

# INSIGHTS INFORMING THE CONCERNS OF POST- 9/11 VETERANS AND FAMILIES

*Case Study:*

*Philadelphia Veterans Multi-Service  
and Education Center*



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY'S INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES (IVMF) HAS BEEN CONTRACTED TO SUPPORT THE GEORGE W. BUSH INSTITUTE'S RESEARCH TO EFFECTIVELY SERVE AND EMPOWER OUR POST-9/11 VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES.



# GEORGE W. BUSH INSTITUTE



## PHILADELPHIA VETERANS MULTI-SERVICE AND EDUCATION CENTER CASE STUDY

### 1. Organizational Overview

#### History

The Philadelphia Veterans Multi-Service Center (VMC) was founded in 1980 to address the multiple needs of Vietnam Veterans. Since that time, the programs and assistance covered by the VMC have grown and diversified to encompass the needs of veterans of all wars and conflicts, up to and including Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation New Dawn Veterans.

The VMC as an organization has experienced significant growth in recent years. Since 1995, the center has gradually expanded its regional influence, now serving veterans in neighboring counties and areas including central Pennsylvania, southern New Jersey, and Delaware; and hopes to extend its influence nationally within 3-5 years. Currently, the center relies heavily on federal funding (they are currently the recipient of 12 federal grants) and projects to have a budget of roughly 10 million dollars for the coming year. The organization now employs a staff of approximately 100 individuals, 77% of whom are veterans themselves.

#### Mission, Vision, and Values

The VMC's mission is to provide services, programs, opportunity, and advancement to veterans of the U.S. military and their families.

According to the VMC, the center exists solely to aid United States Military veterans in need or to "serve those who served." The center is the only non-profit agency in the Philadelphia and surrounding areas that provides a comprehensive resource center available to all veterans in need.

The VMC's vision is to recognize, address, and advocate for the evolving needs of veterans, forward through time and generation, with an unselfish commitment to service through individualized assistance and support in a dignified and holistic approach.

Specifically, the VMC's commitment is to advance the cause of veterans, advocating on all levels, giving voice to their concerns, bringing equity and quality to their earned benefits, and a just resolve to their needs.

## Organizational Structure

The VMC focuses its organizational structure, programming, and philosophy around being able to provide holistic services to veterans in need. The center spans two campuses, the VMC headquarters in Philadelphia and the transitional housing campus in Coatesville and involves a four person Executive Board, a Board of Directors, and an eight person Executive Team. Key leadership positions housed at the Philadelphia campus include the Executive Director, Deputy Executive Director of Development and Support, Director of Housing, Director of Business Management, Director of Economic Development, and Director of Development. The Director of Homeless Veterans Residential Services and the Deputy Executive Director both primarily work at the Coatesville campus.

Although the majority of services offered through the center concern addressing the housing and income needs of homeless veterans, the staff adopts a flexible and often creative approach in doing so as the needs of this population are often highly diverse. The majority of center staff interviewed expressed that even though their job might focus primarily on a specific area (center development/outreach, social work, finance, etc.) that they would often assist with responsibilities outside their technical job descriptions as these diverse needs often necessitate this. For example, one center representative who works primarily with supportive housing articulated the following:

“At least for me, I work outside (of) my job description, and (name removed) does too, so there are a lot of times where the Perimeter needs help, and me and some of the other supportive housing program workers will help (name removed) or vice versa, so we kind of work as a team.”

## Programming

As articulated within the organization’s mission and vision, the VMC intends to assist veterans in any way possible, particularly those in need. With this said, the programs and services offered by the VMC are provided free of charge to all eligible veterans. Specifically, these services include veteran benefit/entitlement assistance, employment and training services, services for homeless veterans, supportive services for veterans and families (SSVF), and diverse on-site resources at both the Philadelphia and Coatesville campuses. Generally speaking these services can be categorized as those designed to increase veteran income, those that assist with housing/homelessness, and those that provide general counseling and support on-site.

