental health services to people who are homeless.

Because many homeless veterans prefer to work with programs whose staff understands their needs, some programs serving homeless veterans have established partnerships with One-Stops, in which veterans come to the program as their primary point-of-contact and the program serves as a portal for One-Stop services such as job listings, job fairs, and access to services through the DVOP. Veterans might also be eligible for "intensive services" at the One-Stop, which can include personalized training opportunities and placement assistance. In this way, veterans are able to access employment services at their own pace while receiving complementary support services.

Self-Employment

Many veterans have skills that can be translated into a small business, and the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) has established the Patriot Express program.⁹ This program speeds loan applications, sets low interest rates, and guarantees loans. Veterans who have not been dishonorably discharged and meet general SBA requirements are eligible for this special program. Veterans Business Development Officers are on staff at SBA district offices to provide help to interested veterans with loans and business advice.¹⁰ Additionally, SBA has contracted with private organizations to form Veterans Business Outreach Centers offering hands-on assistance in starting and developing a business.

CHALLENGES IN PROVIDING EMPLOYMENT SERVICES TO HOMELESS VETERANS

Although many opportunities exist for eligible veterans to receive assistance with employment (or self-employment) through programs targeted to veterans, homeless veterans can also be expected to seek assistance with employment outside of these programs. There are many reasons that veterans often need assistance outside of these targeted programs:

- Some homeless veterans are not currently eligible for these resources due to their discharge status. While ineligible veterans can be referred for legal assistance in appealing their discharge status, they can also receive employment services in the meantime through mainstream systems or programs targeted for people who are homeless.
- Veterans whose disabilities have not been demonstrated to be service-connected do not qualify for some of the programs providing more intensive assistance with vocational rehabilitation and other employment supports. Additionally, it is thought that a significant percentage of homeless veterans have undiagnosed and undocumented mental illnesses.
- Many eligible veterans seek employment assistance outside of veterans-specific programs due to their personal preferences or past negative experiences. Female veterans might be particularly likely to seek non-targeted services, especially if they have experienced sexual assault or harassment, or if targeted programs do not accommodate their parenting obligations. Veterans' employment programs are also not always able to address benefits and legal issues when families are involved.
- Programs targeted toward veterans might not be available in a veteran's community of residence or might not be convenient for the veteran.
- Homeless veterans might need extra assistance with support needs or help with career direction in order to take advantage of some programs targeted generally to veterans (as opposed to disabled or homeless veterans). For example, a homeless veteran might need support in discovering skills that could lead to self-employment with the assistance of an SBA loan. Similarly, additional educational programs that address literacy and other academic needs may often be needed as part of an overall employment plan.

Thus, the homeless assistance community should be prepared to assist veterans with employment issues.

While each individual is unique, the military has certain expectations of recruits, and service in the military and the return to society have

significant, long-lasting effects on individuals—and often on families. Service providers are likely to note significant differences in the service needs of homeless veterans in comparison to other people who are homeless. Some of the challenges commonly faced when providing assistance to homeless veterans are discussed below.

Personal Challenges Facing Veterans

Rates of homelessness among veterans are higher than among non-veterans, particularly among certain demographic groups. Many factors contribute to homelessness among veterans, some of which are the same economic and societal factors leading to homelessness in general. However, the experience of military service, for many veterans, leads to personal challenges that can become a primary or contributing cause of homelessness. Homeless veterans are likely to face barriers including PTSD and trauma, substance abuse, traumatic brain injury (TBI), family issues, and legal issues, as discussed below.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Linked to Combat and other Trauma

According to the VA, approximately 45 percent of homeless veterans have mental illnesses, with or without co-occurring substance abuse issues.¹¹ Included in this statistic are high numbers of veterans, both male and female, diagnosed with PTSD. For homeless veterans, PTSD might be linked to several types of trauma:

- Combat veterans have often been exposed to extreme violence, which can include physical injury to themselves and those close to them, as well as witnessing the deaths of others. The rate of PTSD among combat veterans is high; among homeless veterans, the rate of PTSD could be as high as 40 percent. Some studies have suggested, nonetheless, that substance abuse and mental illnesses other than PTSD are much greater risk factors for homelessness than PTSD is.¹²
- A significant percentage of women veterans have experienced military sexual trauma (MST), which can include both sexual harassment and sexual assault. Estimates are that 55 to 70 percent of women veterans have been sexually harassed, while 11 to 48 percent have been sexually assaulted.¹³ Additionally, women entering the military are more likely to

have been sexually abused than other women—leading some to hypothesize that many women join the armed forces to escape abusive relationships—and women veterans are susceptible to being in abusive relationships after leaving the military.¹⁴

- Separation from the military can be a traumatic experience—for some, even more traumatic than experiences in combat. A complete change in lifestyle, loss of the close relationships that exist in most military units, potential problems reconnecting with family, and lack of employment opportunities can make re-entry into civilian life a difficult experience for many.
- The experience of homelessness is itself traumatic, and it has a unique impact on veterans. For those who have served their country, becoming homeless can elicit feelings of shame, hopelessness, marginalization, and being “used.” While homeless, veterans might also develop patterns of protecting one’s self, possessions, and territory, similar to being in battle.

PTSD and other responses to trauma can have a significant impact upon finding and holding a job. A workplace that is noisy or where sudden noises or flashes of light are present might pose a problem for someone who has experience combat trauma. For people who have experienced any form of trauma, trusting others and working collaboratively is often more difficult, which can cause significant barriers in the workplace. Having to interact with large numbers of co-workers or members of the public, having an authoritarian supervisor, or, for people who have experienced MST, working with large numbers of men, might also be triggers for PTSD symptoms. It is important to identify the types of trauma that a veteran has experienced and the types of situations that trigger symptoms.

