

**PROPOSAL / REQUEST FROM A COALITION OF ORGANIZATIONS FOR
PROPERTY
AT THE VA WEST LOS ANGELES CAMPUS TO BE DESIGNATED FOR NEW
HOUSING
FOR HOMELESS VETERANS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS
WITH PRIORITY GIVEN TO CHRONICALLY HOMELESS VETERANS**

THE COALITION:

New Directions, Inc.



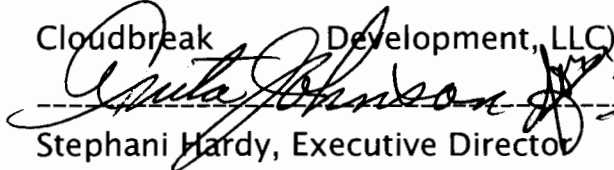
Toni Reinis, Executive Director

The Salvation Army




Major Paul Seiler, Divisional Commander

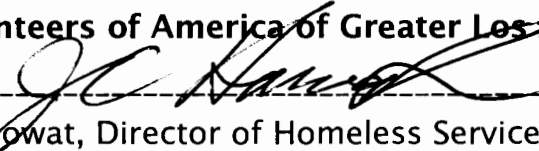
US VETS (A collaboration between United States Veterans Initiative and
Cloudbreak Development, LLC)



Stephani Hardy, Executive Director

Thomas R. Cantwell, Jr.

THOMAS R. CANTWELL, Jr.
Cloudbreak Development

Volunteers of America of Greater Los Angeles (VOALA)



Jim Howat, Director of Homeless Services

SUPPORTED BY:

Councilmember Bobby Shriver and the City of Santa Monica
A Community of Friends
Corporation for Supportive Housing

SUBMITTED TO:

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs
Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) Commission

September 2005

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I. The Opportunity

The Capital Asset Realignment for Enhanced Services (CARES) process offers an important opportunity to provide enhanced services to a larger number of our country's least fortunate veterans: homeless veterans with special needs and chronically homeless veterans. A coalition of organizations with extensive experience serving chronically homeless and special needs veterans has formed to request that the CARES Commission and the US Department of Veterans Affairs designate a portion of the property available on the VA's West LA campus to provide long-term therapeutic supportive housing to disabled veterans currently living on the street. The new housing, developed and operated with government and private sector collaboration, will enable these veterans to regain health and economic self-reliance by linking them with the services they need.

II. The Need

On a wall near the main entrance of the hospital on the VA West LA campus, a sign reads, "The cost of war is evident here." The cost of war is also evident on the streets of our cities:

- **More than 17,000 veterans are homeless in Los Angeles County.** This figure comes from the 2005 homeless census for LA County (19% of the county's 91,000 homeless individuals are veterans). VA reports place the estimate as high as 27,000.'
- Using data from the same study, **7,200 chronically homeless veterans live on the streets of LA County.** Approximately 42% of the county's homeless (38,000 people, 19% of whom are veterans) meet the federal definition of chronically homeless: an unaccompanied individual with a disabling condition who has been continuously homeless for a year or more or has experienced four or more episodes of homelessness over the last three years.

- Special needs veterans are those who suffer from physical disabilities, mental illness, chemical dependencies, and/or HIV AIDS. Conservative estimates place 30-50% of the homeless population, and up to 70% of veterans, in the special needs population. **The West LA VA Campus offers extensive supportive services and is an ideal location for “long-term therapeutic housing” for special needs veterans.**

The coalition proposes to refurbish three or more existing buildings to create supportive housing to accommodate 300-500 chronically homeless veterans, homeless special needs veterans, and (under limited conditions) veterans at risk of homelessness. It is the coalition's intent that clear priority—at least 50% of the housing developed—be given to chronically homeless veterans, and that the housing be intimately tied to rehabilitative services.

To ensure compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood, public input will be solicited via a community advisory board and incorporated into the plans for the housing's development and operation.

III. Why Create this Housing at the VA?

Two philosophical reasons: First, housing homeless veterans is consistent with the VA's mission to assist men and women who have served our country make successful transitions into civilian society. Second, this housing also fulfills the historical expectation that the land donated to form the VA's West LA campus would be used to benefit veterans.