In terms of the services offered to help address financial difficulties, the VMC offers benefit/entitlement assistance along with employment and training services. In providing veteran benefit/entitlement assistance, the VMC employs two full time accredited Veteran Service Officers certified by the Vietnam Veterans of America and The Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America. These service officers are available to assist in developing and filing claims along with addressing questions that veterans may have concerning their entitlements, including the new GI Bill. For employment and training services, the VMC focuses on creating training programs designed to provide assistance in further developing job skills and expanding employment opportunities for veterans.

Next, the VMC offers a variety of programs for homeless veterans and veterans in danger of homelessness. These programs include:

- The Perimeter: Homeless day service center providing for immediate needs (located in Philadelphia, PA)
- Operating Base Cecilia: Offering SSVF program services to Montgomery, Chester, and Delaware counties (located in Coatesville, PA)
- LZ II: 95 Bed, male transitional housing residence (located in Coatesville, PA)
- The Mary E. Walker House: 30 Bed, female transitional housing residence (located in Coatesville, PA)
- Freedom's Gate: 30 unit Shelter Plus Care (SPC) housing program
- Veteran's Home Project: 10 units of subsidized housing for veterans with special needs

In addition to these programs, the VMC also offers supportive services for veterans and families (SSVF). Specifically, the VMC provides comprehensive supportive services for low income veterans and their families who are currently experiencing homelessness or are at risk of losing their homes. Eligible veterans may receive time-limited financial assistance for rent, utilities, and security deposits. The SSVF also offers short-term case management services, linking veterans within the Veterans Administration and other community resources.

Lastly, a variety of additional on-site resources are available for veterans to access at both the VMC headquarters in Philadelphia and at Operating Base Cecilia in Coatesville. These services include emergency food and clothing, open computer labs, shuttle services, access to training courses, and access to a variety of counseling services and programs.

### Veteran Populations Served

The VMC provides programs and services that are available for all veterans in need. The majority of the programming and services offered by the center, however, are directed toward providing aide to homeless veterans or veterans in danger of becoming homeless. Due to the center's heavy reliance on funding from federal grants, the center is largely funded for the services it supplies to this population. Specifically, the Grant and Per Diem sponsored homeless day service center (The Perimeter) receives \$5.23 for every hour they serve a homeless government registered veteran in the facility. Still, staff unanimously indicated that they do not turn away veterans from the center on the basis of whether or not they meet the government definition of homeless. Data collected from the center indicated that just over 60% of the individuals served at the Perimeter center are not eligible because they are housed. Staff indicated in interviews that although this population may not meet the government definition of homeless, they are often in serious danger of losing their housing if they don't receive the center's assistance. As indicated in one interview, the center visitations from this population often increase toward the end of each month (as social security begins to run out, they often come to the center for food and laundry).

### Funding Sources and Strategies

Roughly 95% of the VMC is funded through grants. The center is currently the recipient of 12 federal grants and receives funding through billable services the VMC provides through its Perimeter Homeless day center. In the upcoming year, the VMC will have a budget of approximately 10 million dollars.

In interviews, VMC representatives expressed mixed feelings toward how heavily grant funded the center

currently is. Some representatives indicated that because of the restrictive nature of much of the grant funding (i.e., it must be used specifically for housing, job training, etc.) that it could sometimes be difficult to match the needs of the veterans being served in the center. Others articulated that the accounting system used by the center (PeachTree) is not currently geared toward non-profits and as a result can be difficult to use with some of the grants. Others expressed concern about the impact of the high percentage of the VMC budget generated through grants, as loss of a grant could significantly impact the center staff and how well they could serve veterans. Multiple representatives expressed that they felt the current strategies to increase development in private sector outreach and media marketing are critical. Representatives indicated that while the agency takes significant pride in the percentage of funding the center spends directly on programs, they felt that social outreach to the private sector was a key strategy moving forward (roughly 95% of the VMC's expenditures go to programs while about 1% goes toward fundraising). In terms of increasing the centers exposure to potential donors, one representative articulated the following:

“For our future this is probably one of the biggest components...This is a caring and wealthy community with some major corporates and major foundations and individuals that if they really saw a sustainable, well-governed organization that is turning out a good product—they'd be there.”