For some veterans, the triggering of PTSD symptoms can cause extreme disruptions in the workplace, even if the veteran is otherwise able to perform job duties. The following text from a Board of Veterans Appeals regarding the disability appeal of one Vietnam-era veteran illustrates some of the challenges of PTSD in the workplace. In this case, the appeals board found that the veteran was 100 percent disabled, but many veterans experience similar but less severe impairment in the workplace that nevertheless needs to be recognized and addressed:

[The veteran experienced] increased severity of the symptomatology associated with his PTSD, including increased hypervigilance, hyperarousal, diminished ability to concentrate and control irritation, anger, and explosive outbursts of violence. In that regard, the veteran was noted to have sustained minor injuries to his hand after having struck a wall with his fist at work due to job-related frustrations. The veteran had worked fairly consistently over the course of that period, but his employment was marked by conflicts with co-workers and superiors to the point where he could only function at work in an isolative environment. . . .

At the time of the [disability] examination the veteran was working at a local VA medical center (VAMC) and had been employed in that capacity for the past three months. According to the veteran, he continued not to handle stress well, and indicated that he would snap at co-workers and VAMC patients. The veteran offered that he tended to isolate himself and worked in the basement because he did not want to have to interact with patients and co-workers. The veteran reported that he thought about the traumatic experiences he encountered in Vietnam on a daily basis, that he experienced regular nightmares, and that his startle response or hypervigilance was increasing. Further, he offered that he had nearly struck his supervisor and daughter when both individuals surprised him on separate occasions, that he experienced road rage, and that he performed “perimeter checks” about his home where he kept a number of firearms. On examination, the veteran was found to be cooperative and well-groomed and well-dressed, and he was fully oriented. Speech was coherent, clear, and goal directed, although the veteran admitted to experiencing recent homicidal and suicidal ideation. . . .

According to [four] co-workers, the veteran's symptoms had increased markedly in recent years, and all expressed fear that the veteran would harm himself or others during such outbursts. All of the veteran's co-workers indicated that he was unable to cope with any sort of stress, and that such would provoke an angry or violent outburst, often with no prior indication of such.¹⁵

The example shows that some veterans experiencing severe PTSD symptoms have difficulty coping with any type of workplace stress or interactions with others at work. In other cases, workplace triggers are much more specific. Many veterans cannot take advantage of job skills and experience—both military and non-military—because the performance of certain duties triggers PTSD symptoms. One report by the veterans' group Swords to Plowshares concludes:

PTSD may require Guard and Reserve veterans to completely redirect their career path. The skill sets used in Iraq (and in prior careers) are themselves a trigger for the veterans' symptoms. This has been the case for the transportation field, such as the truck driver who returns with an unmanageable fear of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) on U.S. roads. The same can happen to National Guard forces who used their communications, information technology (IT), language or paramedic skills in Iraq.¹⁶

For veterans of regular forces, a similar impact can be expected, but the report highlights the effect on Guard and Reserve troops because most have had an established career outside of the military that can be diverted by PTSD, thus requiring retraining in a line of work less likely to trigger symptoms.

MST can also affect employment. Experts consider MST, which can affect both women and men (though with less frequency for men), to have some distinct differences from other forms of sexual trauma. While any form of sexual trauma can have impact on working, MST is particularly likely to create work problems due to its unique nature. According to a fact sheet from the National Center for PTSD:

Sexual trauma that is associated with military service most often occurs in a setting where the victim lives and works. In most cases, this means that victims must continue to live and work closely with their perpetrators, often leading to an increased sense of feeling helpless, powerless, and at risk for additional victimization. In addition, sexual victimization that occurs in this setting often means that victims are relying on their perpetrators (or associates of the perpetrator) to provide for basic needs including medical and psychological care. Similarly, because military sexual trauma occurs within the workplace, this form of victimization disrupts the career goals

of many of its victims. Perpetrators are frequently peers or supervisors responsible for making decisions about work-related evaluations and promotions. In addition, victims are often forced to choose between continuing military careers during which they are forced to have frequent contact with their perpetrators or sacrifice their career goals in order to protect themselves from future victimization. . . .

Female veterans who use VA healthcare and report a history of sexual trauma while in the military also report a range of negative outcomes, including poorer psychological and physical health, more readjustment problems following discharge (i.e., difficulties finding work, alcohol and drug problems), and a greater incidence of not working due to mental health problems.¹⁷

Substance Abuse

As with other people who are homeless, rates of substance abuse among homeless veterans are high, with some estimates placing them higher than those in the overall homeless population. According to the VA, more than 70 percent of homeless veterans have substance abuse problems, with or without co-occurring mental illnesses.¹⁸ A study reviewing data collected from Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) programs suggested that 52.2 percent of homeless veterans were dependent on alcohol and 42.2 percent were dependent on drugs, with some overlap between the groups.¹⁹

Though both veterans and non-veterans who are homeless are likely to abuse alcohol and drugs, substance abuse among veterans frequently co-occurs with PTSD, which can complicate substance abuse recovery. The VA and Department of Defense (DoD) have established clinical practice guidelines for the treatment of PTSD, including a section on co-occurring PTSD and substance abuse. The guidelines make the following observations and conclusions:

- Substance abuse frequently masks symptoms of PTSD, and therefore veterans who have substance abuse problems should be carefully evaluated for PTSD.
- Conventional substance abuse treatments are not as effective for people who have co-occurring PTSD, and therefore integrated treatment approaches are necessary.

