

Veterans Inc. Helps with Job Training and Outreach

Through a mix of services and programs, Veterans Inc. helps many who have served our country get back on their feet.

By Nance Ebert July 8, 2011

For the past 20 years, Veterans Inc. has been providing services to include housing, support services like employment and training, health and wellness, case management and targeted outreach programs and more to homeless veterans.

In Shrewsbury, they provide transitional housing for up to 30 veterans. The site was the former Old Cavalry Retreat Center and is located at 39 South St. This large facility sits on 22-acres of land in a picturesque setting.

In this facility, employment and training services as well as health and wellness are provided. In addition, this site has meeting space available as well as a banquet room for private functions. Catering services are also provided.

Veterans Inc. depends on its volunteers to help the veterans.

"To be a homeless person in the greatest country in the world is a tragedy," said Veterans Inc. President and CEO Vincent J. Perrone, lieutenant colonel, United States Air Force, retired. "To be an honorably served homeless veteran living on the streets of America is a disgrace. We owe it to these brave men and women to not have to face another battle when they return home."

There are currently six locations; four of which are in Worcester. The Grove Street center can house up to 85 veterans and is the headquarters for Veterans Inc. All of the locations are dry, as there are no drugs or alcohol permitted.

"This site started out as a small, homeless, veterans shelter. Today it is more than a shelter," said Riik, Veterans Inc. public relations manager. "We are one of the largest providers of veteran's services in New England."

There are three housing programs in triple-deckers on Cambridge and Canterbury streets in Worcester that houses male veterans.

There is also a women and children's program on Sheridan Street in Worcester. Here, there are 10 transitional housing units for women with or without children. There is also a preschool called Little Patriots for children of military families and veterans.

At the former Fort Devens in Ayer, Veterans Inc. manages transitional housing for up to 36 veterans.

“Veterans Inc. was awarded a grant through the Veterans Administration (VA) to build a retreat center. It was karma at the time of the awarded grant because the Calvary Retreat Center went up for sale and was an ideal spot as it was located in Central Massachusetts. We have been in the building for two years and it’s been one year since we have had the programs up and running,” Perrone said.

There is also a program outside of Massachusetts located in Bradford, VT. This is Veterans Inc.’s newest transitional housing facility.

“People used to know us as Massachusetts Veterans Inc. and now we are known as Veterans Inc.,” Riik said.

Services provided vary from location to location. The headquarters in Worcester has a multitude of different things that they are able to provide to veterans who are homeless, in need, and they also help families of veterans as well. There is an on-site, computer-training academy to teach basic computer skills as well as specialty classes and “A-Plus” certification, which is a form of Microsoft.

“We connect veterans with local providers that can help with a medical issue with the Veterans Administration (VA),” Riik said of the other services available. “They are able to go get their services because a lot are not even registered with the VA, so we always make sure to register them. We are not part of the VA as we are nonprofit.”

Veterans Inc. also has an employment and training staff. When a veteran walks through the door, he or she is assessed on where they are with their education, employment, and certification or simply in need of a job.

“The employment and training program helps connect with local businesses and organizations making sure they know who we are. If there are any employment opportunities available, they can contact us,” Riik said.

This is one of their largest programs at the center and they recently received a grant from Microsoft, which they are able to use to help National Guard and Reserve Units and their family members. This is the first time this population is able to also receive assistance.

“We are trying to educate the public that if you are someone that is in the National Guard or Reserve Units and you need training, we can actually help you right now. The misconception is that we only help homelessness and that is not true,” Riik said.

On the second and fourth Thursday of every month, the Outreach, which is the Food Bank, is open to those in need. With the economy the way it is, the number of those in need of a food box has also increased.

Riik explained how rewarding it is to see someone graduate from the program (which takes about two and a half years to complete) and have his or her life back.

“Veterans Inc. has a motto,” Riik said. “They were there when we needed them. We must be there now that they need us.”

For more information about Veterans Inc., go to their website.