## 2. Measurement and Data Supporting Effectiveness & Impact

The VMC collects a host of data on a variety of outcomes. Due to the requirements of the grants through which the center is funded, the center is required to collect detailed data on the veterans they serve ranging from demographic data to period of time spent visiting the Perimeter center. Additionally, the VMC utilizes a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) to collect data on individuals served. Furthermore, anecdotal data in terms of social work case reports, and case reports developed for residents of Walker House and LZ II are also kept. As articulated by one representative who coordinates the collection of data for the Coatesville Transitional Housing facilities:

“I am a data freak. I track everything from the day they move in, to include their name, their birth date, their age, how many children they have, where (they lived).... We track medications, the military era — when did they serve? Are they an in-country veteran for Vietnam? Did they serve in a combat zone for post 9-11? Do they have mental health? You name it, we track it. I have a very extensive database, and we've had that in place for — you know, I can go back to the first person who ever lived there and tell you all that data.”

Center representatives articulated that the collection of data is used to help tailor resources, services, and support to veterans and to also formatively assess and improve upon their programming on an ongoing basis. As articulated by one center representative:

“What I do is I look at that data and I look in particular at permanent housing. Where did they go when we discharged them? And what is it we can do to better help that veteran get placed into safe, secure permanent housing? And that's actually one of the most recent improvements we've made to the program.”

Ultimately, although the center collects thorough quantitative and qualitative data of these sorts, center representatives consistently indicated that they felt that the often personal influence they have on

individual veterans was their true measure of success. As indicated by one representative:

“When the veterans tell me I'm getting it right.... I can tell you my program is successful. I know — there's no doubt in my mind I run two of the best programs in the country. I know that. But am I successful? Ask my alumni.”

### 3. Strategic Themes

#### Employment and Education

As indicated by multiple representatives, furthering the employment of veterans following military service represents a paramount goal of the VMC. As stated by one representative in discussing the transition to civilian life: “If you give people the tools to employ themselves—I think that solves a lot of things—if you had to export one thing across everything”. Following securing housing, increasing income represents the second most pressing goal of the center in aiding veterans in need. While increasing income in many instances involves aiding the individual in securing more financial assistance through government programs (which usually is handled by the VSO officers and center social work staff, among others) the center has implemented a variety of programs and initiatives concerning veteran employment. Some of these include hosting mock interviews, assistance with resume development, computer mini courses, temporary employment through the VMC sponsored thrift store, and specific job based training courses including a *Certificate for Apartment Maintenance Training Program (CAMT)*, a *Nurses Aide Training Program*, a *CompTIA A+ Certification*, a *ServSafe Food Safety Management Certification*, and an *OSHA Forklift Certification*. Center representatives indicated that at times, one hurdle for some of the veterans they serve is generating awareness of marketing the skills they developed in the military for civilian based jobs.

Multiple VMC staff indicated that many veterans feel a significant sense of professional pride in the jobs they executed in the military and the skills they developed during their service. Staff indicated that at times though this can lead to disappointment when jobs of similar status aren't immediately available upon their discharge. To help remedy this, multiple VMC representatives indicated that they aim to provide assistance in translating military based skills into tangible resume talking points. One representative gave the example of a veteran who may have military experience as an equipment officer translating this into how many millions of dollars of equipment they were responsible for tracking and the types of computer skills needed to manage that military job. Another representative indicated that helping individuals understand the benefits and drawbacks of using funding through the GI Bill to attend college is also something their center strives to help manage. The representative cited that while the GI Bill (particularly attending college through its assistance) can be beneficial, there are significant financial consequences for using this funding and then failing to complete school.

