

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

**Section 1 Introduction to HUD Employment Lecture Series, Lecture #8
“Employment Services for Homeless Veterans”**

Colleagues:

This lecture is the eighth in a series of nine lectures that are being developed on employment-related topics. This lecture is intended for case managers, housing staff, employment specialists, vocational rehabilitation staff, and program managers who might provide services to people who are homeless. To download lectures from this series, please go to www.hudhre.info.

Today’s topic is providing employment services to homeless veterans.

A significant percentage of people who are homeless have served in the military. As many as one out of every three men and a growing percentage of women who are homeless are veterans. A number of targeted programs support eligible veterans with employment and self-employment assistance. Government agencies at the State and Federal levels, such as the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (or VA), support these programs. Additionally, private Veterans Service Organizations (or VSOs) exist in many communities to support veterans. However, not all veterans are eligible for targeted programs, some might not want to participate in them, and some might need additional support from the homeless assistance system. The homeless assistance field offers many opportunities to support homeless veterans in attaining self-sufficiency.

While every individual is unique, people who work with homeless veterans have identified a number of common issues that arise, particularly when assisting homeless veterans with work-related activities. While homeless veterans often have impressive skills, experience, and education, they also typically face significant barriers to employment. Additionally, working with military veterans will require you to understand how military service can affect behavior, attitudes, work preferences, and styles of communication.

There are 11 sections in this lecture. The topics contained in the remaining 10 sections are as follows:

- Section 2: Understanding Homelessness among Veterans;
- Section 3: The Need for Services Outside the Veterans’ System;
- Section 4: Establishing Connections with Veterans;
- Section 5: Helping Veterans with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Succeed in the Workplace;
- Section 6: Helping Veterans with Substance Abuse Issues Succeed in the Workplace;

- Section 7: Helping Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injuries Succeed in the Workplace;
- Section 8: Dealing with Legal Issues Common among Homeless Veterans;
- Section 9: Helping Veterans Take Advantage of Military Skills;
- Section 10: Opportunities Available to Eligible Veterans; and
- Section 11: Conclusion.

A companion pamphlet provides a more in-depth analysis and includes a list of resources.

Section 2 Understanding Homelessness among Veterans

On any given night, it is estimated by the VA that more than 150,000 veterans are homeless, and almost twice that number can be homeless over the course of a year. According to the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, there are some demographic differences between the veteran and non-veteran homeless populations. For example, 46 percent of homeless veterans are white males, compared to 34 percent of non-veterans, and, very significantly, 46 percent of homeless veterans are aged 45 or older, compared to only 20 percent of non-veterans. One national study found that 67 percent of homeless veterans had been married, compared to 41 percent of non-veterans.

Providing employment-related services to homeless veterans is likely to be quite different from providing these services to other people who are homeless. In general, homeless veterans tend to have much more work experience, both inside and outside of the military. They also tend to have greater educational achievement. In fact, at one program interviewed for this lecture, more than 20 percent of the homeless veterans in the residential facility had four-year college degrees. At a minimum, the military requires a high school diploma or GED of recruits. Keep in mind, though, that there will be some veterans who could benefit greatly from adult education.

However, along with their skills, education, and experience, homeless veterans also face significant challenges. As one program director stated, “Employed in the past and employable are two different things.” You will probably note some of the same barriers to employment among homeless veterans as you would among other people who are homeless, such as mental illnesses, substance abuse, trauma, and criminal history.

However, certain issues seem to be prevalent among homeless veterans and might require a different approach to services. Here are several examples:

- Post-traumatic stress disorder (or PTSD) is common among homeless veterans. Other forms of mental illnesses might be less prevalent than among non-veterans who are homeless. PTSD might be linked to combat trauma or military sexual trauma (or MST), and it might also be linked to the trauma of being separated from the military or being homeless. Working might trigger symptoms of PTSD, and a plan is necessary for avoiding these triggers or minimizing their impact. However, because there is a great stigma within the military, many veterans might not acknowledge they have PTSD or other mental health problems.

- There is also a high rate of substance abuse among homeless veterans, and because the substance abuse is often linked to trauma, treatment can be more difficult and relapse can be more likely.
- Many homeless veterans have families from whom they have been estranged and with whom they might want to reunite. Often, discharge from military service is a difficult adjustment that leads to family conflict.
- An increasing number of veterans, particularly younger veterans, have a traumatic brain injury, which can have profound effects on many aspects of life, including work.
- Another issue prevalent among homeless veterans is legal difficulties, such as criminal records, unpaid child support, or revoked driving privileges.
- Finally, employers might ask about military discharge status and might not hire someone who did not receive an honorable or general discharge.

