

How you can help local veterans by planning a stand down

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On any given evening in our country, 39,471 veterans are homeless, and 9 percent of those are women, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

During a stand down in Dixon, Calif., Robert Lacosse, a Marine and five-time attendee of the event, sat calmly in a barber's chair, enjoying a haircut and a beard trim. "It's great for the veterans," he said. "You don't have to worry about anything when you're here." Lacosse stood up from the barber chair with a smile. "I feel better already," he said, looking into a mirror. "I feel lighter."

Barber Kevin Hancock, a first-time volunteer at the stand down, appreciated the praise. He said he wanted to give back. "It's just good to volunteer," he said.

Stand downs are organized by self-appointed community coalitions that take on the task of holding the event. The philosophy of a stand down is to give homeless veterans a hand up, not a handout. For more information about stand downs, see our post **What's a Stand Down?**

"You find out there are people who do love you and who do care about you," said Army veteran Kenneth Jackson at a stand down in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Here's what it takes to plan a stand down as a one-day homeless veterans health fair:

1. Contact your local Veteran Service Organizations. Support organizations like the American Legion Auxiliary, The American Legion, VFW, DAV and others can offer insight and experience with events like this.
2. Visit <http://www.va.gov/homeless> to see if any stand down events are already planned for your area. If so, consider serving as a volunteer.
3. Approach the Homeless Outreach office at the VA medical center in your area and tell them you'd like to plan a stand down. Ask for the approximate number of homeless veterans in your area.
4. Determine when and where you would like to host the event. Consider your climate when deciding to have the event. If you are planning to host it outside, find a large, open space that is cost-effective to rent. Secure the proper permits.
5. Contact homeless centers and food banks in your area to spread the word about the upcoming stand down to other homeless or at-risk veterans in the community.
6. After seeing what services the VA medical center can provide, contact the following, as needed, to provide as many free services as possible:
 1. Health care screening and services:
 - Local chapter of the American Medical Association
 - Community Outreach Programs department of a large local hospital
 - Medical schools
 - Local health department
 - Eye Care – This is probably the most difficult service to find. Not everyone is eligible for vision benefits at the VAMC. Call ophthalmologists in your area to see if anyone is willing to donate their time.
 - Dental Care – Contact the local community college—many have dental programs with students who will volunteer. In addition, dental students have to practice on a certain amount of patients in order to graduate.
 - Social Security and food stamps – Contact the respective local offices.

The VA should offer information on VA benefits. They will probably be able to offer information on substance abuse and housing services. For veterans to be admitted to veteran only transitional housing, the referral often comes from the VA. For further assistance, contact local Vet Centers and the state Veterans Administration office.

7. Invite your local American Legion Auxiliary to assist in helping with questions you might have. They can be helpful with useful information, like how a veteran can obtain a copy of their DD-214, which is a document of the United States Department of Defense, provided upon a military service member's retirement, separation, or discharge from active duty in the Armed Forces.
8. Download the most current Stand Down Information Form. http://nchv.org/index.php/service/service/stand_down/ to be listed in their database of stand down events, follow the directions to submit the form to National Coalition for Homeless Veterans.
9. Prepare to serve lunch to the veterans. Ask a restaurant or caterer to donate food. One option is to bring out a large grill and serve hamburgers.
10. Check with American Legion Auxiliary to encourage Legion Family members to volunteer at the event; veterans often enjoy spending time with other veterans.

Original link:

<https://member.legion-aux.org/Blog/How-you-can-help-local-veterans-by-planning-a-stand-down-event/>