#### Transition to Civilian Life

Representatives from the VMC consistently and strongly indicated that they felt the transition to civilian life should occur *before* military service men and women leave the military. Ideally, veterans should be provided thorough and comprehensive services in career counseling, benefits orientation, and applicable psychological and medical treatment in the final months of their military careers. Representatives indicated that while a degree of transitioning does happen in this area, service men and women are often so excited to go home that they speed through the process and don't reach out to veteran's service

organizations until much later. Multiple VMC representatives indicated that historically, veterans in the U.S. have not reached out to veteran’s service organizations until often five or more years after their exit from the military. Furthermore, those who do reach out to these organizations often do so at a time of great need (homelessness, danger of homelessness, etc.)—a trend that multiple representatives indicated is even greater with women veterans.

While representatives shared multiple perspectives on why this trend occurs, some hypothesized that visiting a center such as the VMC carries a mild stigma as the center services many homeless veterans. Furthermore, other representatives suggested that many veterans lack a thorough understanding of their military benefits.

Though the holistic approach adopted by the VMC allows for veterans to receive a host of services that aid with the transition to civilian life, the most influential is arguably the active presence of full-time Veteran Service Officers. As stated, the VMC currently employs two full time accredited Veteran Service Officers certified by the Vietnam Veterans of America and The Associates of Vietnam Veterans of America. These individuals assist veterans with understanding their military benefits and the GI Bill, and assist with helping them navigate the military and government benefits system post-service.

### Reintegration with Family

While not as explicitly addressed as goals relating to housing, income, and increased emotional and psychological well-being, reintegration with family represents a goal the “holistic aide approach” facilitates. Representatives from the VMC indicated that they provide those veterans who are separated from family the personal space to determine how they desire to reintegrate with their families. Multiple VMC staff shared stories of how reintegration with family, particularly children, represented a powerful goal for many individuals who the center provides assistance for. Furthermore, many VMC staff shared stories of individuals who after seeking assistance (and often counseling) through the VMC were able to gradually reintegrate with family and indicated the strong sense of emotional fulfillment this provided them. Ultimately, while not as directly addressed as some of the center’s more tangible goals, the VMC is able to facilitate reintegration with family for those individuals who seek it. Through providing veterans in need with the support and resources necessary to meet their basic needs (housing and income), a caring environment to reestablish emotion security, and ultimately helping clients redevelop a successful personal framework, the center plays a significant role in helping their clients reintegrate with family.

### Community Connectedness

Multiple representatives indicated that they felt veterans were an in-vogue cause in America at the moment and that many individuals are currently interested in providing support to veterans’ organizations. Multiple representatives also noted however that partly because of the cause’s current popularity, many non-profits and charities are trying to “get into the veteran space”. While representatives noted that these organizations are well-intended, they noted that many of these organizations lack the familiarity and expertise of veteran needs that many older, veteran specific charities possess and as a result they can actually interfere with helping veterans on a large scale. One representative noted that they have been approached by organizations that provide extremely specific services to veterans (wheelchairs, suites for veterans, “care packages”, etc.) without first researching if these services are necessary or already covered by other charities and programs. The problematic nature of this type of redundancy is then amplified when charities of this sort begin to compete for grants which

in turn can lead to the reduced funding of more impactful charities.

Moving forward, representatives from the organization cited increased community outreach and social media presence as steps they are taking in engaging with the greater community. Multiple representatives cited the center's well-respected standing in the Philadelphia community (the VMC won the 2007 Non-Profit of the Year Award from the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce and has been named a "Top-Rated Non-Profit" by the organization *GreatNonprofits* for the past three years). Furthermore, representatives indicated that the VMC possesses a well-developed relationship with many area landlords (who help secure housing for VMC veterans) as well as many area businesses and places of worship. In turn, the VMC has been able to use these connections to generate volunteerism and a degree of financial support (e.g., an area church provides frequent support for the VMC's women's center, an area business sent Human Resources staff to hold "mock interviews" as part of VMC sponsored job training).

Ultimately, VMC representatives cited the organization's honesty (particularly in dealing with area landlords), the support of VMC alumni, and the individual relationships many of the center staff have with other VSO organizations and non-profits as the key contributing factors to establishing their respected reputation.

