

Agency Retooling for Today's Veterans



"NEW" NEW DIRECTIONS

By Toni Reinis



New Directions, Inc. (NDI), a public benefit 501 (c)(3) organization founded in February 1992, is celebrating its 18 years of service to veterans by changing its programs to better meet the needs of the veterans we are seeing today.

We are changing the culture of this agency to better serve homeless veterans and veterans who are at risk of becoming homeless. Eighteen years ago the veterans in our care sought treatment for addictions to alcohol and drugs. Most aging Vietnam veterans who remain homeless today suffer from mental - and often physical - illnesses as well. All have experienced trauma, whether in war, on the streets, or in childhood.

For the younger generation of veterans - those who have served in the Global War on Terror - emotional trauma is a hallmark of combat experience.

And, for today's women in uniform, sexual abuse all-too-often compounds the trauma of war. This abuse has become so common that there is an acronym for it: MST or Military Sexual Trauma. We must change to better serve the special needs of all of our veterans - older as well as younger, and the growing population of female veterans.

New Directions is retooling itself in four key program areas, and is stepping up its activities to secure permanent supportive housing for disabled and elderly veterans.

Program adaptations: In addition to substance abuse treatment and the comprehensive array of services the agency has always offered (including successful programs in remedial education, job training, anger management, legal services, money management, housing placement and family reunification), the four new areas of program focus include:

Integrated mental health treatment for all veterans. New Directions' clinical staff has grown markedly over the past three years, and now includes nine clinicians.

Establishment of a Trauma-Informed Community (TIC). Because every veteran enrolled in New Directions' program has experienced trauma, the agency's entire staff - not just those who provide treatment - is being trained and challenged to develop a Trauma-Informed Community where every veteran will feel safe.

Ramped up outreach to female veterans. Women who have served in the military often do not realize they are entitled to veteran's services. Others shy away from the VA because it is a predominantly male environment in which they feel uncomfortable.

Since 1994, New Directions has offered a program specifically designed for female veterans. The NDI Women's Program is located in private homes in the community apart from NDI's men's facilities.

Outreach to all veterans - but especially to women - will be augmented by a new Veteran Advisory Board we formally introduce in May, with a high-ranking woman officer in a leadership role.

Also, a new TV spot produced for New Directions by Women in Film informs female veterans that New Directions is a resource for them. [\[LINK\]](#)

Ongoing specialized services for veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). OEF/OIF veterans continue to exhibit very high incidences of depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) upon return from combat. Symptoms include difficulties with sleep, hypervigilance, and challenges in readjusting to family and civilian life.

OEF/OIF veterans at New Directions benefit from more personalized treatment in smaller groups, and spend the last phase of their treatment in a designated OEF/OIF home in the community.

This program, known as Operation Welcome Home, also operates a Veteran Support Center in the San Fernando Valley. Here veterans can access benefits education, case management and other services without entering the New Directions' residential program.

Securing permanent supportive housing: In addition to retooling its existing programs, New Directions is actively pursuing permanent supportive housing opportunities for disabled U.S. veterans.

One of these initiatives is a partnership with A Community of Friends (ACOF), an established non-profit builder of permanent supportive housing.

The New Directions-ACOF project plans to convert two empty buildings at the Sepulveda VA in North Hills into 147 single occupancy apartments for low-income, disabled veterans. [[LINK](#)]

Los Angeles has one the highest housing costs in the nation. There is a direct connection between the high cost of housing and our city's dubious distinction of being the homeless veteran capital of this nation.

Eight percent of Americans have served this country in uniform, yet more than a quarter of all homeless Americans are veterans who live on our streets, in our parks, in their vehicles and in shelters. Disabled veterans deserve more.

For more information about New Directions, Inc. please visit our website at www.NDVets.org
Immediate help is available by calling our 24-hour assistance line at (310) 914-5966.
General inquiries are invited Monday-Friday from 8:30 a.m. - 5 p.m. at (310) 914-4045.

(Toni Reinis is New Directions Executive Director.) -cw

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