- People with co-occurring substance abuse and PTSD are more likely to relapse than those with substance abuse disorders alone.²⁰

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

Traumatic brain injury (TBI), which the Swords to Plowshares report calls the “signature wound of the Iraq war,” can result from direct trauma to the head or from nearby explosions.²¹ According to the report, TBI can have significant effects upon a veteran’s ability to work, affecting memory, concentration, interpersonal relationships, and the ability to control one’s temper.²² According to the National Association of State Head Injury Administrators (NASHIA), employment and vocational rehabilitation specialists can expect to find five types of challenges when helping someone with TBI succeed in the workplace:

- **Cognitive problems.** Many people with TBI experience short-term memory loss, have difficulty concentrating, and can be distracted easily by sensory overload.
- **Perceptual problems.** TBI can affect the five senses, increase sensitivity to pain, and create problems keeping track of time.
- **Physical problems.** Fatigue, weakness, loss of coordination, headaches, and sensitivity to light are common among people with TBI.
- **Behavioral and emotional problems.** People with TBI can have poor emotional control, often overreacting to situations and not reading social cues well.
- **Psychiatric problems.** TBI is strongly associated with depression and suicidal thoughts and behavior, and it can lead to paranoia or hallucinations.²³

Due to the impact that TBI is having among service members and veterans, the VA has established several initiatives to address the problem, including a center for the study and treatment of TBI at Walter Reed hospital in Washington, DC.²⁴

Family Issues

Veterans who have been separated from their families and deployed in combat situations can experience difficulty readjusting to family life.

The Veterans’ Families United Foundation notes that the returning veteran can be withdrawn, anxious, easily angered, domineering, or confrontational and can exhibit some military behaviors such as being mission-oriented or reacting quickly to situations, all leading to difficulties with family members.²⁵ Often, these difficulties lead to the veteran becoming estranged from the family.

Homeless veterans are more likely than other people who are homeless to have been married. Programs serving homeless veterans find that while some male veterans are trying to provide for their families, a significant percentage of male veterans are estranged from their families and owe back child support for minor children. In that situation, the likelihood of having future wages garnished can reduce motivation to work. On the other hand, the desire to reunite with children or other family members can be a motivating factor in “getting one’s life together.” Many veterans view employment as a positive step toward reconciliation, but the reconciliation process is often difficult and requires intensive support.

Female veterans, by contrast, are likely to have minor children for whom they are responsible. In VA-sponsored programs for homeless women veterans, 25 percent of participants have minor children.²⁶ However, women veterans are often faced with a dilemma: some programs designed to help them with issues of combat trauma and MST do not allow them to keep their children with them. Thus, women veterans often must choose between placing their children with others and seeking help from a program not specifically designed to help women veterans.²⁷ Some male veterans face a similar decision, although it is less common that they are part of a homeless family.

Legal Difficulties

In addition to the common problem of unpaid child support and fines, programs serving homeless veterans report that certain legal issues often complicate seeking or obtaining employment. In a study of homeless veterans seeking employment services at nine VA centers nationwide, 79 percent had been charged with a crime, and the mean number of convictions was 3.4.²⁸ Criminal records might include minor offenses that stem from homelessness or violent crimes that can be linked to substance abuse, PTSD, or TBI.

Additionally, the type of discharge can greatly influence a veteran’s employment prospects. Standardized job applications often ask about

military service, including discharge status. Those who are discharged under conditions other than honorable might not be hired or asked to interview. While VSOs and other public interest legal organizations can offer assistance in appealing discharge status, it can be a long and difficult process.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) generally cautions employers against asking about military discharge status, because members of minority groups are more likely to be dishonorably discharged than whites; thus, asking about discharge status has the effect of screening out minority candidates.²⁹ An employer risks a discrimination lawsuit if it cannot show that it has a business purpose for asking about discharge status. However, there is no absolute prohibition under Federal law against asking about discharge status, and some employers do ask. Some States, therefore, have passed specific laws that prohibit asking about discharge status.

Counseling veterans on how to answer inquiries about discharge status will depend on State laws, information about which should be available from VSOs or State departments of veterans affairs. Unless such inquiries are illegal, they should be answered honestly, although employment specialists can help applicants to stress positive changes made and educate employers that people with less-than-honorable discharges can nevertheless make excellent employees.

Some programs report that the loss of driving privileges is a common obstacle to employment. To regain driving privileges, people must pay fines and/or wait a certain period of time after having a license suspended. The inability to drive precludes veterans from working at jobs inaccessible by public transit, which can be a significant problem outside of major cities.

Legal difficulties such as drug offenses or other crimes, or the loss of driving privileges can also influence the type of job for which the veteran is eligible. Often, jobs that match the skills a veteran developed in the military have requirements—such as a commercial driver's license (CDL) for a truck driver or construction worker or a background check for a security guard—that the veteran cannot fulfill because of past legal difficulties.

Barriers to Effective Services

In addition to the individual barriers faced by veterans, programs often face challenges in reaching out to homeless veterans and providing appropriate services. Military service leaves an impact on the individual that might create its own set of challenges, particularly for those who are unfamiliar with serving veterans. For example, veterans typically have more work experience and skills than other people who are homeless, and thus have higher expectations regarding the type of job and salary they should be able to attain. In addition, service providers will need to serve veterans with a better understanding of military culture and help veterans overcome the stigma of seeking treatment for mental health issues and their distrust of services that may have failed them in the past. These issues are discussed below.

Job Expectations

Programs serving homeless veterans report that veterans typically have much higher job expectations than other people who are homeless. As a group, homeless veterans tend to be better-educated and have better work experience than the non-veteran homeless population. A high school degree or GED is required of recruits, and many veterans have attended college; at one program, more than 20 percent of homeless veterans in the transitional residence have four-year degrees. Additionally, military service allows the individual to develop numerous skills that can be transferred to the civilian workforce. Many homeless veterans have, in fact, held civilian jobs that provided good pay and benefits.