### Social Connectedness

In discussing the social connectedness of the organization, representatives discussed the nature of and techniques for addressing the "military/civilian divide". Representatives agreed that a divide often exists between the general public and veterans in terms of understanding veteran military service experiences, veteran social connectedness, and veteran specific needs. Furthermore, representatives articulated that many individuals in the community didn't clearly differentiate between active military and veteran military members, and many other area charities misunderstand the types of services the VA will provide veterans (often assuming their services are more varied and inclusive than they are).

Representatives articulated that through utilizing the knowledge and connectedness that veterans can often have with one another through hiring veterans (77% of the VMC staff are veterans themselves) that the center can more directly and more efficiently connect with many veterans who may feel disconnected from many civilian based charities. With this said, although multiple representatives indicated their opinion that having many military veteran staff was important to the center's ability to connect with veterans in need, VMC representatives also indicated their strong belief that civilians could also connect with veteran needs through active listening and empathy. As articulated by one VMC representative: "They don't have to understand—but they should listen without judging. That should be enough. I don't understand a chemical engineer's job, but that doesn't mean I can't listen."

Center representatives also indicated that they felt better developing understanding in the greater civilian community of the nature and importance of veterans needs would be an important step in decreasing the military/civilian divide and possibly increasing private sector donorship. Specifically, one representative indicated that through sharing the personal narrative of veterans, as well as veterans in need, the center could more directly connect its mission with the community and ultimately develop greater community empathy, awareness, outreach, and financial support.

### Women Veteran Efforts

Representatives from the center articulated two primary efforts geared directly toward women veterans: The Mary E. Walker House and the Women's Program run through the VMC headquarters in Philadelphia. In discussing both of these initiatives, multiple representatives articulated that the needs of women's veterans often differ significantly from those of men. Representatives indicated that women are less likely than men to personally identify as being veterans and more often identify with being a mother, caregiver, or some other type of professional. Furthermore, representatives articulated that women veterans are more likely to be primary caregivers for children and are more likely to be the victims of military sexual trauma. Lastly, partly because of these factors center representatives indicated that women veterans would often not seek help from the center (or any other service) until their circumstances were significantly problematic. Representatives hypothesized that due to fear of losing their children and a stigma attached to some homeless facilities (that they can be unsafe), women veterans often viewed reaching out the center as a last resort. Given the growth of this veteran population due to the increased participation of women in the military during the last 20 years, targeting this population's needs was cited as being a paramount concern to center representatives.

With these facets in mind, VMC representatives indicated that they have collected data in the form of surveys and focus group responses from women veterans to help better determine their unique needs and how to best meet them, and have worked to develop programs that directly target the needs of this veteran group.

Currently, the VMC has 209 women registered with the center and the Mary E. Walker house provides transitional housing to just over 30 women. Through the VMC women's initiative, the center has run a variety of events and programs targeting women veterans specifically. These have included a women's book club, "Chat and Chew" sessions, a pamper day, and MST workshops.

With these services in mind, the services provided through the Mary E. Walker house ultimately represent the most significant concentration of resources provided by the center pertaining to women veterans. This 30 bed transitional housing facility is for women only, and for the majority of its existence represented the largest of its kind in the United States. Through this facility, women veterans in need are provided with temporary housing in a women's only facility at the VMC's Coatesville campus. While housed in the facility, women have access to counseling and resources including training courses, open computer labs, shuttle services, and connections to a variety of related programs and services.

## Media

Representatives indicated that they felt that the media plays a very persuasive role in how the general public views and understands veteran needs. Representatives also indicated that they felt that public awareness concerning veteran support was currently at a relative high point. Representatives indicated that the local news media would often express interest in the agency around Veteran's day, but would generally not pay much attention to the center (or other veteran's charities) outside of this time. Recently however, multiple VMC representatives indicated that they felt that veterans were now of more ongoing interest in the media and were currently a very popular social cause.

