

Impact Veterans Dept – Innovations

Impact's Veterans Department has created specific solutions to the complex problems faced by homeless veterans as they progress back towards self-sufficiency and personal independence. Among these solutions are:

Daytime Outreach – For years agencies focused on helping homeless individuals conducted outreach as a night time function primarily aimed at providing people with a safe place to sleep. One key definition of homelessness used by the federal government is a person who resides in places not meant for human habitation such as the street, sidewalks, abandoned buildings, cars, and parks.

By innovating a daytime outreach service for veterans, Impact was able to simultaneously make arrangements for a shelter bed and also transport the homeless individuals directly to other service providers during their normal work day when they were open for business. In this way, a variety of services could be started more quickly and thereby improve the chances that many of the barriers associated with the homeless condition would be addressed.

Progressive Housing – In the first few years of Impact initial transitional housing program (HomeBase) it became clear that many veterans entering the facility were not ready for the program, i.e. their recovery progress was not adequate to handle the responsibilities required in this program. As a result, Impact planned and applied for an early stage transition program, which took more than one application cycle before it was approved. This early stage program is focused on veterans with a short amount of clean time. These veterans are not allowed to hold a job while they are in the program because they must devote all of their time and concentration on making progress on their individual development goals. After completing this program, they are graduated up to the HomeBase program where all work-capable veterans are required to get and maintain employment. A couple of years after the early stage program began, Impact innovated yet another housing option by creating a mentor house where the strongest veterans coming out of the HomeBase Program were invited to live in a third level program, called the Independence Zone. As mentors, these veterans continue their own recovery plan, maintain employment and serve as experienced guides for those veterans still making their way through the first and second level programs.

Multi-State Regional Outreach – At the invitation of the chief of the VA region (called a Veterans Integrated Service Network or VISN), Impact began a series of shuttle runs to various VA Medical Centers (VAMC) to bring Philadelphia veterans back home after they had completed specialized treatment at these Centers. In the early years, these runs were made to 4 VAMC's but this has since grown to 12 Centers in Pennsylvania and 5 surrounding states. This long-range return trip service is unique among community veteran service providers in this part of the country.

Special Focus Programs – In the delivery of services to homeless veterans, Impact has created several programs that focus specifically on problems faced by particular sub-populations. For instance:

- ❑ A program in which Impact linked up with the Philadelphia Family Court to coordinate the clearance of bench warrants on defaulting fathers with back-due child support obligations and assist these veterans to find employment and negotiate updated contracts with the court to begin catching up on their payments.
- ❑ A program in which Impact sought out female veterans and developed new methods to assist individuals who did not understand their rights and entitlements as veterans and who did not, in many instances, relate to the existing infrastructure of veterans organizations. These methods improved communications and education.
- ❑ A program in which Impact linked up with the county corrections system, the State Board of Parole, and the Defenders Association to focus on the risk factors connected to veterans who are coming out of incarceration.
- ❑ A program which Impact began with the encouragement of the Philadelphia VA Medical Center to manage the complex challenges of dual diagnosed homeless veterans. These individuals are dealing with substance addiction and mental illness and by some estimates reflect over half of the US homeless veteran population that still remains to be served.