



HUD/VASH Results: Home for the Holidays

By: **Scott Johnson**
Montgomery Advertiser

There have been many Christmases in Keith L. Robinson, Sr.'s life when he either had nowhere to go or was soon back on the street once the festivities had ended.

Now, for the first time in his adult life, the 49-year-old Army veteran has a home to call his own and is even having family members over for Christmas.

"I can truly say that I'm a productive member of society," Robinson said.

Robinson was one of several veterans who recently moved into Montgomery apartments with the help of a partnership between the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The program is the least the country can do for people who have put their lives on the line, said Al Bloom,

public affairs officer with the Central



Keith L. Robinson Sr. works on the grounds of the East Campus. Photo by Lloyd Gallman/ADVERTISER

Alabama Veterans Health Care System. "These are our nation's heroes."

The program provides subsidized housing vouchers for eligible veterans, with the veterans choosing a location and case managers making sure the chosen locations are in good neighborhoods.

Many of the issues homeless veterans face are the same ones other homeless people face, including mental illness and substance abuse. Case managers make sure veterans are receiving treatment for those problems, said Tammy Davidson, program coordinator for CAVHCS' HUD/Veterans Affairs Supported Housing.

"A lot of them are already in (substance abuse) programs," said Davidson, who is also a case manager. "If they are not, we try to get them into programs."

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Homelessness Among Veterans Declines 12% in 2011

The Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development recently announced that a new national report shows that homelessness among Veterans has been reduced by nearly 12 percent between January 2010 and January 2011. The 12 percent decline keeps the Obama Administration on track to meet the goal of ending Veteran homelessness in 2015.

"This new report is good news for the tens of thousands of Veterans we have helped find a home. Our progress in the fight against homelessness has been significant, but our work is not complete until no Veteran has to sleep on the street," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "We have been successful in achieving this milestone due to strong leadership from the President and hard work by countless community organizations and our federal, state, and local partners who are committed to helping Veterans and their families get back on their feet."

According to the 2011 supplement to the Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) released today, 67,495 Veterans were homeless in the United States on a single night in January 2011 - a significant reduction from last year's single night count of 76,329.

Since 2009, working with over 4,000 community agencies, VA and HUD have successfully housed a total of 33,597 Veterans in permanent, supportive housing with dedicated case managers and access to high-quality VA health care.

VA also announced it will make \$100 million in grants available to community agencies across the country to prevent nearly 42,000 Veterans and their families from falling into homelessness or to quickly return them to stable housing. The funds are offered for fiscal year 2012 through VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program, a homelessness-prevention and rapid re-housing program.

"The problems that lead to homelessness begin long before Veterans and their families are on the streets," said Secretary Shinseki. "By putting more resources into prevention services for those at risk of becoming homeless, we will continue to help more Veterans and their families turn their lives around."

Last year, VA provided \$60 million through the SSVF program to community providers, which will affect nearly 22,000 people through 85 non-profit community agencies in 40 states and the District of Columbia. The program provides community organizations with funding for counseling, training, education assistance, direct time-limited financial assistance, transportation, child care, rent, utilities, and other services aimed at preventing homelessness or providing homes for participating Veterans and family members.

CAVHCS All-Stars

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge my appreciation to Ms. Doris Howard for the untiring dedication she shows to patient care. During my visits to Occupational Therapy at the VA Center, Ms. Howard has always shown a high level of professionalism in working with all of her clients. She is a joy to work with and I enjoy each and every visit. I feel she deserves recognition for her outstanding care. She should receive an award.

-- Respectfully, Glenn F., Columbus, Ga.

I want to commend Mrs. Barbara King of the Nutrition and Food Service. God in Christ Jesus has blessed me to be served by this VA Hospital since February of 1975. I have yet to be served by a staff member in Nutrition & Food Services other than Ms. King. She has not only a great personality but is a true professional attendant. Please thank her for me. -- Regards, Robert J., Sr., Montgomery, Ala.

Sir, as usual everyone on your staff treated me as if I was their only concern. Everyone in the country should have the care the VA provides to the Veterans. Please thank everyone for me and tell them "Great Job."

-- Thank you all, Emanuel G., Dixon Mills, Ala.