Representatives indicated that they have recently begun greatly expanding their media and marketing outreach. As indicated by one representative, while the center has always been well respected in the non-profit and veterans charity communities, historically the center had not dedicated nearly as many

resources to marketing and media as many other charities. Currently, the center is beginning to dedicate more substantial resources to expanding their marketing and media presence in an effort to expand veteran's need awareness and also generate greater private sector financial involvement. Strategically, representatives cited a handful of actions they are currently taking in this area. Currently, the center has established a partnership with Bellevue Media Group (a VMC board member is currently president of this organization) which they will work with moving forward in branding and marketing the center. Furthermore, center representatives articulated that they feel the use of the personal narrative is a highly effective medium to generate community interest in the center. By sharing the stories of individual veterans that the center has benefitted, VMC representatives indicated that they will be able to better emotionally and personally connect those in the community with veterans and thus generate greater community involvement and financial support. Lastly, VMC representatives discussed the center's increased social media presence. Through use of social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter, center representatives work to share center news and promote center initiatives and events. Representatives indicated that while Twitter represents the center's largest current social media presence, that the center's number of Facebook followers has doubled during the past year (they have tripled their number of Twitter followers).

### Independent Sector Involvement

As indicated, the VMC is currently funded primarily through government grants. Specifically, the center is currently the recipient of 12 federal grants, and is roughly 95% grant funded. As articulated by multiple representatives, increasing the financial involvement of the private sector represents a very important priority for the center moving forward. As stated, the center has recently begun to dramatically increase its focus on media and private sector outreach. Representatives discussed relationships the center has cultivated with private industries (e.g., Wells Fargo) and also articulated that they often found engaging with non-veterans to be a particularly useful route because of the current popularity of veteran's needs as a social cause. Interestingly, one barrier that the center indicated they have in reaching donors was the fact that the services the center provides are so multi-faceted. As articulated by one representative, because the center provides many different services to veterans in need, it can often be difficult to tailor their message and purpose to potential donors. To remedy this, one VMC representative indicated that the VMC is interested in strategizing this communication in two specific ways moving forward: utilizing the personal narrative of veterans and tailoring their communication with specific companies so that they appeal to the company's philanthropic interests on an individual level. Specifically, one VMC representative gave the example of reaching out for donorship from the Jon Bon Jovi Foundation, and tailoring their communication with the foundation to initially focus on housing as this is a primary philanthropic concern for this organization. Once the relationship is established, the VMC would then begin to bring attention to the other services the center offers as well.

### Veteran Programming Differentiation

Pertaining to this area, representatives primarily discussed how they view veteran service programming as different from other non-profits and also how they may tailor programming to specific groups of veterans. Representatives articulated that they felt that working with veterans in need necessitated specific knowledge of government programs which cover veteran's benefits and also necessitated an intimate understanding of the needs and experiences of veterans. Representatives cited the large number of veterans they have on their staff as a strong point in addressing these issues.

Concerning the differentiation of programming for specific types of veterans, VMC representatives articulated that although they do see trends in the types of needs associated with different groups of veterans, they seek to treat each veteran on an individual basis. In other words, the center focuses its programming on making their services match the needs of the veterans, rather than trying to “pigeon hole” a veteran into the programs they have. With this said, VMC representatives did indicate that the primary differentiation they see between veteran groups is based on the military time period they served during (e.g., World War II, Vietnam, Post 9/11, etc.). Representatives hypothesized that the similarities found within these groups were largely a result of the typical age of the veterans in these cohorts and that their needs matched the life stage in which they were in currently (i.e., Vietnam veterans are often of a similar age, post 9/11 veterans are often of a similar age).

## 4. Key Learnings and Reflections

### Catalysts of Impact

The VMC represents an organization that has a significant impact on the lives of many veterans in the Philadelphia area. Through taking a holistic approach to “serving those who served”, the center is able to provide a bevy of services to veterans in need. Arguably the most significant of these services are those geared directly at aiding homeless veterans and those in danger of becoming homeless. Ultimately, VMC representatives consistently indicated that through implementing wrap-around services in these areas, and tailoring their programming to individual veterans, they are able to facilitate an impact on a host of factors in the lives of veterans.