The military also has its own culture, and if you have not served in the military or been part of a military family, this culture might be quite unfamiliar to you. However, in your work with people who are homeless, an understanding of the military culture will be important. We'll discuss this more in Section 4.

Keep in mind also that working with homeless veterans requires a delicate balance. The person you are trying to help might have had a successful career and a family, only to lose everything. Now, the person might have serious obstacles standing in the way of employment. This lecture will help you to identify a veteran's strengths in a respectful manner while dealing with the very real barriers that he or she might currently face.

Section 3 The Need for Services Outside the Veterans' System

Local, State, and Federal government agencies have established a number of employment opportunities for veterans, including specific programs for disabled veterans and homeless veterans. At the end of this lecture, we'll discuss some of these opportunities, but it is important for you to understand that you are likely to be serving homeless veterans alongside non-veterans.

Foremost, the veterans' system does not have the capacity to serve all homeless veterans. Other reasons why you are likely to encounter homeless veterans outside of the veterans' system include the following:

- First, some programs are designed for veterans with "service-connected" disabilities, and veterans who have disabilities that are not a result of military service are ineligible.
- Second, veterans might have disabilities that *are* service-connected but have not been classified as such; it has traditionally been difficult to get service-connected benefits for certain disabilities such as PTSD.
- Third, many veterans have mental illnesses that have not been diagnosed, or for which they refuse to seek treatment; thus, they would not be considered eligible for services for veterans with mental illnesses.
- Fourth, veterans with family obligations might refuse services that require them to be apart from family members.

- Fifth, services specifically for veterans might not be available in a location convenient for some veterans; for example, urban VA hospitals might have waiting lists and veterans might be unwilling to attend a program in a suburban or semi-rural area. Similarly, veterans might require more intensive care than is available in local veterans' facilities.
- Sixth, veterans might already be working with the homeless assistance system because they are able to have their needs met more effectively.
- Finally, almost none of the resources targeted to veterans are available to veterans who have been dishonorably discharged from the service, which some estimates place at about 10 percent of homeless veterans.

You should try to serve homeless veterans by taking advantage of every possible resource. In some cases, veterans might benefit from your assistance while they are trying to qualify for some of the resources available to eligible veterans. You can provide employment supports while at the same time referring a veteran to veterans service organizations (or VSOs) that can help the veteran through administrative or legal proceedings that remove barriers to participation.

- VSOs often provide assistance in appealing one's discharge status, such as changing a dishonorable discharge to a medical discharge.
- VSOs can also help a veteran demonstrate that his or her disability is service-related, which is a common issue of contention for mental health issues.
- VSOs and legal assistance agencies might be able to help a veteran with a criminal record clear it, through special arrangements with the court system and correctional agencies.

Whether you are providing services to a veteran in cooperation with a VSO or independently, it is important to establish a trusted connection with the veteran, as we'll discuss next.

Section 4 Establishing Connections with Veterans

As noted in our earlier lecture on outreach, establishing a connection with someone who is homeless can present many challenges and require a concerted effort. Establishing a connection with a homeless veteran might be even more difficult, especially if you are not a veteran yourself. Service in the military creates a strong sense of camaraderie, and many homeless veterans feel more comfortable dealing with fellow veterans. While programs who work specifically with homeless veterans typically hire veterans to do outreach, many non-veterans have established connections with homeless veterans, and you can too.

To make connections with homeless veterans, however, you must understand some of the challenges they face and some of the reasons that veterans might have for rejecting your offers of services. Some of these reasons include the following:

- First, many veterans have PTSD, which impacts the ability to form trusting relationships.
- Second, within the military community, there is a great stigma attached to seeking mental health treatment and other supports—even greater than the stigma in society at large.

- Third, veterans who end up homeless often feel alienated and “used” by a society that relied upon them for military service but could not provide for their basic needs after their service ended. As a result, they might be skeptical of offers of help that they see as connected to the government. They might also be concerned about sharing delicate information with someone whom they are not sure will be able to relate or understand what is being said.
- Finally, as a coping mechanism while homeless, veterans might employ defensive measures to keep people away, such as establishing a territory and protecting it from outsiders.