A practical reason: To overcome personal issues that led to their homelessness, chronically homeless and special needs veterans need ready access to a strong support network. The West LA VA campus already offers a comprehensive array of services these veterans require to succeed in their new lives off the streets:

- Medical treatment
- Psychiatric care
- Substance abuse rehabilitation
- Group and individual counseling
- Vocational services

Innovative programs already operating at the VA, such as the Supportive Employment Program for Homeless Veterans and the Mental Health Homeless Primary Care (the Building #206 programs) would be ideal to support the new housing.

It makes sense to house formerly homeless veterans as close as possible to the services they need to remain housed.

IV. Property on the VA West Los Angeles Campus Suitable for New Veteran Housing

The coalition requests that the CARES Commission and the Department of Veterans Affairs designate appropriate buildings or property on the VA West Los Angeles Campus suitable for the development of new veteran housing for homeless veterans with special needs, giving priority to chronically homeless veterans. The coalition specifically requests the designation of Building # 205 (approximately 53,047 square feet), Building # 208 (47,265 square feet), and Building # 209 (46,706 square feet), or similar or comparable structures. The property designated should be appropriate for long-term therapeutic supportive housing as follows:

- Comprised largely of rooms that can be adapted as housing, although significant investment will be required to create housing amenities such as bathrooms, kitchens, and common areas
- Located in a quiet area of the campus, not immediately adjacent to the medical center or other major existing or proposed institutional or public uses
- Similar in design, construction, and period to several buildings on the campus previously adapted successfully by organizations for housing and supportive services for veterans

The coalition requests that these buildings be leased to one or more organizations for a term of up to 60 years. A 60-year term is requested to amortize long-term capital investment in the renovation of these buildings, and to enable the organizations to comply with a mandatory 55-year compliance period imposed by the State of California on the use of federal low income housing tax credits, one of the most viable means of financing the renovation of the buildings.

In addition to the buildings described above, the coalition requests the CARES Commission and the VA to consider designating one or more additional, perhaps smaller, buildings suitable for the development of housing with intensive supportive services for chronically homeless veterans and homeless veterans with special needs who can best be served in a smaller or more flexibly structured setting.

V. Uses *Not* Envisioned for the Requested Property

- Homeless shelter (i.e. less than 3 months)
- Transitional housing (i.e. less than 2 years)
- Housing for veterans who do not meet the federal definition of homelessnessⁱⁱ

However, the new facilities may be used as long-term therapeutic supportive housing for special needs veterans who are at risk of homelessness and have graduated from quality transitional housing programs—provided that these programs conduct extensive homeless outreach/engagement efforts in public spaces on the Westside of Los Angeles.

VI. Selecting Organizations to Develop and Operate New Veteran Housing

The coalition proposes that the Department of Veterans Affairs award leasehold interests in the requested buildings through a competitive bidding process open to organizations with experience developing and operating housing for veterans. The competitive process would consider, among other factors, organizational experience and capacity in financing, developing and operating housing for homeless veterans and providing appropriate services; project feasibility; compatibility of the proposed project with other activities on the campus; the number of veterans to be housed and the quality of housing; and the appropriateness of supportive services to be provided. Innovative programs that actively engage chronically homeless veterans and homeless veterans with special needs, move them into housing and rehabilitative programs, and keep them from returning to the streets would be given highest priority.

The VA would enter into a lease with the selected organization or organizations for a prescribed term of up to 60 years. The lease, or an accompanying contract, would specify various development time frames and performance requirements placed on the organization. Lease payments would be nominal.

Leasehold interests in the buildings would preferably be awarded for individual buildings or portions of buildings, rather than a single award to one organization. The participation of multiple awardees will provide greater opportunities for innovation, collaboration, and assemblage of resources, and for more expeditious development of the housing.

VII. Financing, Developing, and Operating the New Veteran Housing

The coalition proposes that the selected organizations be responsible for financing, developing, and operating the new veteran housing. Each organization requesting one or more buildings would submit a plan for financing, developing, and operating the housing and providing appropriate supportive services as part of the competitive process undertaken by the VA to award the leasehold interests in the buildings. The coalition has considered numerous strategies for financing, developing, and operating housing and providing supportive services on the requested property, and is confident that such undertakings are feasible. The approaches taken by the various organizations relative to the new veteran housing will differ depending on the particular organization, the veteran populations targeted, and the program and housing models proposed.