### Barriers to Impact

The primary barriers toward impact the VMC face include the service restrictions of the grants they receive and also the growing redundancy of services that have developed in the veteran charity space. In terms of grant restrictions, because the center is heavily funded on grants yet strives to initiative holistic services to veterans in need, it can sometimes be challenging to directly fund programming and services for those veterans whose needs aren’t directly covered in the center’s grants (e.g., individuals who have housing but still utilize services in the Perimeter homeless day center). Though the center has responded flexibly and effectively to the varied demands of veterans in need while being primarily grant funded, moving forward the center is seeking to expand their financial engagement with the independent sector in order to secure more flexible funding.

Secondly, competition with other related veterans based charities over grant funding also represents a barrier toward the center’s impact. While VMC representatives repeatedly indicated that the vast majority of veteran’s charities are well-intended, many representatives also indicated that many don’t possess deep expertise of veterans’ needs and ultimately offer services that are often redundant with those of the VA or other charities. Due to the fact that these charities compete for the same grant dollars as the more established charities such as the VMC, they can often interfere with the most impactful charities receiving the most funding. Moving forward, the VMC has articulated broad reaching strategies in media and outreach to both the independent sector and community to help raise awareness on the specific needs of the population they serve. By doing so, the VMC hopes to increase efficiency within the veteran’s charity sphere and possibly increase their private sector funding.

### Ongoing Efforts to Enhance Impact

Through interactions with center staff during the presented case study, several key findings/strategies emerge demonstrating the center's ongoing efforts to enhance their impact on veterans in need. These strategies include:

- *Focus on the individual:* The holistic approach to veteran care appears to be an important strength of the VMC. By adapting programs and services as needed to individual veterans' needs, VMC representatives indicate that they are able to provide more relevant care and also increase the sustainability of their services' impacts.
- *Early interactions with those new to the center should not be overwhelming:* As indicated by VMC staff, offering counseling and services to homeless individuals as a first interaction can be problematic and overwhelming for the individual. Instead, the VMC focuses on first addressing basic needs (providing a meal, clean cloths, etc.) and establishing a rapport of trust prior to attempting to initiate additional service.
- *For homeless veterans—securing housing is the top priority, followed by increasing income:* Although the holistic “wrap-around” services offered by the center are certainly a strategic strong point, a significant *goal* of utilizing this approach is to facilitate success in these two crucial areas. As noted by the VMC, a clear reciprocal relationship exists between housing and income and thus, transitioning individuals to stable housing and increasing their income (either through employment or increased government assistance) represents arguably the center's most enduring tangible goal.
- *The personal narrative is a powerful motivator:* As indicated by multiple VMC representatives, the stories of the accomplishments of individual veterans as well as the center's work in providing them aide are powerful motivating tools in providing the VMC with a sense of fulfillment. Furthermore, VMC representatives also indicated that utilizing these personal narratives is a powerful and influential tool in inspiring donors and raising awareness about the center and its purpose.
- *Women veterans should receive targeted programming:* As indicated by multiple VMC representatives, female veterans often possess distinct needs relative to other veterans including increased services in support of children and separate housing options. Because this veteran population is rapidly growing (due in large part to the increased participation of women in the military compared to earlier eras), the VMC is working to actively engage with women veterans to best determine what services are distinctly appropriate, while continuing to run programs directed specifically to this veteran group (e.g., The Mary E. Walker House).
- *Focus on creating opportunities:* The employment programs developed and executed through the VMC largely focus on providing veterans in need with training and outlets for job opportunity. Among other things, the VMC has collaborated with local businesses to have mock interviews with veterans, facilitated job trainings, and provided resume counseling in helping veterans translate their military responsibilities into marketable talking points for the current civilian job market.
- *Utilize Veterans:* 77% of the VMC staff are veterans themselves. As indicated by VMC representatives, this can be key in building empathy and trust with veterans in need and can ultimately contribute to greater success in understanding the strategies needed to effectively help serve the veteran population.