Thus, while lack of education and experience is less likely to be an issue for an individual veteran than among other homeless people, the homeless veteran's job expectations might pose a challenge to staff. Some reasons that staff might have to work with a veteran to adjust job expectations are as follows:

- The veteran might overestimate the value of particular military duties to civilian employers. As the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) notes, many combat-specific positions have little application in the civilian workforce outside of law enforcement, and the number of combat veterans far exceeds the hiring needs of the law enforcement community.³⁰ Even skills that are applicable to the civilian work force do not

translate into secure employment, particularly for younger veterans. As NCHV explains in a guide for employment assistance providers, “Many of the occupations of younger veterans that *are* transferable are on the lower end of the civilian wage scale – warehousemen, clerical, food service, health care assistants, or lower level workers with limited experience. In many markets, veterans may be competing for rare employment opportunities with civilians who have more site-based training or more personal contact with potential employers and their crews or staff.”³¹

- The job market might have changed, or new skills might be required, since the veteran was last employed in a particular field. With rapidly changing technology, employer needs change quickly, and certain skills become obsolete. NCHV suggests to the employment assistance provider, “In some cases, you will have to make it clear he or she is essentially ‘starting over.’ Encourage the veteran to participate in education and training programs that will create better career opportunities.”³² Additionally, as the U.S. job market shifts even further away from an industrial economy toward a service-based economy, greater computer and literacy skills are required for employment at a living wage.
- The veteran might underestimate the impact that unemployment, legal problems, or other factors will have on employer attitudes. A person who held a job with good pay and benefits and lost the job due to substance abuse, for example, might have difficulty accepting that finding a similar position might be very difficult after a significant time away from the workforce.
- A veteran with a mental illness, TBI, or other disability might face challenges in returning to a type of work previously held.
- The veteran might need to improve mathematical, writing, or other skills. A veteran who could benefit from additional adult education might not agree with that assessment because he or she has a diploma or GED and has undergone additional testing and training.

Military Culture

Veterans are part of a culture that can be difficult to understand for someone who has not served in the military or been part of a military family. Because the military is arranged into small companies or units, in which the members depend on one another for everything—including one’s life and safety—veterans share an unusually strong camaraderie. Service in the military typically involves rote duties, and veterans can fall into similar patterns of repeated actions. This learned and accepted behavior is a hallmark of the military but can be detrimental in employment environments in which individuals are expected to be flexible, work with different people when performing different tasks, or communicate quickly with large numbers of other people. The military also has its own set of terminology that can be extremely confusing to the outsider.

Military culture might influence the veteran’s employment preferences. For example, some programs report that participants are more interested in jobs in which they will be working as part of a small, tightly knit team that is similar to what they have experienced while in the military.

Service in the military creates certain expectations of behavior. As discussed below, soldiers might consider it to be poor character to report a fellow soldier’s or commander’s misconduct, even when the other’s action is harming the soldier. Similarly, asking for help with issues such as substance abuse or PTSD might be avoided because it would be thought of as a form of weakness or could derail one’s military career.

Often the transition from a combat zone to the civilian workplace is extremely difficult. According to a report on homelessness among returning veterans, “Newly discharged veterans and demobilized Guard and Reserve may have difficulty maintaining their composure and self-control throughout the work day, especially in positions of high stress or high public exposure.”³³

Stigma

In the military culture, there is a significant stigma associated with seeking help for mental health problems, particularly PTSD. Historically, there have been real and significant consequences associated with seeking help for PTSD or other mental health

problems, with those on active duty risking reassignment, loss of security clearance, and other impacts on one's military career. Additionally, many perceive that seeking help for mental health problems will lead to exclusion by commanders and fellow soldiers, thus disrupting the all-important camaraderie of military service.³⁴ Some programs report that veterans will often deny or downplay mental health problems—even if they are seeking help with co-occurring disorders such as substance abuse.

The VA Healthcare System is struggling to accommodate the mental health needs of veterans, but traditionally mental health services have been under-funded and difficult for veterans to access. Further, demonstrating that PTSD or other mental illnesses are service-connected (thus receiving paid care) has been difficult. Therefore, many veterans have had an additional barrier to receiving needed mental health services.

Distrust

Many homeless veterans are distrustful of services for veterans. A number of the challenges faced by homeless veterans—such as PTSD and TBI—are a direct result of military service. Whether or not they have been ruled to have a service-connected disability, many veterans feel that their experiences in the military led to their substance abuse, psychiatric, family, or legal problems, and thus they associate their current situation of homelessness with their past military service. Even homeless veterans who are extremely proud of their military service and who bond well with other veterans might have these feelings. Failure by service providers to acknowledge these feelings, while at the same time showing respect for veterans' service, can lead to distrust.³⁵

Distrust among homeless veterans can also influence their willingness and ability to access other services. Thus, it is crucial that service providers be extremely sensitive to these dynamics and have well-defined and thoughtful strategies for respecting the individual and building trust. An important element of this is to provide consistent, reliable and responsive services, and to follow through on agreed upon tasks in a timely manner.

Female veterans might be especially distrustful of programs designed for veterans. As many as four out of every five women veterans avoids VA-sponsored services—an attitude probably attributable to high rates

of sexual harassment and assault in the military.³⁶ Other factors can include a feeling or perception that the services are not responsive or relevant to the needs of women veterans and concern that their needs will be seen as less important than those of male veterans.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Despite the numerous challenges facing homeless veterans, many have found employment with the assistance of programs that understand and accommodate the special needs of homeless veterans. The experiences of these programs, including HVRP grantees, provide many ideas for helping link homeless veterans to appropriate employment and helping them succeed.

Show Respect for Service and Experiences

Many HVRP grantees and directors of other programs serving veterans strongly believe that the best way for employment programs to connect with homeless veterans is to employ veterans—particularly those who have been homeless—to provide services. However, while other staff of homeless assistance programs might not have the same connection with homeless veterans, they can certainly demonstrate skills and attitudes that will help to establish a better connection. One program director suggests that dedication and a genuine desire to help people are the most important attributes for staff.