The selected organizations would work with

- The VA to ensure efficient operation of the programs and adequate outside funding
- Community representatives to ensure that programs are compatible with the neighborhood

VIII. Goals and Benefits

The new veteran housing proposed by the coalition will advance the mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs to “meet the needs of the Nation’s veterans” by providing marked and tangible benefits in advancing several broad goals:

- 1) **Goal:** To provide chronically homeless and special needs veterans with affordable, quality supportive housing that addresses the documented needs of veterans in Los Angeles County and the region.

Benefits: The lives, personal circumstances, incomes, physical and mental health, and quality of life of thousands of veterans over time will be enhanced by the provision of quality housing and supportive services that directly address their particular needs, including such needs as housing; substance abuse treatment; access to VA health, mental health, and supportive services such as the VA Supportive Employment Program and Best Practice – Mental Health Homeless Primary Care Program; employment; and socialization. At the same time, VA health care costs will be reduced by making out-patient non-emergency preventive care readily accessible to veterans who might otherwise seek hospital care.

- 2) **Goal:** To further the mission of the VA and the intent of the federal government in dedicating the VA West Los Angeles Campus for the benefit of veterans.

Benefits: The development of new veteran housing will result in significant capital investment in the VA West Los Angeles Campus and will significantly expand access to and use of the VA West Los Angeles Campus by eligible veterans.

- 3) **Goal:** To reduce homelessness and alleviate other social problems in the Los Angeles area by providing severely needed new housing linked to supportive services for chronically homeless veterans and homeless veterans with special needs.

Benefits: The new veteran housing will reduce the number of homeless veterans on the streets and other public places. This housing will also alleviate the overburdened affordable housing stock and supportive services network in the region by diverting over time thousands of chronically homeless and homeless special needs veterans from available resources to the new veteran housing.

The coalition recommends that the awarding process for the property include requirements that each selected organization establish and be accountable for achieving specific, measurable objectives to document furtherance of the above goals.

IX. Coalition of Organizations Serving Veterans

A coalition of four organizations has been meeting with local VA representatives and officials of the City of Santa Monica throughout the Spring and Summer of 2005 to discuss the need for additional housing and supportive services for homeless veterans and to plan a strategy for providing such housing on the campus of the VA West Los Angeles Campus. These organizations are experienced in providing housing and supportive services for homeless and special needs veterans in collaboration with the Department of Veterans Affairs. The organizations currently serve various veteran populations under a variety of housing and program models.

The coalition is proposing that the new veteran housing be provided by one or more organizations, and not by the coalition as a coalition. It is likely that the organization or organizations providing the housing will collaborate or coordinate with a multitude of other organizations, government agencies, and private parties. The coalition is proposing that opportunities to develop and operate the new veteran housing not be limited to members of the coalition.

The coalition will continue to meet and provide input to the CARES Commission and the VA until a final determination is made relative to the designation of the requested property. The City of Santa Monica has provided, and will continue to provide, leadership and support to the coalition. The coalition has consulted with and will continue to be informed by the Westside Council of Governments, the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority, the City of Los Angeles, the

County of Los Angeles, the Corporation for Supportive Housing, A Community of Friends, and other government and private entities.

The coalition members represent the leading providers of veteran-specific housing and supportive services in Los Angeles County:

New Directions, Inc., a licensed, long-term drug and alcohol treatment program founded by three formerly homeless veterans, has provided food, shelter, and rehabilitation since 1992. New Directions provides services to more than 800 homeless veterans a year at four locations: The 156-bed Regional Opportunity Center; the 43-person capacity New Directions North program for veterans with both substance abuse disorders and mental illness (both of these programs are on the VA West Los Angeles Campus); and the New Directions' Women's Program, consisting of Barrington House and Mitchell House, which together house up to 16 women veterans, as well as spouses, daughters, and siblings of veterans.