Above all, it is important to show respect for what the veteran has done and what he or she might have lost in his or her life. Veterans—regardless of where, when, or how they served—have made a sacrifice in putting on a uniform and serving their country. If you do not know much about military service and veterans’ issues, try contacting a local VSO or veterans’ group. Talking with veterans can help you better understand how their lives have been shaped by military service.

Many homeless veterans have had successful lives both inside and outside the military, only to lose their homes, careers, families, friends, and community connections. It is particularly important that you find out as much as possible about a veteran and base your discussions of employment on what you learn. Even if a person currently would have difficulty getting anything other than an entry-level job, you can discuss opportunities in the context of past achievements and working to regain status.

Helping a homeless veteran to rebuild self-confidence is an important early step. Introduce discussions of employment at an early stage without placing pressure on the veteran. This approach can help engage the veteran in other supports that he or she might need in order to pursue regular employment. Peer support can be a particularly useful tool in rebuilding self-confidence and motivation, as veterans are very accustomed to supporting each other and “watching each other’s backs” above all else.

Because of the widespread stigma toward mental health services, it is extremely important to be sensitive to the fact that veterans might not acknowledge having mental health concerns. You might have to discuss support issues in more positive terms, such as having someone to talk to when the person is stressed out. It might also be helpful to discuss specific behaviors that may be problematic and ways to avert or change them.

Many programs serving homeless veterans have found peer support to be an indispensable part of employment supports. If you are not working within a program staffed by veterans, you could establish either peer support groups or informal mentoring relationships. A companion pamphlet lists some resources in establishing peer support opportunities.

In addition to some of the general supports you can offer to veterans, you are likely to find yourself dealing with some specific issues, such as PTSD, substance abuse, traumatic brain injuries, and legal problems. Let’s look at some specific strategies in each area.

Section 5 Helping Veterans with PTSD Succeed in the Workplace
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Many homeless veterans have diagnosed or undiagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder (or PTSD) due to various forms of trauma. Rates of PTSD can be expected to be much

higher among homeless veterans than among homeless non-veterans. Some estimates suggest that 40 percent of homeless veterans have PTSD.

PTSD among homeless veterans might have numerous causes. As you might expect, veterans who have served in combat might have PTSD that can be traced back to exposure to enemy fire, injury to the individual or those close by, and death of comrades. Others may have been traumatized by seeing injured comrades or bodies of those killed in action. PTSD can also be caused by the experience of sudden crises, explosions, loud noises, interactions with others, or being in circumstances where the potential outcomes are stressful, unpredictable, and cause significant levels of anxiety.

For others, PTSD can be linked to military sexual trauma (or MST). A significant percentage of women in the military experience either sexual assault or sexual harassment. Estimates place the rate of assault as high as 48 percent for women veterans and the rate of harassment as high as 70 percent. Additionally, a significant percentage of women veterans have experienced domestic violence, both before and after serving in the military.

Trauma might also originate with stressful non-combat experiences while in the military or the stressful experience of becoming separated from the military, particularly for those who experience family conflicts or difficulty finding work upon leaving the service.

As it is for non-veterans, the experience of homelessness is itself traumatic, but this effect might be more pronounced among people who feel that they have been “used” by society.

For veterans who have experienced combat trauma, it might be difficult or impossible to work in the same type of field in which the veteran worked previously. For example, a truck driver whose truck was damaged by a roadside bomb might find that driving trucks triggers PTSD symptoms.

MST presents an even greater potential for disruption of work. When a veteran has experienced sexual assault or harassment at the hands of a superior or comrades, the trauma takes place in the context of work. Thus, working itself might trigger fears of danger from supervisors and co-workers. This experience has been reported by many female and male veterans.

Regardless of the cause of PTSD, it is important for you to recognize that the symptoms of PTSD can lead to difficulties at work. Working closely and collaboratively with others and dealing with members of the public might be difficult. Being easily startled, angered, or distracted and acting in a defensive or survivalist manner are common manifestations of PTSD in the workplace.

If you are assisting someone with PTSD, it is important to identify any triggers that might be present in the workplace, or as a result of coming and going to work. Keep in mind that some veterans do not acknowledge having PTSD, and thus you might have to discuss those triggers in the context of what stresses them out at work or causes them to “lose it,” rather than using clinical language.