Every individual is unique, but homeless veterans are likely to come to homeless assistance programs with a set of skills, experiences, and challenges quite different from other program participants. Many homeless veterans have had very successful lives, including holding well-paying jobs, raising families, and earning the respect of others. Through a change of circumstances that might include substance abuse, mental health issues, re-adjustment problems, or simple changes in economic circumstances, many of these veterans have seen successful lives fall apart.

In their current situation, many homeless veterans will need extensive support in order to work, and even with that support, might only be able to find entry-level employment. Some might find it insulting when an employment specialist suggests a job with far less responsibility, lower pay, and lesser benefits than what the veteran has had in the past, while others will understand that their current circumstances limit their opportunities. Getting to know the veteran and finding out details of

past experience demonstrates to the veteran a respect for accomplishments. Putting employment opportunities in the context of a small step toward regaining employment that matches the veteran's skills set demonstrates an interest in helping the veteran regain a successful life. During this process it is important to build on the numerous skills that are likely possessed by the individual and support the development of an employment goal that relates to current strengths and circumstances.

For many veterans, a primary need is building self-confidence. At many programs, the primary method of building self-confidence is to link the homeless veteran with peer support. Whether it is forming ties with other veterans who are homeless and looking for work, or being mentored by someone who has been in similar circumstances and gotten back on his or her feet, veterans often respond well to peer support, as it meets the need for camaraderie developed while in the service. This camaraderie also comes in the form of speaking a similar language, understanding how certain tasks and experiences are gained through military life, and having the ability to frame the strengths of being a veteran into assets that can facilitate the individual's success in civilian life.

Employment programs associated with VSOs or VA health care facilities typically have staff members who are military veterans and have many current and former participants who can act as peer mentors. The significance of having fellow veterans involved in a program cannot be emphasized enough, because being familiar with the nuances of military culture is key to providing effective employment services to all veterans, including those who have been homeless. For programs without a specific military affiliation, finding mentoring opportunities might require an innovative approach, such as a partnership with a local veterans group. One important way to address the distrust often exhibited by female veterans is to have female staff, including veterans, who are available to provide the services being requested by female veterans.

Remember that military culture is very different from civilian culture. As much as issues such as mental illnesses and sexual harassment and assault are stigmatized in society, within the military culture, there is often a much greater stigma against seeking help. Use tact when trying to identify barriers to employment, as the veteran might not want to

acknowledge PTSD, MST, or mental health issues and might feel uncomfortable talking about reasons for discharge.

Introduce Employment at a Time and Pace Right for the Individual

Linking homeless veterans to employment opportunities should be viewed as part of an overall plan to help the veteran overcome the challenges associated with homelessness. It is likely the case that the veteran will need less assistance with developing "hard skills" and more assistance with overcoming the emotional and logistical barriers to taking advantage of skills developed in the military or in civilian jobs. Thus, the timing and approach of addressing employment issues are crucial. As described below, the timing should account for veterans' immediate health and legal needs, and the approach should acknowledge veterans' comfort level with more structured programs that encourage accountability and peer support.

Acute Needs

Because many homeless veterans have long-standing substance abuse, physical health, or mental health concerns but also have significant job experience and skills, programs often begin discussions of employment soon after first contact with the homeless veteran, but allow immediate needs to take priority. In addition to substance abuse treatment, addressing domestic violence, PTSD and other mental health issues, or chronic health conditions often present immediate needs that are addressed before intensive employment activities take place. One HVRP grantee in western Pennsylvania, Veterans Leadership Program, even established a fathering initiative, in recognition of the desire of many male veterans to reunite with family as an immediate priority.

However, even while addressing acute needs, many programs offer homeless veterans some low-stress, low-impact employment activities, such as job readiness classes or working a few hours a week, while the veterans are engaging in or completing substance abuse or other treatment. Other programs simply establish a dialogue between veterans and employment specialists. Maintaining discussions of employment makes it possible to intensify job-related activities as soon as the veteran is willing and able. The important point is to facilitate employment conversations with the individual throughout the

relationship with service providers and integrate employment goals and related action steps and supports into an overall treatment plan.

More significant employment activities typically take place after veterans successfully complete substance abuse treatment or other types of acute treatment and are in some form of aftercare or follow-along treatment. For example, for a veteran with substance abuse issues, work opportunities might be available once active substance abuse is discontinued. VA-sponsored Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) and social enterprises run by private organizations allow the veteran to devote attention to maintaining recovery while regaining work skills in a less-stressful environment.

Legal Issues

Addressing a veteran's legal issues early in the process can also help ongoing employment efforts succeed. Many programs have partnered with the local criminal justice system to offer veterans the opportunity to clear legal problems getting in the way of employment or obtaining needed licensing and certifications. For example, Veterans Village of San Diego (California), an HVRP grantee, brings the city's "homeless court" to its shelter serving homeless veterans. The program has helped veterans clear up thousands of legal problems, typically when a judge accepts the veteran's participation in employment training, substance abuse, and volunteer activities as an alternative to jail time or fines.

Some programs have established working relationships with local prisons and jails to identify veterans who have been incarcerated so that they can develop a transition plan so that the veteran is not unemployed and homeless after leaving the correctional institution.

In addition to criminal records, veterans often need help regaining a driver's license, obtaining identification or military records, or challenging a discharge decision. Handling these issues early in the process can help the veteran find employment. Additionally, for veterans who will be paying back fines or child support, it is helpful to develop a payment plan, including any agreements with those owed money, prior to starting work, so that the individual can have enough for living expenses.

