

## The Harold Anderson story

When Harold Anderson, an honorably discharged vet, showed up at the Philadelphia Stand Down in 1999, an annual event coordinated by the Department of Veterans Affairs and a range of social and employment service providers to reach out to homeless veterans, and he knew that he needed help in turning his life around. But, it took a couple more years of moving from job to job, and running out of money to force him to a decision.

In September of 2001 he applied for entry into 124 VETS, a transitional housing facility run by Impact Services Corporation in Kensington that forms part of Philadelphia's Continuum of Care for homeless persons. In early 2002, he graduated up to the HomeBase program, another housing facility that concentrates on getting these veterans into good jobs while continuing their supportive services. With a strong focus on getting employed, together with a broad range of support services to address substance abuse recovery, credit repair, legal aid, personal counseling and life skills, these programs were Anderson's best chance to overcome long-term problems that had beset him for most of his adult life.

After completing his junior year at Father Judge High School here in Philadelphia, and feeling that he needed a new challenge in his life, Harold Anderson enlisted in the Marine Corps with his mother's consent at the age of 17 in 1972. He not only acclimated to the Marines he thrived there. By his 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, he was a Parris Island drill instructor, and to this day considers this one of his proudest achievements. Six years later, he was the staff NCO overseeing research fund accounting at Quantico, Virginia.

He not only obtained a GED immediately after completing his basic training (and later was awarded a diploma from Father Judge), but his record in the Marine Corps exceeded everyone's expectations, maybe even his own. He was working hard, and living hard. Unfortunately, he was also drinking hard. At the age of 28, this problem led the Marine Corps to discharge him. It was a decision he accepted at the time, but later regretted that he didn't fight harder to overturn.

The 18 years that followed his discharge were a declining pattern of jobs, failed marriages, lost contact with children and no clear plan for the future. Clean periods were interrupted by new bouts of drinking, but he never entered an addictions program, such as Alcoholics Anonymous. After visiting Stand Down in 1999, he knew he needed help but wasn't ready to take action. Finally, he hit bottom and knew that taking some action was the only choice he had left.

After moving through a series of shelters, he walked into a presentation by the Impact outreach worker who was explaining the combination of employment and housing services, accompanied by case managed assistance, which was available for honorably discharged veterans. The Impact story was about developing a plan for your future and making it happen step by step. It included all of the issues that complicate the lives of homeless and chronically unemployed people. The individual must take the steps, but the tools and resources are made available in the program.

Today his addiction is under control and his personal affairs are in better shape than they have been for over 25 years. He took a position at Impact's COPY Center, an enterprise that Impact began to offer reprographic services to the business community in the heart of Philadelphia's commercial district while creating job opportunities for its clients. While delivering an impressive performance on the job, Anderson completed his tenure in the HomeBase Program and was selected by the staff to serve as a mentor to other veterans going through the program. As a mentor, he resided in Impact's program called the Independence Zone where these exemplary graduates have their own apartments at a discounted rent level. After two years serving as a mentor, Anderson obtained his own apartment in Northeast Philadelphia.

The former drill instructor feels that he has found the structure and direction he needed to carry out a plan that returned him to self-sufficiency and personal independence. He has been promoted to shift supervisor in his COPY Center job and now thinks about new goals, like teaching and working with young people. He knows there are no guarantees about the future, but he also knows that he has achieved impressive goals before in his life . . . and can do so again in the years to come.