



HOUSING FOR ALL!!!

NEWS FROM THE NEW MEXICO COALITION
TO END HOMELESSNESS

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A Veteran's Path Out of Homelessness

by Stephanie Jacquot, Office Manager

In 1984, right after he graduated from his Ohio high school, Bruce enrolled in the Air Force. During his term, he was shipped to Saudi Arabia where he participated in the Iraq War. It was a difficult experience which considerably aggravated his health conditions. At the end of his term, Bruce was honorably discharged. He found a job but was laid off after a year. Bruce moved to New Mexico and became homeless. For 15 years, challenged by his disability, he rarely found short term work to help him go on. Emergency shelter environments were too stressful and felt like prison, so, he only went when it was so cold he could not survive outside. For 15 years, Bruce mostly lived in the woods, outside Albuquerque, only going to town when he had to.

For a decade and a half, Bruce's attempts to find housing failed. Finally, in 2006, Bruce met with Linda Simon, who was managing the only housing assistance and support services program for homeless persons with disabilities in Sandoval County. With his 100% disability status, Bruce qualified for the program. He did not want to live in town, so he was able to choose a small house in the Country, not too far from Albuquerque. Bruce says "I will never forget October 26, 2006, the day I moved in. I did not have much, my service dog, a few belongings and a tiny TV, but, I finally had a home. The housing program Bruce originally enrolled in closed down, but Linda Simon who had started working at La Buena Vida Inc. as a program manager was able to transfer the housing program with Bruce and 22 other clients to La Buena Vida Inc. Through La Buena Vida's Shelter + Care program Bruce has been able to receive counseling, health and dental care. In 2007, Bruce accessed DVR (Department of Vocational Rehabilitation) services and entered the IDA (Individual Development Account) program. With his computer skills and his desire to contribute to the community, he started a small business, refurbishing computers for disabled



Bruce is a veteran who was homeless for 15 years before he obtained housing through the Sandoval County Shelter Plus Care Program, operated by La Buena Vida.

people. He also became a certified service dog trainer with the intention to again contribute to the community.

Bruce's quality of life has greatly improved since he obtained housing. He says the services provided by Shelter + Care program are "100% appropriate for the kind of challenges he and other veterans with disability face". He expresses his concerns for the veterans that are currently homeless and for those he fears will become homeless as a result of the ongoing wars.

Our Sincere Gratitude Goes Out to These Individuals & Organizations

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-Patti Ferguson for hosting the first meeting of the Veterans Helping the Homeless at her lovely home.

-Mesilla Valley Community of Hope, Families and Youth Inc, and Catholic Charities of Central NM for donating space for HMIS trainings and office.



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NMCEH distributes Mini-Grants to Deserving Agencies

by Hank Hughes, Executive Director

In the Spring of 2011 the Advisory Board of NMCEH raised and distributed \$9,500 to agencies that are doing particularly good work on ending homelessness. This brings the total distributed through the mini-grants program to just over \$48,000 since 2004 when it started. The Advisory Board is a group of people who raise money for NMCEH advocacy and for mini-grants. The members who helped raise money for this year's grants are Abigail Adler, Peter Chapin, Linda Tigges, Patti Ferguson, Elvira Ogard, and Tom Aageson. Many thanks to them for their generosity and great work!



Homeless children are the focus at Cuidando Los Niños, an agency receiving a mini-grant.

This year's grants, which ranged from \$600 to \$1,100 went to the following agencies that are each working on ending homelessness from different angles:

New Life Homes in Albuquerque provides permanent supportive housing to people with disabilities including many who have been homeless.

Cuidando Los Niños in Albuquerque provides child care, case management and housing assistance to homeless families with young children.

La Buena Vida in Bernalillo provides permanent supportive housing in scattered site apartments to people who are disabled and have been homeless.

Samaritan House in Las Vegas provides emergency shelter for homeless people and transitional housing for homeless families with children.

Carlsbad Mental Health Center is building 24 apartments for people with mental illness, many of whom are currently homeless.

Taos Coalition to End Homelessness provides emergency shelter to people who are homeless.

Faith at Work in Santa Fe provides rental assistance and case management to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Masada House in Farmington is a new program that will provide transitional housing to people recovering from substance abuse.

Mesilla Valley Community of Hope in Las Cruces provides outreach, case management and supportive housing for people who are homeless.

Families and Youth Inc. in Las Cruces provides transitional housing for homeless youth ages 16 to 20.

Veterans Organizing to Help the Homeless

by Hank Hughes, Executive Director

On June 2, 2011 a group of veterans of the U.S. armed services met to form a new group called New Mexico Veterans Helping the Homeless. The group is the brain child of Tom Aageson who joined the NMCEH Advisory Board earlier this year. Tom felt that many veterans would appreciate an opportunity to help veterans as well as others who are homeless since homelessness affects veterans in a disproportionate way. Veterans make up about 20% of the U.S. homeless population but only 8% of the general population.

The veterans attending the initial meeting were Mike Peters, Mike Barr and his wife Marcia, Revell Carr and Mark French. They were joined by some of our Advisory Board members including Patti Ferguson, Abigail Adler, Linda Tigges, Peter Chapin, and of course Tom Aageson. Patti Ferguson generously hosted the event at her lovely home. Hank Hughes and Lisa Huval were on hand to answer questions.

Veterans Helping the Homeless is planning to assist the Advisory Board with fund raising with some of the funds helping NMCEH fund its advocacy program and some of the funds being used to support agencies that help homeless veterans and other homeless people through mini-grants. For next steps the group is working on a case statement that will demonstrate the need and how this groups efforts will help and then the group will set a goal for the fund raising effort.



We are very pleased to have a new group of friends joining us in the effort to end homelessness.

The New Mexico Coalition to End Homelessness



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- *Vibrant nonprofit housing programs*
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- *And public knowledge of real solutions*

SOAR Helps Homeless People with Disabilities

by Lisa Huval, Policy and Advocacy Director

In 2009, the NMCEH partnered with the NM Human Services Department (HSD) to implement SOAR in New Mexico. SOAR, which stands for SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery, is a model that is used in 47 states for helping homeless people with disabilities successfully apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Income (SSDI). Although many people experiencing homelessness qualify for SSI or SSDI, the complicated application process makes it challenging for them to obtain these benefits.

Under the SOAR model, social workers are trained in how to complete a SSI/SSDI application using the SOAR model. At the same time, the Social Security Administration (SSA), Disability Determination Services (DDS), service providers and advocates work together to create a smooth process for SOAR applications.

Since April 2009, Lisa Huval from the NMCEH and Patrick Halsmer from HSD have co-chaired the SOAR Steering Committee. The SOAR Steering Committee, which meets monthly, has helped build the systems change necessary to implement SOAR. Over 118 people from 10 different counties have been trained as SOAR representatives, and over 100 SOAR applications have been submitted to SSA. Approximately 47% of SOAR applications have been approved, which is far higher than the average approval rate for people experiencing homelessness.

The commitment to SOAR from many different partners has been critical to SOAR's success in New Mexico. At the



*Anonymous Homeless Woman in Las Cruces, NM.
Photo Credit: Travis Hanson-Pollock*

same time, there are many challenges to SOAR implementation. Of the 118 people trained as SOAR representatives, only about 40 are actively doing SOAR applications. One of the biggest challenges is that SOAR applications are extremely time-consuming, making it difficult for already very busy social workers to complete a SOAR application. In the short term, NMCEH and HSD are working to provide ongoing support and training to SOAR representatives. In the long-term, we are exploring ways that we can secure funding for new SOAR positions, which would focus solely on completing SOAR applications.