The Salvation Army: The Salvation Army provides 235 beds of service intensive housing for homeless veterans in two leased buildings on the campus of the VA West Los Angeles Campus (The Haven and Exodus Lodge) as well as 140 veteran specific beds in two other locations in Los Angeles County: Bell Shelter and the Harbor Light Center. Additionally, The Salvation Army operates two Homeless Veterans Reintegration Programs (at Harbor Light Center and Bell Shelter) that provide employment services to an average of 485 homeless veterans each year, and partners with the Volunteers of America in operation of an Incarcerated Veterans Reintegration Program.

U.S.VETS (a collaboration between United States Veterans Initiative and Cloudbreak Development, LLC) is the largest organization in the country dedicated to helping homeless veterans. Each night it provides housing and services to more than 2,000 veterans in ten sites in six states, and helps more than 1,000 veterans a year find full time employment. Its two facilities in Los Angeles County, Westside Residence Hall in Inglewood and Villages at Cabrillo in Long Beach, provide nearly 1,000 beds of housing and provide outreach to more than 2,500 homeless veterans each year. Its facilities provide access to case management, counseling, employment assistance, job training, and career planning in a seamless continuum of support.

Volunteers of America of Greater Los Angeles (VOALA) serves more than 35,000 residents of the Los Angeles area each year through more than 30 programs including five programs serving homeless veterans. These veteran-specific programs include a Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program that provides job training and placement for veterans; a 102 bed transitional housing program for homeless veterans; and a Veterans Service Center that provides advocacy and referrals for homeless veterans. Also, the Incarcerated Veterans Reintegration Program, in partnership with The Salvation Army, provides services in the county jail and after release for veterans.

The coalition does not have and is not seeking incorporation or other legal formation.

X. Proposal Summary and Request

The coalition respectfully requests the CARES Commission and the Department of Veterans Affairs to designate three or more buildings, as described above, for use by experienced and qualified organizations for new veteran housing, with clear priority given to long-term therapeutic supportive housing and other successful models for special needs and chronically homeless veterans. The coalition is prepared to provide additional information and input relative to this request in written documentation and testimony.

September 16, 2005

¹ The VA's May 2005 CHALENG Report estimates that 17,800 homeless veterans live in the service area of the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System. The State of California Department of Veterans in 2002 placed the count of veterans in LA County at 27,000.

Additional homeless census data

Homeless Persons in Los Angeles County: In June of 2005, the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) released the results of a homeless count conducted in January, 2005. The 2005 Homeless Count found 83,347 homeless people in the streets and in shelters on any one night (point-in-time) and 224,203 annually in Los Angeles County, excluding those in Long Beach, Pasadena and Glendale. When including homeless count information from Long Beach, Pasadena and Glendale, the total homeless count for Los Angeles County is approximately 91,000. This is the largest homeless population in the nation for any metropolitan area. The 2005 Homeless Count found that 88% of homeless persons in Los Angeles County are unsheltered and 42% meet the definition of "chronically homeless." More than half (55%) of the chronically homeless population has three or more disabilities, indicating that these people face multiple barriers to overcoming their homelessness.

National View: The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that 250,000 veterans may be homeless on any given night and that twice as many veterans experience homelessness over the course of a year. Many other veterans are considered at risk because of poverty, lack of support from family and friends and precarious living conditions in overcrowded or substandard housing. Almost all (97%) homeless veterans are male and the vast majority is single. About 45% of homeless veterans suffer from mental illness and, with considerable overlap, slightly more than 70% suffer from alcohol or drug abuse problems. A large number of displaced and at-risk veterans live with lingering effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

" Federal Definition of Homelessness

For the purpose of this proposal, the federal government's definition of homelessness will be used. A person is considered homeless only when he/she resides in one of the places described below:

- In places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings (on the street).
- In an emergency shelter.
- In transitional or supportive housing for homeless persons who originally came from the streets or emergency shelters.
- In any of the above places but is spending a short time (up to 30 consecutive days) in a hospital or other institution.
- Is being evicted within a week from a private dwelling unit and no subsequent residence has been identified and the person lacks the resources and support networks needed to obtain housing.
- Is being discharged within a week from an institution, such as a mental health or substance abuse treatment facility or a jail/prison, in which the person has been a resident for more than 30 consecutive days and no subsequent residence has been identified and the person lacks the resources and support networks needed to obtain housing.
- Is fleeing a domestic violence housing situation and no subsequent residence has been identified and the person lacks the resources and support networks needed to obtain housing.