In helping others with job searches, keep in mind that some workplaces are more supportive than others. For example, jobs with flexible scheduling might be more compatible with needed supports such as counseling or support groups. You might also target employers that offer an employee assistance plan (or EAP), which provides confidential support to employees experiencing mental health, substance abuse, or other

critical situations. These same workplace criteria might also be useful for veterans with substance abuse, traumatic brain injury, or other conditions requiring additional support.

Section 6 Helping Veterans with Substance Abuse Issues Succeed in the Workplace

Widespread substance abuse among homeless veterans helps to explain why homeless veterans, as a group, tend to have very good job skills but still have low rates of employment. Many homeless veterans who are actively abusing drugs or alcohol are able to do some work but are unable to hold a steady job or keep a home due to substance abuse. For those in recovery, relapse poses a threat to job stability.

According to the VA, about 70 percent of homeless veterans have substance abuse problems, including those who have co-occurring substance abuse and mental illnesses. Research in Healthcare for Homeless Veterans programs revealed that 50 percent of homeless veterans seen were dependent on alcohol, while 40 percent were dependent on drugs, meaning that many are dependent on both drugs and alcohol.

Unfortunately, for many homeless veterans, substance abuse problems are long-standing and difficult to resolve. Substance abuse is also often linked to the veteran's military experience. For many, drug and alcohol abuse is an attempt to self-medicate symptoms of PTSD. Getting help for people with co-occurring substance abuse and PTSD can be quite complicated for several reasons:

- First, substance abuse often masks the symptoms of PTSD, preventing diagnosis of the disorder.
- Second, substance abuse treatment is less effective for people who have PTSD.
- Third, people with PTSD are more likely to relapse into active substance abuse than other people who are in recovery, especially when symptoms are triggered.

Many programs find that homeless veterans are more likely to benefit from intensive substance abuse treatment, such as residential treatment. A well-known example is the domiciliary care program offered by VA Health Care facilities nationwide.

Programs that address substance abuse along with a veteran's other needs are more likely to be effective in working successfully with veterans to obtain and retain employment. The prospect of employment can serve as a means of engaging the veteran in services and motivate the individual to stay with the program.

An example of a program using an integrated approach is the Mission program operating at a VA facility in New Jersey. Serving unemployed, homeless veterans with co-occurring substance abuse and mental illnesses, Mission works with participants both while they are in the domiciliary care program and when they return to the community. Mission's model of care combines integrated mental health and substance abuse counseling, peer support, and job coaching.

One key to success appears to be introducing employment supports slowly, in a way that does not distract from substance abuse treatment. Examples can include helping the veteran develop a resume, practice interviewing, and career counseling. Once active substance abuse has ceased, activities can include the following examples:

- Compensated Work Therapy (or CWT), which is non-competitive employment offered at many VA facilities;

- Internships, including internships with a social service agency or housing provider;
- Working part-time at a VA facility;
- Working for social enterprises (such as thrift shops or restaurants) run by non-profit organizations; and
- Performing day labor, which offers flexibility.

Because work can be a source of stress that complicates remaining in recovery from substance abuse, it is particularly important that veterans have some form of aftercare available. Attending Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous with other veterans can be particularly helpful. Additionally, regular phone or in-person contacts with the veteran once employed can help you monitor whether additional supports are needed. You might even need to help the veteran get time off of work to concentrate on immediate needs.

<p>Section 7 Helping Veterans with Traumatic Brain Injuries Succeed in the Workplace</p>
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Traumatic brain injuries (or TBIs) can occur in several ways and have numerous, unpredictable effects. An injury can be caused by a direct impact to the head, such as from enemy fire or vehicle crash. An injury can also be caused by nearby explosions or by sudden impacts to other parts of the body. In those cases, the brain literally collides with the inside of the skull, causing harm.

TBI has been called by some the “signature wound” of the war in Iraq. Troops are under constant threat from explosions, such as roadside bombs that damage military vehicles, and many younger veterans are returning from Iraq with TBI. The Federal government has recognized the problem and created initiatives to support veterans with TBI. However, many in the veterans’ community are concerned about the long-term prospects of these younger veterans and fear that many will become homeless. Furthermore, there is concern about how TBI will affect long-term employability.