As an Air Force Veteran of 22 years and one who served in Afghanistan, I can tell you how impressed and pleased I am with "Kenneth" at the podiatry clinic desk. He is always courteous and helpful and he goes out of his way to take care of the customer. Your other VA employees need to take a lesson from him!

-- Best Regards, Lt. Col. F., (USAF, Ret.), Montgomery, Ala.

I would like to thank you for having employees like Dr. Duke, Ms. Rose Elsberry and Eric Patterson around to care for Veterans like me. The care they provided to me was really needed. It feels good not to be treated like a number but like a human being. PLEASE thank them again for a job well done! -- Sincerely, Mary E.

I saw Dr. Bannister this morning without an appointment and the doctor noticed that I was having a problem with my left eye and he took the time to get information from the doctor that had performed the surgery on that eye before sending me on my way. I appreciate the efforts of Dr. Bannister and the time he took with me.

-- Respectfully, David W., Montgomery, Ala.

I just wanted to say thank you to Regina Williams for her friendly and professional manner and service. She makes a trip to the doctor enjoyable. Please commend her for me. -- Thank you, Sam H.

From the Director

Thank you, very much, for helping CAVHCS reach 113% of our CFC goal!

We did it; I believed we would.

From my first day at CAVHCS, it was apparent to me that the medical center is full of kind hearted, good natured, compassionate employees. Your contributions to CFC will provide much needed relief to some of our neighbors.

I want to thank you for your generosity and for demonstrating to the community that no one cares more than we care.

Happy Holidays to you and your family!

-- James R. Talton, PA-C, MBA, M.S., FACHE,
Acting Director



\$57,993.83

113% of our CFC goal!



The CAVHCS Salute

The CAVHCS Salute is produced by the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care (CAVHCS) Public Affairs Office. CAVHCS Salute is an unofficial, internal communications publication.



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Johnny R. Davis
Rozelia Bean, MS, RN
Cliff Robinson, MD
Al Bloom

The CAVHCS Survey says...

“Do you have a New Year’s resolution...and if so, why or how will you keep it?”



Chuck Wacker,
Vista Imaging System
Manager, OIT

“To become more physically fit and lose weight.”



Mr. Terrell L. Ellis,
Housekeeping Aide,

“To become a better person, by treating others the way I want to be treated...that’s the Christian Way.”



Ms Kenna J. Longerbeam,
Supply Clerk,

“To be true to myself and always let the Lord be first, because I believe people really need to trust in God to help everything get back in rhythm.”

We All Have Needs

Something to Do; to Love, to Hope For

By: Sherman Lee Burford, D.Min., BCC

Chief, Chaplain Service

“How (in what ways) are you different now than you were 12 months ago?” Take a minute to meditate on that. I’ll wait.

“How (in what ways) do you want to be different 12 months from now?” Go ahead. Take another minute. We have time.

We humans have many needs. Many faith traditions boil those down to three basic needs:

-the need to believe:

people have a need to believe (in) something/someone. Even the person who says, “I don’t believe in anything”, has a need to believe that. It is our way of making some sense of the world in which we live; of identifying our place in the world;

-the need to belong:

people have a need to belong; to be connected. No one wants to feel isolated or abandoned, alone or cut off from the world around them. We have a basic need to be connected somehow to the world in which we live (to another person; to a Higher Power; to ourselves); and finally **-the need to become:** people have a need to become “more than we are”. We desire to make better choices about the person we are choosing to become.

One tradition describes it this way: something to do, something to love, something to hope for.

As clinicians, we recognize how important these three basic needs are to the people we serve every day. But do we also recognize how important these needs are to us and for us (our self; our personhood)?

As we close out 2011, let me ask the question again: “How (in what ways) are you different now than you were 12 months ago?” Go ahead. Take a minute to jot down a list.

And as we begin 2012, let me ask the question again: “How (in what ways) do you want to be different 12 months from now?” Now take another minute to jot down a list that comes to mind.

Helpful hints: not just weight, height, knowledge, etc. But stuff like more patience with those who are different, honesty, humility, transparency, increased ability to give and receive love, ability to trust, etc.

