

ZION HOUSE TRANSITIONAL HOME FOR HOMELESS FEMALE VETERANS

A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN ZION EPISCOPAL CHURCH & AMERICAN LEGION JOSEPH GALLIPEAU POST NO. 294

INTRODUCTION

A homeless program has been under consideration by Zion Episcopal Church in Avon for the past three years. The driving force that prompted the consideration came from a female veteran who was in counseling with The Rev. Mark Stiegler, a Contract Chaplain with the VA and the Rector of Zion. The veteran expressed a need for transitional housing for homeless female veteran similar to programs available to men. In consultation with Homeless and Vocational Coordinators at the Canandaigua, Rochester, Bath, and Buffalo facilities, as well as the MST Program Batavia VA Hospital it was determined that a transitional house specifically meant for homeless, or those in danger of being homeless, female veterans was indeed greatly needed. Currently no facility that meets the special needs for such a population exists in New York or the United States. This was supported by data provided by the VA representatives.

The average number of homeless female veteran in VISN 2 for the years of 2004 and 2005 was (58). Of this number, (28) were shown to be either institutionalized, had no residence, or were living in shelters or temporary housing programs. Both of these average figures have increased in 2006. Demographics show that these homeless veterans were poorly served by the VA in 2004 and 2005; however, the number served in 2006 has dramatically increased. This data has been provided by North East Evaluation Program Center Network homeless program data, VISN 2 Behavior Health Careline - Healthcare For Homeless Veterans Program - Demographic Profile for Women Veterans Receiving Services, and with collaboration with representatives of the Buffalo, Canandaigua, Bath, and Rochester VA Homeless Programs.

ZION HOUSE

As a result of the above information Zion Episcopal Church in partnership with the American Legion Joseph Gallipeau Post Number 294 has decided to convert the Rectory currently owned by Zion Church into a Transitional Home for homeless veteran women. The transitional home is envisioned as the last step for homeless veteran women who are coming out of crisis and moving into self-sustaining independent living. An average of (8) homeless female veterans are projected as being served by Zion House, or, 14% of average total homeless female veteran population in Central and Western New York. The veterans, who will be considered, are veterans who have no regular home. They may use temporary shelters, public or private, or live temporarily with acquaintances. All of the veterans in consideration are veterans who have applied to the VA and been accepted for assistance.

Zion House is an out reach ministry owned and operated by Zion Episcopal Church, Avon, New York. Zion House will have a Board of Directors comprised of members selected from the Zion Congregation, the American Legion Post, and concerned members of the Avon

Community. This board will be responsible directly to the Rector and Vestry (Parish Council) of Zion Episcopal Church. Additionally, a House Manager will be hired and a licensed social worker will be contracted with or hired as a caseworker.

VISION

The vision of the program and the environment in which it takes place, is to give each participant greater self-determination in the decisions they must make as they move through life, to help them in their transition from a homeless situation to secure independent living and employment. Of prime concern are the decisions they make relative to self-worth, relationships, healthcare, housing, nutrition, finances, and job. The program is seen as the last step before independent living, or, in the event the veteran is not capable of full independent living, a means of greater self-sufficiency in whatever setting they may be placed.

The target population for Zion House is homeless veterans, or those who might become homeless and are referred by the VA. However, Zion House will not turn away other homeless people should they seek our services. Should services be sought by non-veterans, they will be directed to other non-veteran programs. Zion house will assure the safety of non-veterans until they are placed in a program.

If a veteran applies for services, and is not currently enrolled with the VA health services, Zion House will ensure that the veteran becomes enrolled with the VA within thirty days of entry to Zion House. This will include contact with primary care, mental health, the homeless program, substance abuse, and any other programs that might be necessary.

GOALS & MISSION

Initially, Zion House seeks to provide: a safe secure environment, a proper environment for personal hygiene, an evaluation of clothing needs with clothing provided as needed, proper nutrition, and a bedroom that may be secured (locked) by the resident.

Second to a safe and caring environment, the goal of the Zion House program is to provide: mentoring in life skills, placement in affordable housing, job placement, sustained employment, continued participation in self-help groups such as twelve step programs, advancement in education, continued participation in VA treatment programs as necessary, continued association with VA healthcare. This mission is accomplished by: residential stability and security; life skills mentoring; re-entry job support and guidance; a means of saving for independent living; peer and self-help support group access; a means of continued contact with local VA facilities for all necessary health care and treatment programs; and a means of transportation, when necessary, to accomplish these goals.