Structure

Some programs exclusively serving veterans employ a much more structured environment than found in most social services, finding that the veterans respond well to a level of structure greater than what is found in most social services programs. For example, the Maryland Center for Veterans Education and Training, an HVRP grantee located in Baltimore, organizes participants into platoons and squads, similar to those used in the military. Program leadership notes, "Students are accountable to each other, their fellow platoon members, and the designated platoon leadership. All residents are expected by their peers to be accountable for their actions. This order and structure replaces the chaos they have experienced while homeless and prepares them for reentry into the community."³⁷

Additionally, most programs specifically serving veterans emphasize the role of peer support in helping veterans to gain and maintain employment. Peer support groups and the presence of peer counselors is common in veterans' service programs, with a focus on translating the positive aspects of military and veteran life into skills and strengths that can be applied in civilian life. Often, veterans are encouraged to attend Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meeting with fellow veterans, and programs host alumni events, offering food, activities, and even door prizes, to encourage networking among people who have received services.

Help Veterans Sell Their Skills and Experience

Many employers like the idea of hiring veterans, an act viewed as a civic obligation to recognize veterans' service to the country. Programs representing homeless veterans typically stress the fact that an applicant is a veteran who is looking to support himself or herself (and possibly a family), rather than discussing homelessness. Staff sometimes meets with employers face-to-face to sell them on the idea of hiring veterans, while other programs find that a call to a human resources department letting them know that a veteran has applied for a job sometimes gets the applicant's resume looked at. However, employer goodwill is typically erased if the applicant has a felony conviction.³⁸

Homeless veterans typically have developed many skills, both in military and civilian life. However, employers are unlikely to understand

the terminology used in the military to describe duties and positions. Therefore, employment specialists working with veterans and those about to leave active duty help to translate a veteran's military record into more accessible language. For example, the training for veterans developed by DOL for its Transition Assistance Program (TAP) recommends using terms such as "assistant manager, line supervisor, section leader, task leader, supervisor, or foreman," rather than the military terms "E4, E5, or E6."³⁹ A number of tools are available online to help translate military duties into civilian-friendly language.⁴⁰ These tools are helpful in developing a resume or standardized job application that the veteran can copy from when applying for a job using a written form or computer kiosk.

In addition to the veteran's own report of skills and experiences accrued while in the military, the veteran's service records, including discharge papers (known as a "DD214"), might be of use in helping to identify resume material. Veterans are able to request service records (from the National Archives, not the VA) electronically or by using a Standard Form 180 (SF 180).⁴¹

When interacting with potential employers, it might also be helpful to stress some of the personal characteristics and skills that a veteran might have cultivated while in the military, examples of which follow:

- Leadership
- Ability to follow rules and work within a structured environment
- Ability to work as part of a team
- Experience working with diverse groups
- Willingness to take risks and try new tasks/assignments
- Ability to give and follow directions
- Completion of tasks with minimal supervision⁴²

Supervisors and human resources personnel at most employers have little familiarity with hiring veterans or handling issues commonly affecting veterans. Programs serving homeless veterans actively work with employers to tell them about the personal characteristics just described and dispel misconceptions such as the following:

- Military veterans cannot dress like or socialize with civilians.

- People who chose to serve in the military lack creativity or ambition.
- The military does not have the same expectations of productivity or "bottom line" as the private sector.
- Military careers are easy.⁴³

Additionally, some programs offer to work with employers to deal with human resources issues with which they might be unfamiliar, such as dealing with paperwork related to benefits or coordinating health care, assistive technology, or other needs that the veteran might have. In some cases, employers even agree to have the program act as an intermediary if disciplinary or performance issues arise, with the employer contacting an employment specialist rather than "writing up" the employee. This relationship with the employer often extends to receiving training or resources on how to supervise individuals who have been homeless and are veterans, having the employer engage in the idea of service providers offering ongoing supports to the veteran who has been hired, and thus expanding the successful linkage between the employment service provider and employer. Many employers enjoy and appreciate the benefits that come with this type of working relationship with service providers, and have used a veterans' organization as a major recruitment source.

Identify Jobs Consistent with Individual Attributes

Helping homeless veterans present their skills is part of the equation, but perhaps a more important part is helping the veteran to identify jobs within the civilian workforce that are consistent with the veteran's assets, preferences, motivation, interests, and current barriers to employment. For programs with funding for follow-along activities, placing a veteran in a job that better matches his or her skills, even if it takes longer for the veteran to find work, is often preferable: staff can provide these services while the veteran works in a job with long-term potential, rather than at a job the veteran will probably leave soon.

Military Skills

The same tools that can be used for developing resumes and standardized job applications can also be used to identify fields in which a veteran's military skills could be considered an asset. While military duties vary widely, some of the jobs that veterans have

successfully worked in with the help of employment programs include the following:

- Security
- Property management
- Carpentry, HVAC, and other skilled trades
- Maintenance work
- Mechanical positions
- Machinists
- Welding
- Manufacturing/assembly
- Warehouse
- Construction
- Forklift operator
- Food service and preparation
- Driving
- Counseling and social services
- Clinical positions
- Healthcare providers
- Administrative and clerical
- Retail
- Hospitality industry (hotels, resorts, entertainment, sports)
- Teaching and other educational positions
- Management
- Sales and marketing
- Telephone/cable/electrical linesperson

Need for Structure and Teamwork

While each veteran is different, programs providing employment services to homeless veterans note that many veterans are seeking civilian employment that shares certain aspects of military experiences. For example, many veterans have a desire to work as part of a small team with consistent members. Someone with such a preference might prefer to work for a painting company that sends out teams of three or four people to paint houses, rather than working in a large retail store with irregular schedules and high turnover, requiring the employee to work with large numbers of co-workers.

This same idea of teamwork extends to positions that require individuals to rely heavily on each other to complete a project or task. Again, this replicates some of the positive experiences that one may have had in the military, and it assists the veteran to feel comfortable and confident in performing the job.

