

Welcome Home Veterans

Turning an empty apartment into a home



WELCOME HOME
VETERANS

Minnesota Elks Association

◦ Rick & Gretchen Peterson

Our Mission

- Welcome Home Veterans is a program dedicated to helping homeless veterans.
- We provide home starter kits to homeless veterans moving into permanent housing.
- The vets come from all military branches, ethnicities, men, women and families - each with a different story on how they came to be homeless.

“So long as there are veterans, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks will never forget them.”

- The Elks are a national, fraternal organization serving youth and veterans.
- There are approximately 800,000 members and 1,800+ Lodges across the country.
- The Elks created and launched the Welcome Home Kit program in 2014. Since then, over 10,000 kits have been delivered – over 1,000 of which have been in MN
- Elks Lodges in 35 states participate in this program.
- We are funded by a grant from the Elks National Foundation, fundraising activities and private donations
- Elks Lodges throughout Minnesota participate in this program including:
 - Duluth Lodge #133
 - St Cloud Lodge 2843
 - Stillwater Lodge #179
 - Faribault Lodge #1166
 - Mankato Lodge #225

The Elks





A Program is Born

- Launched in June, 2016
- Serves the greater Minneapolis/St Paul area
- Partners with other Elks Lodges to deliver to the entire state of Minnesota
- Receives referrals primarily from the VA's Community Resource & Referral Center (CRRC) – a VA clinic specializing in homelessness
- 100% volunteer organization
- Focus on household goods and consumables – furniture is provided by another non profit
- Established Help For The Homeless a 501c3 non profit

An Empty Apartment



- The vast majority of veterans we serve have nothing...literally nothing.
- Most of them are overwhelmed as to how to even begin the process of furnishing an apartment
- Most don't have the financial means to furnish an apartment
- Many don't have transportation to go shop for items
- Our kit makes an empty apartment livable

The Welcome Home Kit



- **Bedroom Items**

- Sheets, comforter, bed pillows
- Queen size beds or air beds

- **Kitchen Items**

- Dishes, silverware, glassware
- Pots / Pans, kitchen utensils
- Toaster, coffee maker, Trash can

- **Bathroom Items**

- Towels, Wash Cloths
- Shower Curtain, Rod
- Toiletries

- **Miscellaneous Items**

- Paper Products, Cleaning Supplies
- Floor Lamp, Camp/folding chairs
- Microwave, Clock Radio

- **Non-perishable Groceries**

“I was scared of being in
my own apartment.
How am I going to get
the things I need.
The help you gave me
was wonderful.
Thank you so much for
everything.
I am glad to be home.”

- Harold F, newly housed
homeless veteran



Shopping & “The Warehouse”



Their Stories

Deon, a veteran of the Marines who was hit while riding his bicycle and was homeless after leaving the hospital. We provided the standard kit but also a new bicycle.

Holly and Monte were recently discharged from the Navy. Holly was 8 months pregnant and they were living out of their car. We provided the standard kit plus a crib, diapers, lots of diapers, baby clothes and more.

Greg said “I started off as a clean cut kid from North Dakota and came back from the (Vietnam) war as a messed up man”. It has taken him years to get back to a sense of normalcy in his life.

“I can’t say enough
how much your
Welcome Home kits
mean to the veterans.
The visit that comes
along with the delivery
eases the isolation and
anxiety that many of
them feel after leaving
the shelter system.”

- Diane Ruse-Christensen

HUD VASH Housing Specialist,
Minneapolis VA Health Care System



By The Numbers

- **Veteran Homelessness**

- As many as 10% of homeless adults in the U.S. are veterans
- 70% of veterans served by the VA have dealt with chronic homelessness and unemployment
- Many believe the number of homeless adults and families will increase because of recent events

- **Our Program**

- Since it's inception in June, 2016:
- Delivered over 860 home starter kits
- Delivered over 250 queen size bed sets
- Over 140 different volunteers have participated in shopping, delivering kits, hosting holiday dinners, handing out supplies and more

“Hey I just wanted to say thank you again for everything. I appreciate it so much.

I don't even know you guys and you've helped me get back on my feet like this.

I'm just extremely grateful and I don't even know what to say except thank you and god bless you guys for doing what you do.”

Luke W, newly housed
homeless veteran



Sometimes more is needed and we are there to serve those that served us.



Van for a veteran with special needs child



Christmas tree, presents and boys first bicycle

Above and Beyond

- Beds for families with children
- Crib, diapers, clothing and more for parents of a newborn
- Commercial drivers license (CDL) test
- Holiday dinners for low income veterans
- Distribution of 375 pairs of Red Wing shoes & boots



Replacing a stolen bicycle – his primary means of transportation

“I see not only the impact of the personal belongings but also the way in which the Elks have communicated to them that they’re important and that they matter.”

Joel Wenzel – a HUD VASH
Social Worker



What We've Learned

Everyone has a story as to how he/she became homeless - be it medical issues, PTSD, military life conflicting with civilian life, chemical dependency issues or child custody issues to name a few.

We provide the items necessary to make an apartment livable. It's the simple things in life we take for granted: food, light, sound, a chair, a comfortable bed, a can opener...can help make the move to permanent housing successful.

A Program's Impact



Link to video: <https://youtu.be/EichZc8F0fw>

Thank You



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