Veterans with profound TBI are more likely to be served by VA-sponsored or State-sponsored vocational rehabilitation programs. However, it is quite possible that you will encounter veterans with less pronounced symptoms or undiagnosed injuries. Some injuries do not totally disrupt functioning but can have serious effects on a person’s ability to work. In addition to headaches, weakness, and fatigue, a person might have difficulties on the job in the following areas:

- Concentrating on work assignments;
- Remembering to do tasks or when to do them;
- Judging distances or spatial relationships;
- Reading social cues;
- Understanding if one is behaving appropriately; and
- Controlling temper.

As is the case with any other disability, helping a person with TBI succeed in the workplace begins with a thorough analysis of a person’s strengths and deficits. An earlier lecture in this series provides much more detail on vocational assessments, but

some basic examples of areas to evaluate include concentration, attention span, memory, interpersonal skills, ability to tolerate external stimuli and stress, and stamina.

Consider whether basic adjustments to job duties or workplace conditions can help the person to succeed. Examples might include changing lighting conditions for the person who experiences headaches, soundproofing areas to improve concentration, and breaking a lunch break into shorter, more frequent breaks to lessen fatigue. A person might also benefit from such simple accommodations as carrying a checklist of job duties or having an alarm watch remind the worker of needed tasks.

Section 8 Dealing with Legal Issues Common among Homeless Veterans

In addition to some of the disabilities that veterans might be facing, veterans often have legal problems that get in the way of employment. Many of these problems are the result of behaviors associated with mental illnesses, substance abuse, and TBI. In some cases, referring the veteran to VSOs or legal services agencies can be quite helpful in resolving these situations, but you'll have to take unresolved issues into account when helping someone obtain or keep a job. Some common issues include a veteran's military discharge status, criminal records, revoked driving privileges, and child support or other civil obligations.

In addition to affecting a veteran's eligibility for veterans' benefits, discharge status can also affect employment opportunities. A veteran's discharge status can be verified by obtaining a copy of the discharge papers, or "DD214," which also describes the veteran's duties and positions while in the military. As noted earlier, veterans can appeal other-than-honorable discharges, and VSOs, legal services agencies, and private attorneys might be able to offer assistance.

Job applications or interviewers sometimes ask about military service, including discharge. However, employers are generally advised against asking about the type of discharge, and in some States, such inquiries are illegal. Making hiring decisions based on discharge status is thought to have the effect of excluding minorities and people with disabilities disproportionately from the workforce. You might wish to research the legality of such questions in your State and advise veterans about their rights.

Nevertheless, military discharge status might be an issue in jobs requiring a background check or security clearance. It is important for job applicants to be honest about their discharge status, unless they are legally entitled to refuse to answer questions. In working with employers, you can stress that work performance is typically unrelated to a person's discharge status and that many people with other-than-honorable discharges are excellent employees. In other words, it is important to educate employers that the individual's capability in a current job and military discharge status are really unrelated in most situations.

Homeless veterans might have criminal records that interfere with their efforts to get or hold a job. Their offenses can range from petty offenses associated with homelessness to violent crimes that can be associated with substance abuse, PTSD, or traumatic brain injury. Some VSOs have cooperated with the local criminal justice system to create diversion programs for veterans accused of minor offenses and procedures for helping clear minor convictions by participating in drug treatment, job training, volunteer, or other programs.

As with discharge status, it is important for people not to lie about criminal convictions; however, you can work with people to stress positive changes that they have made. U.S.

employers are more frequently hiring people who they know to have conviction records. After all, the Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that one in 15 Americans will serve time in prison during his or her lifetime. Work with employers to educate them that people with criminal histories can make excellent employees. You can also investigate the bonding program described in the pamphlet, which provides employers with financial security when hiring ex-offenders.

Another commonly occurring problem is the loss of driving privileges. This loss can result from criminal convictions involving drugs or driving under the influence, unpaid fines, allowing a license to lapse, or certain medical conditions or medications. A veteran who cannot drive probably will be unable to work in locations inaccessible to public transit or take jobs that require driving. Many jobs that take advantage of military skills involve driving or operating heavy machinery, and therefore helping the veteran to re-establish driving privileges opens many more job opportunities. Long-term employment planning can include steps toward regaining driving privileges, such as a plan to pay down fines on a regular basis.

Lastly, many homeless veterans have families. However, they are frequently estranged from their families because discharge from military service often presents significant adjustment problems. When working with homeless veterans, you are more likely to encounter more people who have child support obligations than you would when working with non-veterans.