Veterans might also have a desire to work in a job with carefully structured duties that do not differ greatly from day to day. At one program, veterans have gotten work with telephone companies installing and repairing cable, which is a routine task that builds upon experience that they have developed in the military.

Disabilities

For people with lesser limitations, a thorough evaluation of deficits and creative thinking about workplace duties and possible accommodations can lead to appropriate placements. Typically, however, veterans with significant disabilities will benefit from more intensive vocational rehabilitation.

For veterans with PTSD, it is important to understand what types of conditions trigger an individual's symptoms and whether the individual can cope with symptoms under certain circumstances. While triggers vary from individual to individual, some factors to consider when evaluating a workplace or position include the following:

- What is the overall noise level of the workplace?
- What kind of stimuli can be found in the workplace, such as sudden noises, flashing or blinking lights, employee chatter, disturbing sights or smells, etc.?

- What kinds of stimuli exist in the surrounding neighborhood that may impact someone when coming to or going home from work, as well as to lunch, etc.?
- How many co-workers would the individual interact with?
- Would the individual have to interact with the public, and if so, what is the typical level of stress that can arise from these interactions?
- Would the individual be performing duties similar to those performed in a combat zone, e.g. responding to crises, working under consistent pressure, or working in an environment in which there are a lot of surprises or unknowns?
- Would the supervisory structure or personality of the supervisors create tension or fear?
- Are productivity expectations promoted in a positive way or a punitive way?
- What type of teamwork and camaraderie is the norm in the job, and how is that facilitated and encouraged?

Veterans who have TBI might experience a number of obstacles to work, due to symptoms such as fatigue, inability to concentrate, irritability, and sensitivity to light and noise. However, vocational rehabilitation specialists have devised many methods for helping people with TBI succeed in the workplace, such as the following:

- Using stopwatches, pagers, or mobile phones as reminders of tasks
- Spelling out duties on a checklist that is carried at all times
- Scheduling shorter, more frequent breaks
- Soundproofing or changing lighting in the work station⁴⁴

Many veterans experience emotional issues on the job. Employment staff typically offers to support them through the adjustment period, for example, by asking participants to call the office if they feel an increase of stress or if they are concerned that they are going to quit a job or be fired. Programs try to stay in phone contact with participants who have been placed; calling at least monthly for the first nine months is typical.

Legal Situation

While addressing legal issues early in the process is helpful, not all issues can be resolved. Thus providing employment services to homeless veterans often involves trying to find jobs for which the individual would not be disqualified during the initial application or background check. For people with convictions involving theft or embezzlement, violent crimes (particularly sex crimes), or drugs, finding work in many fields is difficult or impossible. Additionally, many employers run credit checks, and the financial problems that lead to homelessness for many veterans leave them with serious credit problems. Job sectors such as banking, legal services, insurance, health care, security, education, or child care might be closed to certain participants.

However, there is an increasing percentage of Americans becoming involved with the criminal justice system, with the Bureau of Justice Statistics estimating that one in 15 Americans will serve time in State or Federal prison.⁴⁵ Thus, many employers are hiring people with criminal records to meet their workforce needs. As the increasing success of placement programs for ex-offenders illustrates, placement in many types of jobs is possible, even some in industries once closed to ex-offenders.⁴⁶

The Federal Bonding Program (FBP) is one tool for placing ex-offenders, people with poor credit histories, and people who have successfully completed substance abuse programs. Under the program, which is administered by the States' departments of labor, the State can offer employers federally-backed insurance policies that cover theft by the employee for a period of six months, after which the employer can purchase a continuation of the policy. The program allows employers to take a chance on people who are trying hard to rebuild their lives.

Help to Identify Work-related Deficits

For most individuals, employment services are geared toward placement rather than retention. However, homeless veterans often have some long-standing issues (related or unrelated to military service) that can affect their ability to maintain employment. Following up with the veteran after work has begun can help to identify issues for which additional support is needed, or in some cases, which indicate

that the placement was not appropriate. Follow-up should focus on the employment needs and disabilities identified during the assessment and placement process as well as a job retention plan developed during the job search process to determine if needs are being met.⁴⁷

It is particularly important to identify any issues related to a veteran's service-connected disabilities. In the disability rating process, job performance is often considered as an indicator of the level of benefits to which a veteran is entitled. Additionally, if a veteran experiences difficulty at work due to a service-connected disability, he or she might be eligible for additional follow-along supports or help with workplace accommodations that can help to ensure job success.

CONCLUSION

As many as one-third of homeless men in the United States are military veterans, and the demographics of the homeless veteran population are changing, with more women and younger veterans becoming homeless. Though homeless veterans face many of the same challenges as non-veterans, service providers will be better equipped to serve veterans if they understand their unique experiences and needs.

Many homeless veterans have had successful lives but have lost everything. They often have valuable skills and experience but face serious obstacles to employment, including PTSD and other mental illnesses, substance abuse, and TBI. They may also have parallel health issues that make the obstacles even more complex. Additionally, veterans might have other issues related to their separation from the service or estrangement from their families. They might face legal issues such as unpaid child support, revocation of driving privileges, criminal convictions, and unfavorable discharge status.

Many employment-related opportunities exist for veterans in general, homeless veterans, and disabled veterans, but many homeless veterans do not qualify for these programs or are unwilling or unable to take advantage of them. In the homeless assistance field, service providers sometimes have a difficult time connecting with homeless veterans, who might be very distrustful and who might refuse to acknowledge some of the challenges they face.