The goals of the program will be met through a structure of mentoring, education offered by volunteers from the church community, professionals, and other concerned individuals from the community at large (i.e. the business community), as well as support and encouragement from the Zion community. Case management will be accomplished by an Advisory Board composed of VA personnel selected by the VA, volunteer mentors from Zion Episcopal Church or other selected volunteers, a case manager as well as interested local, county, and state professionals.

The program is seen as a link in the treatment and rehabilitation for homeless female veterans and as part of their continuum of care given by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The program structure will consist of the following:

- A) For those veterans selected as a potential referral to Zion House, interviews by the Advisory Board with the veteran while the veteran is still in VA care either at the MST facility or in the Domiciliary. The purposed of the interviews will be to get to know the veteran, their care team, and to, a) determine if the veteran desires admittance into the Zion House program, b) determine if the VA care team feels the veteran is a good match, c) and to determine if the Zion House Advisory Board feels there is a good match. All three parties must agree to the placement before admittance to the program.
- B) A care plan in the form of a Contract of Expectations will be drawn up and agreed to by the VA care team, the veteran, the Zion Case Manager, and the Zion House Advisory Board. This Contract of Expectations becomes the instrument by which the progress of the veteran is measured. Progress reports will be made by the Zion House mentoring team and Case Manager on a regular predetermined basis to all parties concerned, including the veteran. The Contract of Expectations might include advancement in education, securing and/or obtaining employment, attendance of AA or other self-help groups, and involvement in the daily activities necessary for the maintenance of Zion House (i.e. food preparation, cleaning, laundry). Failure to meet the terms of the contract may lead to an adjustment in the contract, referral back to the VA for treatment, or removal from the program. The residential Zion House program is planned to be a six to twelve month transitional program. The decision for a veteran to move on to independent or assisted living will be made with the full consultation and acceptance by the VA care team, the Zion House Advisory Board, and the veteran.
- C) Under the guidance of a resident manager, the veteran will be expected to fully participate in the operation of the house. This will include cleaning, cooking, menu planning, and shopping within a budget. These activities will assist in their life-skills growth. Zion House is a single-family dwelling which will allow the veteran experience a home environment as opposed to an institutional environment. Each veteran will have a private room with ample closet space. There will be one bedroom and bathroom specifically design for a wheelchair dependent person. Additionally, the residents will be offered space for crafts and hobbies.
- D) Residents will be encouraged to participate in community activities, spiritual direction as fits their personal tradition, and aerobic classes which are held daily at Zion Church. Zion Church is adjacent to the house that will be used for the proposed program. The following programs are offered Zion Church: three AA meetings per week, aerobic classes five days per week, a food addicts program once a week, and various self-help programs offered by the Livingston County Mental Health Association which has an office in Zion. While access and encouragement to all faiths will be offered, Zion House will not allow proselytizing or evangelizing by any group, including Zion Church, with the residents.
- E) As deemed appropriate by the Care Team, the resident will be required to find employment. Zion House is located on the commuter bus line to Rochester, NY, approximately eighteen miles away, and has local buses to many employment areas. Two manufacturing facilities in the village have sought employees from the VA Homeless/Vocational programs in the past. Referring veterans to these companies has

been difficult because of the lack of housing. Zion House solves this problem for the female veterans.

- F) Residents will be required to maintain a link with the local VA Medical facilities for preventive health, illness, and injury. Zion House is within twenty-five miles of three VA medical facilities, all of which have outpatient departments. All of the facilities are served by local bus service the Zion House van may be used. The Women Veteran Residential Program (MST) at the VA Hospital in Batavia, NY, is twenty-five miles from Zion House.
- G) The Zion House care team will submit progress notes on a regular basis that tracks the progress the veteran is making in complying with her Contract of Expectations. Prior to discharge, a discharge plan will be developed by the VA and Zion House care teams and case manager, and the veteran. The discharge plan will become an extension of the Contract of Expectations and follow the veteran into independent or other assisted living. The discharge plan will set goals and follow the progress of the veteran. Follow-up surveys of six and twelve months post discharge will be part of the discharge contract. The veteran will be encouraged to maintain contact with Zion House. She will be invited back from time to time for social events in order to socialize with the current residents and her mentors.
- H) The veteran will be encouraged throughout this process to remain active with the VA healthcare system. In order to assure a continuum of care, Zion House will submit back to whatever VA agencies the VA determines to be appropriate, progress reports on the progress of the veteran.

CONCLUSION

Zion House will offer a much need service to those who have served our country. The services offered and the follow-up will enhance and give hope to the lives of those who may feel their lives are hopeless. Further, the residents of Zion House will enhance the community of Avon, and surrounding communities, by becoming valuable contributors to the community. Instead of being a liability to society through their homelessness, they will be an asset, bringing new vitality and contribution through residency and employment in our community.