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Veterans Transition Center (VTC) resource guide

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Senior Capstone Project Veterans Transition Center (VTC) Resource Guide

Key words: education, exploring ,goals, homeless, housing, resource guide, self-sufficiency, substance abuse, transition, veterans

This resource guide will support clients and their families by providing them with the most current information on: state, county and city agencies. It will also include resources for medical, dental, recreation, after school programs and similar family related needs. Material will be updated and added to the guide on a regular basis.

The Veterans Transition Center (VTC) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization established in 1996. The Center provide services and support to homeless veterans and their families in Monterey County with the goal of reintegrating this population into the community. They also work in collaboration with the Coalition of Homeless Services Providers to better serve the community as a whole and broaden their resource base. Their current program, The Coming Home Program provides transitional housing and counseling services to veterans for a period of 18 to 24 months. Veterans enrolled in the program are dealing with mental health issues, physical disabilities, and transitioning from homelessness to self-sufficiency. The VTC currently has 33 clients with a maximum occupancy of 45. This resources guide will support clients and their families by providing them with the most current information on: state, county and city agencies, recreational programs, medical and dental referrals and similar pertinent resources. The guide will provide important information and support sources to the clients and their families while they explore their new and unfamiliar surroundings. By using this guide everyone in the program will have the opportunity to explore the many opportunities and resources that the Monterey Peninsula has to offer. The resource guide is designed so that as new information is available (new agencies, additional services, changes in schedule etc) it can easily be added to the book. Veterans and their families will have easy access to many agencies and organizations which will support them in the often difficult transition to becoming a healthy, productive and important part of our community.

“Many Veterans who served America with honor and distinction during times of war and peace, now find themselves homeless. Helping these servicemen and women get off the street is not giving them a handout, it is merely providing a down payment on a debt that can never adequately be repaid. The mission of the Veterans Transition Center is to provide services for Monterey County's homeless veterans and their families. By providing veterans with transitional housing, emergency services and case management programs, veterans will once again become employable, productive members of the community. VTC does not simply offer short term solutions to homelessness, it strives to better the lives of homeless veterans and aims to give them the tools they need to help themselves” (VTC web page <http://www.vtcmonterey.org/index.htm> 2006).

Since Fort Ord's closing in 1993, most buildings were left unoccupied. With Monterey's current housing crisis, members of VTC began working to obtain some of the former Army housing and buildings. The project aimed to restore the structures and use them to better the lives of homeless veterans and their families by providing housing, recreation and support/counseling services in one centralized area. The VTC could not do this without help, it needed assistance for Veterans Administration (VA). “VA's Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program assists nonprofit and local government agencies to establish housing or service centers for homeless veterans. Grants are awarded for the construction,

acquisition or renovation of facilities “ (Diane Publishing Company 1997 pg45).

Two sections of property from the former Fort have been obtained for these purposes. The first section is comprised of several houses in the Patton Park area, which once served as military housing and will serve as VTC's transitional housing program. The second is Martinez Hall, the former base reception center and early officer's club that will serve as the service center. The stereotype of an organization like this is that it is for individual's that fit the description of an “old homeless veteran”. But that picture is far from true as there are veterans in there 40's and 30's, both single and with families in the program. One problem is that when clients and families arrive at the VTC they come from all parts of the country. Many do not know where to go to find key resources in the surrounding cities and communities that will help them turn their lives around. This becomes a problem because the veterans are dealing with drug and or alcohol addiction and in some cases transitioning back into civilian life. (In order to eligible for the Coming Home Program the veterans must have at least 60 days of sobriety). If they do not know where to find certain things that they need in the surrounding community then they will only tread water in their recovery process; they need a guide that will provide them with another tool to encourage them to turn their lives around.

This resource guide will serve not only the clients of the VTC but their spouses and children. When the time comes for the client to graduate from the program it is important that their family (if they have one that lived on the

premises) is ready to move out and that they be as prepared as the veteran to enter and feel comfortable in the community. Most of the meetings and events are structured for the veteran clients; this leaves the rest of the family in the dark on many of the issues that are covered in those meetings and events. This poses a problem when the family becomes independent and tries to do everything on their own without the help of the VTC, families receive information and support so they can be a positive force in the recovery of their veteran.

Historically, the VA has provided a wide variety of services to a large and diverse population. Some of the benefit programs for Veterans include “Disability Compensation, Pension, Education and Training, Vocational Rehabilitation, Home Loan Guaranties, Life Insurance, Burial Benefits, Benefits for Survivors and Health-Care Benefits” (Diane Publishing Company 1997). As with any agency this large and complex, targeting small groups and follow up are just a few of the services that may be under funded, under staffed and overloaded.

Some returning veterans come back home from duty with drug and or alcohol dependency or they pick up the habit when they return home. In many cases this leads them to drop out of the VA system and as a consequence (as well as many other factors) they became homeless and increasingly disenfranchised from society. Many were young men (and women) who had families and no way to produce for them.

In 1996, the Veterans Transition Center (VTC) recognized the need for a centralized facility that would provide support services, medical and

psychological care for these veterans. Their non-profit organization offered help to those who were able to prove 60 days of sobriety. The program provides services for up to 24 months.