Those who owe back child support (or other civil obligations like unpaid taxes) are likely to find that their paychecks will be greatly reduced by garnishment if they return to work. This financial hit can act as a major disincentive to work, particularly for those whose paychecks are not that big to begin with. However, for many people, the desire to reunite with family is a major motivator in the desire to address substance abuse or other problems and find stable employment. The goal is to demonstrate that the person is acting responsibly and is serious about mending relationships.

Section 9 Helping Veterans Take Advantage of Military Skills

Despite the many obstacles faced by homeless veterans, they are united by their military service, which can be presented to employers in a way that gives them an advantage over other job seekers. Typically, programs serving homeless veterans stress that they are helping to place veterans, rather than focusing on homelessness or some of the barriers that the individual veterans might be facing. Often, employers are amenable to hiring veterans because they have served their country, although this attitude might not be shown toward veterans who have felony convictions on their records.

Military experience might be more relevant for skilled jobs than unskilled jobs. However, a person's veteran status might help distinguish the veteran from other applicants even for unskilled jobs. The veteran status inherently implies that the individual has had significant training and experience in diverse job areas, and many employers are interested in exploring this potential. Some employment specialists choose to meet with employers in person to ask them to hire program participants, because it is harder for employers to say no. Others call employers once a veteran has applied for a position because a simple call might make the human resources department pay more attention to the veteran's resume or application.

In general, employment staff tries to focus on the positive aspects for both the employer and the veteran. They might stress that the veteran is trying to support a family, for

example. For employers, staff tries to assess employer needs and explain how veterans' skills can fill the employer's needs.

Many military skills translate well into civilian jobs, including some in high-demand industries. Some of the jobs that veterans can commonly get based on their military experience are listed in the companion pamphlet. A few examples are:

- Security guard;
- Truck driver;
- Construction worker;
- Telephone linesperson;
- Mechanic; and
- Salesperson.

When helping veterans work on resumes or develop a standardized job application, it is important that you help them to translate what they did in the military into terms that civilian employers can understand. Fortunately, a number of online tools, examples of which are listed in the pamphlet, can help you translate both a veteran's positions and job duties into language accessible to employers.

Not all military skills translate well into the civilian workforce, of course. Some infantry skills, for example, have little application outside of law enforcement, which is a competitive career path that is closed to many who have past health issues or criminal involvement.

However, even in cases in which a veteran's specific skills do not translate well into the workplace, you can promote some of the general skills developed during military service, such as:

- Leadership skills;
- Ability to follow rules and directions;
- Strong teamwork ethic;
- Ability to complete tasks independently; and
- Experience in an ethnically and racially diverse environment.

A veteran's experience in the military might also affect the types of jobs and workplaces with which he or she is comfortable. Many veterans enjoy working as part of a small team of workers with whom work and personal relationships can be developed, while others might prefer work that requires less interpersonal contact. Some veterans feel comfortable having a set routine at work, while others prefer more variation.

Section 10 Opportunities Available to Eligible Veterans

A number of public agencies and private organizations offer assistance with employment and self-employment specifically for veterans, and State and Federal laws support the employment of veterans. Some of these opportunities are available to any veteran who received a discharge other than dishonorable. Other services are available to disabled veterans who have a service-connected disability. A few resources are specifically designated for homeless veterans.

Five types of assistance targeting veterans are:

- One, hiring preferences;
- Two, employer incentives;
- Three, job training and vocational rehabilitation;
- Four, workforce investment system initiatives; and
- Five, self-employment assistance.

The first of the five types of assistance that we'll discuss—hiring preferences—gives veterans an advantage in government employment. In recognition of the sacrifices that veterans have made for their country, the Federal government gives special consideration for most government jobs to veterans who have served in times of combat or who have a service-connected disability. Government agencies must hire such a veteran over equally qualified non-veterans. Many States have similar laws that give civil service preferences for State, county, and municipal jobs.

Employer incentives, on the other hand, help to open opportunities with private employers. Some of the main advantages that employers can receive for hiring veterans are as follows:

- Employers who hire veterans who have service-connected disabilities or who receive food stamps can receive a Work Opportunity Tax Credit that can save the employer several thousand dollars in business taxes.
- Employers who hire veterans who have service-connected disabilities and are participating in an on-the-job training program can add the veteran to their staff while only paying a portion of the worker's wages. The VA pays the remainder.
- Employers who hire veterans who are eligible for health care through the VA can save on employer-provided health care costs, and because the employee has access to preventative care, they might see reduced absenteeism costs.
- Employers benefit when they hire participants from programs that provide veterans with tools, uniforms, and shoes and that also help defray transportation costs.

