

Local landlords open doors to veterans

Portland to exceed goal for housing veterans by year's end, but some veterans will remain homeless

BY EMILY GREEN
STAFF WRITER

Hundreds of letters and phone calls to Portland-area landlords paid off. It's expected Multnomah County will exceed the target set for ending veteran homelessness locally by the end of the year.

Contrary to the campaign's title – A Home for Every Veteran – the goal set was to house a specific number of veterans – 690. That was the estimated number of veterans who would experience homelessness during the year based on calculations made from the county's 2015 Point-In-Time Count in January. It turns out, however, that number fell short of the actual number of homeless veterans.

Tony Bernal at Transition Projects said his agency is currently aware of 290 veterans who are still seeking housing. He said 140 are in shelters and 150 are sleeping outside.

While 260 of them already have housing vouchers from the Veterans' Administration, they haven't yet been able to secure housing in Portland's competitive rental market.

Many of them will still be homeless at the start of 2016, said Mary Carroll, A Home for Every Veteran project manager for the county.

Home Forward pledged 50 vouchers to homeless veterans who don't qualify for veteran's benefits, and has received 51 referrals to ensure all vouchers get used, said the public housing authority's director, Shelley Marchesi.

So far, nine have found housing. She said 20 are still looking, and 22 who have been referred more recently are still waiting on vouchers. Veterans have 120 days to use the voucher.

As Street Roots reported in July, officials feared their goal of housing 690 homeless veterans was out of reach when many veterans found that even with government funds paying their rent and moving expenses, they couldn't get approved for

apartments due to spotty rental histories, bad credit or other barriers.

In response, County Chair Deborah Kafoury and Portland Mayor Charlie Hales signed a letter sent to 600 landlords, property owners and managers across the metro region, urging them to consider renting to homeless veterans.

City and County officials' offices followed up with phone calls shortly after.

"That sealed the deal," said Carroll. "We had over 250 units referred to us from that time, and the majority were private landlords."

She said since the letter was sent in June, more than 60 veterans have found housing each month. As of the end of November, 631 veterans had been housed, meaning if the trend continues, the goal of housing 690 by Dec. 31 will be reached, if not exceeded.

Eugene is also likely to meet its goal as well, said Tod Schneider, who led a similar campaign down south.

He said 300 of the 365 veterans Lane County and Eugene set as a target were housed by the end of October.

"Does that mean we've ended veterans homelessness?" said Carroll. "We can say we ended veteran homelessness when we have housed those veterans, and also when we've created a system in Portland and Multnomah County that when a veteran becomes homeless, his homelessness is brief, rare and one time only."

She said with the system that's in place right now, it's taking an average of 81 days to identify and house a homeless veteran. The national goal is 90 days.

"That's amazing in this market," Carroll said.

Of Street Roots vendors who signed up for housing through the veterans' program in May, three found housing, although one is homeless again, and five are still waiting on housing – including Navy veteran Shaun Followell, who was featured in Street Roots' previous coverage of A Home for Every Veteran.



PHOTO BY ISRAEL BAYER

Street Roots vendor Sandra Hahn, at left, accepted the 2015 Emily G. Gottfried Award this week from the Portland Human Rights Commission. Street Roots was given the award for its work to ensure human rights in the Portland region. Above, Hahn is pictured standing with Chabre Vickers, Chair of the Human Rights Commission.



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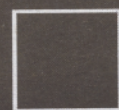
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