The demand for programs such as Coming Home is great. Despite the fact that there are 45 slots available in the program every week there are two, three sometimes four veterans that are apply to the program. But is not just the veterans who are at risk, it is also their spouses and children. Thus the scope of this problem is enormous. "The most important study of families of war veterans was actually mandated by the U.S. Congress in 1983, through Section 102 of Public Law 980-160" (Figley 1998). Providing shelter for these homeless veterans and their families is the first, critical step in recovery.

VTC provides many groups, meetings and activities that support within this program:

Life Skills: This group educates the clients on everything from recycling, writing a resume, interviewing, clearing bad debts and poor credit maintaining a good credit report, to keeping their house clean.

Community Meeting: This is a mandatory weekly meeting that provides the clients with general information and issues of concern.

Residential Council Meeting: Clients are selected from the Coming Home community and they discuss issues that are affecting the members.

Relapse Prevention: This is a meeting designed after Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous for the clients that are in recovery from substance.

Home Group: This is led by an employee of the VA, which works closely with the VTC. This group discusses what obstacles might be in the way of the client on their road to independent living, discusses medical needs and the services that the VTC and VA can and will provide for the Veterans. The VA official provides information on what is needed to reach the goal of permanent housing.

Work Detail: This is a weekly event that takes place on Saturdays. The clients help keep their street and surroundings beautiful by doing routine maintenance.

In order to make transition easier for the clients and their families Susan Lewis (VTC's Program Director) and I came up with the idea for a resource handbook. This guide is designed to help the clients and families of the VTC by directing them to the resources that are in their surrounding communities. It can be used as a comprehensive and quick resource guide in order to strengthen the clients understanding of the many programs and organizations in the area that aim to help and educate clients who are struggling with recovery, transition and responsibility. Anyone of these issues is difficult, in and of itself – dealing with all at once can be daunting. By providing the veterans with information about many resources, in one guide, they will be more likely to see the opportunities for help as being readily available to them. By strengthening the clients understanding of programs and organizations in the general vicinity they will make the transition to self-sufficient quickly and easily.

In order to evaluate the project to determine if it meets the stated purpose, I will conduct a before and after survey as well as lead a discussion with the clients during one of their meetings. How many of them used the resource guide? What programs or resources have you taken advantage of? Is there anything you can think of that is missing from the guide that you think should be in it? By utilizing a discussion group I hope that the clients will see that others have used the guide and it will encourage them to use it as well it will also give clients a chance to give input on changes and additions that they think are valuable. By providing a survey I hope to follow up to see how each agency or organization was used, how frequently and how effective the help was to the individual and or family.

During the last year at the VTC I addressed the following Major Learning Outcomes (MLO) in my Capstone project: Through Collaboration I have demonstrated the ability to share resources, expertise, and responsibility to achieve a common goal in a collaborative setting. Before CSUMB my Information Management skills were little to none. Now I can access a much wider range of computer and Internet technology and apply that information to health and human services. My knowledge of health and human services has broadened to include the health status of different populations and the effect this status has on the physical and emotional well being of these populations. Studying various factors which contribute to health promotion and disease prevention, as well as the relevance of these factors to society at large, has allowed me to apply this information to program development and addressing

issues specific to a particular population. Through my increasing leadership ability, I have begun to master the skills necessary to motivate others by promoting a shared vision and clear direction on how to serve and include diverse communities. My understanding of Public Policy has increased my ability to identify and define public problems developing alternative courses of action and alternative recommendations, dealing with how policy development and implementation can influence populations and provide solutions is an extremely valuable tool. As the resource guide was developing, my knowledge of public interests deepened. The inter – relationship between individuals, groups and government agencies became clearer as I recognized the importance of current and accessible and relevant information.

This Capstone project will reflect the CSUMB Vision by addressing the following passage: “The University will be distinguished by partnerships with existing institutions both public and private, cooperative agreements which enable students, faculty, and staff to cross institutional boundaries for innovative instruction, broadly defined scholarly and creative activity, and coordinated community service (CSUMB Vision Statement <http://csumb.edu/site/x11547.xml> 2006). I feel that I have met this part of CSUMB’s vision statement in that I have crossed institutional boundaries for innovative instruction, defined creative activities and coordinated community services for the VTC through this resource guide. The VTC and I have helped a group of people that are “...historically undereducated and low-income“ (CSUMB Vision Statement <http://csumb.edu/site/x11547.xml>).

My Capstone project will be presented in a binder and I will give an oral presentation of my work with a Power Point presentation during the festival. The power point will include the history of the VTC, how the program is currently running how and why my project was created and how the project evolved during its creation.

This project was a long and sometimes arduous process. In my research for the guide I realized how easily a veteran could become frustrated in his or her search for relevant information. I also feel that the guide will be an ever-growing process in that there will always be room for new ideas and resources to be placed in the book. I have included put extra dividers in the guide so that when a new program or organizations comes along it will be easy to add this information. This resource guide will be an essential tool for the clients and their families to use on their journey to become self-sufficient. This Capstone Project is something that I feel very strongly about. Over the last two years I have learned a great deal about the importance of a healthy life style. The combination of health (both physical and mental) and human services (which supports growth and self-sufficiency) is a powerful tool, whatever shape it takes for veterans and their families. I hope that this resource guide will provide the clients and their families with information that can support a healthier and more productive life. Although the guide is just one component in this very comprehensive program, I am convinced that it is a valuable and long-term asset.

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CSUMB Vision Statement <http://csumb.edu/site/x11547.xml> 2006

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