Job training and vocational rehabilitation opportunities are another type of assistance that can help veterans find and maintain employment. These opportunities might be provided by public agencies or private organizations such as VSOs and faith-based and community organizations. Three important initiatives are the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program, Vocational Rehabilitation and Education, and Compensated Work Therapy. The programs are described in greater detail in the pamphlet, but here is a general description:

- First, the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program is an initiative of the U.S. Department of Labor. DOL provides funding to State and Local Workforce Investment Boards, public agencies, VSOs, faith-based and community organizations, and other private organizations in 32 states and the District of Columbia. Funding allows these entities to provide employment services to homeless veterans who have served on active duty and who were not discharged dishonorably. Each of these programs has specific capabilities to address the unique needs of homeless veterans in order to successfully seek, obtain, and retain employment.

- Second, Vocational Rehabilitation and Education is available through the VA to veterans with service-connected disabilities who were not discharged dishonorably. Depending on the veteran's level of need, the VA can provide evaluation, assistance with a job search, soft skills training, training for specific positions, apprenticeships, training in performing work duties, continuing education, case management, and counseling.
- And third, Compensated Work Therapy is provided by the VA Healthcare System to veterans who were not dishonorably discharged, are eligible for VA health care, and who have a psychiatric or medical condition limiting their ability to work. The disability does not need to be service-connected. Participants work in a non-competitive environment and receive a stipend that does not reduce their eligibility for other benefits.

Next, the workforce investment system has two initiatives to assist veterans, in addition to the full range of services available through One-Stop Career Centers. Staff supported by these two initiatives might be located either at One-Stops or at organizations serving veterans:

- The Local Veterans' Employment Representative advocates on behalf of all veterans eligible for employment programs or benefits. For example, the representative helps to ensure that veterans receive the preferences to which they are entitled in government employment and helps veterans get the support that they need through the workforce system.
- Staff supported by the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program provide more intensive services to a smaller group of veterans—those with service-connected disabilities. In addition to advocacy, program staff provides case management for veterans enrolled in federally funded training and can provide follow-along services after a veteran is placed in a job.

Because some veterans have been uncomfortable using the One-Stop system, the presence of staff specifically dedicated to working with veterans can help make the process more welcoming. These representatives are hired and trained with an emphasis on their ability to provide responsive and sensitive services to veterans who are seeking employment.

Finally, self-employment assistance for veterans is available through the U.S. Small Business Administration (or SBA):

- The "Patriot Express" initiative streamlines the process of applying for SBA loans, speeding loan applications through the process, setting low interest rates, and guaranteeing loans made by private lenders.
- SBA district offices have Veterans Business Development Officers who can help veterans apply for loans and offer them business advice.
- The SBA has also contracted with private organizations to host Veterans Business Outreach Centers, which are able to offer hands-on support to veterans who are starting businesses.

All of the programs described above can be great resources for eligible veterans, but homeless veterans often need help and encouragement to access available services. By establishing a relationship of trust, you might be able to help a veteran take advantage of some of the opportunities that he or she has earned.

Section 11 Conclusion

If you work with people who are homeless, chances are that you will come into contact with homeless veterans. Veterans make up a third of homeless men, and an increasing percentage of women. Working with homeless veterans is likely to present a number of challenges that you are less likely to encounter when working with non-veterans. This lecture should have given you an idea of what these issues are and how to rise up to these challenges. Additionally, you should now have an idea of how military culture and behaviors learned while in the military might affect your interactions with veterans and their employment prospects.

Along with the challenges of working with homeless veterans come a number of resources for helping them succeed. Depending on a number of eligibility factors, veterans might be eligible for a wide array of employment-related veterans' benefits. Additionally, most communities have veterans' organizations that are willing to help. You will also find that homeless veterans tend to have more job experience and higher education levels than non-veterans who are homeless.

As you work with homeless veterans, be sure to show them the respect they deserve and be mindful that many have had successful lives, only to lose everything. Making a connection might take time, but there are many paths to success. Consult the companion pamphlet for more detailed information and resources for assistance.