Because homeless veterans are often skilled but facing serious barriers to employment, many programs try to address acute needs such as housing, substance abuse treatment, mental illnesses, and legal issues immediately and slowly introduce low-impact employment activities such as working on resumes or working in non-competitive environments. Once acute needs have been addressed, the veteran is often ready to move into employment. An integrated services approach helps the individual to become ready to pursue employment and also be supported throughout the entire vocational, job search, job placement and job retention process.⁴⁸

However, job placement must take into account a number of factors that relate both to the individual and to service in the military. Military culture, built upon working as part of small, inter-dependent teams, often influences job preferences, and commonplace challenges such as PTSD and TBI require a careful analysis of the workplace and job duties. Above all, when providing employment services to veterans, it is important to recognize their service to the country and what they have lost in their lives and to embrace the considerable skills and knowledge that they have to offer to most work environments and employers.

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Web Sites

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- **Employer Incentives for Hiring Veterans.** http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/emp_resources.htm
- **E-Vet Records, National Archives.** <http://www.archives.gov/veterans/evetrecs/>
- **Federal Bonding Program.** <http://www.bonds4jobs.com/>
- **Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP), U.S. Department of Labor.** <http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/hvrp/main.htm>
- **Information for Veterans, U.S. Small Business Administration.** <http://www.sba.gov/vets>
- **Military to Civilian Occupation Translator.** <http://www.acinet.org/acinet/moc/>

- **National Coalition for Homeless Veterans.**
<http://www.nchv.org>
- **Patriot Express Program, U.S. Small Business Administration.** <http://www.sba.gov/patriotexpress/>
- **Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS), U.S. Department of Labor.** <http://www.dol.gov/vets>
- **Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program (VRE), U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.**
<http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/vrs.htm>

Endnotes

¹ The VA publishes a directory of VSOs located throughout the nation. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2008). *Directory of Veterans Service Organizations*. Retrieved April 20, 2008 from <http://www1.va.gov/vso/>

² See, e.g., U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2008). *Federal benefits for veterans and dependents*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved April 22, 2008 from <http://www1.va.gov/opa/vadocs/fedben.pdf>

³ For detailed information about work incentives and their effect of benefits, refer to Lecture 5 and the accompanying pamphlet, in this series.

⁴ National Coalition for Homeless Veterans. (2006). *Employment assistance guide for providers serving homeless veterans*. Washington, DC: Author.

⁵ DOL's HVRP page contains a grantee list and other information. See <http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/hvrp/main.htm>

⁶ For a program description, see <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/vrs.htm>

⁷ For information about employer incentives, see http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/emp_resources.htm

⁸ IRS Form 8850 lists categories of eligibility.

⁹ For information, see <http://www.sba.gov/patriotexpress/>

¹⁰ For information about SBA programs for veterans, see <http://www.sba.gov/vets>

¹¹ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (n. d.). Overview of homelessness. Retrieved April 11, 2008 from <http://www1.va.gov/homeless/page.cfm?pg=1>

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¹⁵ Docket No. 03-00375, Board of Veterans Appeals (23 December 2003).

¹⁶ Fairweather, 2006.

¹⁷ Street, A., & Stafford, J. (n. d.) *Military Sexual Trauma: Issues in caring for veterans*. Retrieved April 16, 2008 from http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/ncmain/ncdocs/fact_shts/military_sexual_trauma.html?printable-template=factsheet

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¹⁹ Lim, S., Kaspro, W. J., & Rosenheck, R. A. (2006). Psychiatric illness and substance abuse among homeless Asian-American veterans. *Psychiatric Services*, 57(5), 704-708.

²⁰ Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense. (2004, January). *VA/DoD clinical practice guideline for the management of post-traumatic stress*. Washington, DC: Author.

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- ²² Fairweather, 2006, p. 4.
- ²³ National Association of State Head Injury Administrators. (n.d.). Traumatic brain injury facts: Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services. Bethesda, MD: Author. Retrieved April 18, 2008 from <http://www.tbicac.nashia.org/tbics/download/nashvoc.pdf>
- ²⁴ See <http://www.dvbic.org>
- ²⁵ Veterans' Families United Foundation. (n. d.). Behaviors of veteran readjustment problems and the impact to family/friends. Retrieved April 11, 2008 from http://www.veteransfamiliesunited.org/behaviors_of_veteran_readjustment_problems_of.pdf
- ²⁶ Edwards & Martin, 2008.
- ²⁷ Edwards & Martin, 2008.
- ²⁸ Rosenheck, R. A., & Mares, A. S. (2007). Implementation of Supported Employment for homeless veterans with psychiatric or addiction disorders: Two-year outcomes. *Psychiatric Services*, 58(3), 325-333.
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- ³⁰ National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 2006.
- ³¹ National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 2006, p. 5.
- ³² National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 2006, p. 13.
- ³³ Fairweather, 2006, p. 5.
- ³⁴ Greene-Shorridge, T. M., Britt, T. W., & Castro, C. A., (2007). The stigma of mental health problems in the military. *Military Medicine*, 172(2), 157-161. Retrieved April 17, 2008 from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3912/is_200702/ai_n18632406/print
- ³⁵ National Coalition for Homeless Veterans. (2007). *Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program: Best practice profiles of employment assistance programs*. Washington, DC: Author.
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- ⁴⁰ See, e.g., Career One Stop. (n. d.). Military to civilian occupation translator. Retrieved April 20, 2008 from <http://www.acinet.org/acinet/moc/>
- ⁴¹ An electronic system for requesting service records and a link to the SF 180 form can be found at <http://www.archives.gov/veterans/evetrecs/>
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- ⁴⁴ National Association of State Head Injury Administrators. (n.d.).
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- ⁴⁶ For detailed information about helping people with criminal records find and maintain employment, refer to Lecture 9 and the accompanying pamphlet, in this series.
- ⁴⁷ For detailed information about retention-related services, refer to Lecture 7 and the accompanying pamphlet, in this series.
- ⁴⁸ For detailed information about the integrated services approach, refer to Lecture 3 and the accompanying pamphlet, in this series.