C.S.Lewis put it like this: “...every time you make a choice you are turning the central part of you, the part of you that chooses, into something a little different from what it was before.”

New Year’s celebration time? Certainly. We made it through another year (together) and we look forward to the next one (together). But also a good time to reflect on the past and meditate on the future. Hard work, indeed. But well worth the effort.



'Home'

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According to VA statistics, about 67,495 veterans were homeless in the United States on a single night in January 2011. There are signs, however, that things are improving. The VA and HUD released a report earlier in December stating that there was a 12 percent decline in homelessness among veterans between January 2010 and January 2011.

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Veterans can graduate from the program if a case manager decides that case management is no longer needed.

Robinson is quick to accept responsibility for his years of homelessness. "(Being homeless) is preventable. I was homeless because of the choices I made," he said. Robinson served six years in the Army and four years in the National Guard in California and Florida.

Afterward, Robinson was able to land a good job with the Florida Department of Transportation and worked his way up to highway maintenance. He also worked part time, he said.

"I was young and vibrant," Robinson said. But then he "got introduced to some things" that would lead him down another path. Soon his habits began to eat into his paychecks.

Robinson said he is amazed now when he thinks about the amount of work he would do each day, only to turn around and give away all the money he had earned. Robinson describes it as basically "buying other people's houses" for them. He also was getting into trouble with the law.

Robinson said he has 14 felony convictions, mostly for drug-related offenses. Not surprisingly, that history has followed him and made it difficult to find a job. He doesn't lack an enthusiasm for work, however, professing a passion for landscaping and an eagerness to return to the workforce. He currently serves as the crew leader for a landscaping team at the VA's Tuskegee campus.

Bloom said that Robinson's energy is not unusual for veterans in the program and that the transformation begins with simply feeling better physically. That improves their attitude toward being productive once again. "Then it is hard to hold them back," Bloom said.

Robinson attested to the effect the program has had. "I feel like I'm just as healthy and strong as a teenager," Robinson said.

The program also helped him reclaim his confidence, he said.

"When I got into the program, I had no self-esteem, no self-worth," Robinson said. "But I did have hope, and that hope sparked everything else."

Robinson moved into his apartment Dec. 16, and Harold Ragster and Christopher Shepard both moved into their apartments the same day.

Shepard, 45, served in the Army from 1985 until 1995, and said he didn't have much trouble immediately after leaving the service.

In 2005, he moved to New Orleans.

Hurricane Katrina struck, damaging the house he was renting, and while the house was insured, Shepard's belongings were not.

Shepard said he had been homeless since Katrina and has struggled with a drinking problem. He is now getting help and said he would recommend the program to any veteran. Shepard currently works in the engineering department at the VA's Tuskegee campus.

He is looking for other employment and said he now is also interested in giving back by helping out other veterans who are experiencing problems. Shepard said he has studied psychology and would like to return to school to complete his studies and be a counselor for veterans.

"I have the patience now to pursue and finish (schooling)," Shepard said.

Like Robinson, Ragster is living in a home of his own for the first time in his adult life. Ragster, 50, served in the Navy from 1980 to 1984 and is an electrician by trade. Ragster said he has been receiving treatment for substance abuse and depression and never thought he would be able to get his own apartment.

He said he has learned to be more responsible, including using the willpower not to spend money on a whim. He said he also has learned to be more open and honest with people and to believe in himself. Now, he said, his family is back in his life, and his relationships in general have improved.

"I have people I can really call friends now," Ragster said. Ragster currently is employed as a cook at Tuskegee University, but is "already looking for something better."

Ragster, a former Columbus, Ga., resident, said he is optimistic about the opportunities available to him and is ready to start a new life in Montgomery. "I'm going to try my best not to miss any more opportunities in my life," he said. And the apartment, he said, is something he is going to cherish. "I'm going to treat it like it's a mansion. It's a mansion to me," he said.



Navy Veteran Harold Ragster proudly holds up the keys to his new apartment during CAVHCS' recent Housing Fair. (Photo by Robin Johnson)

Nine Healthy Messages for the New Year

By: Mary Catherine Porch, APN

CAVHCS Health Promotion Disease Prevention
Program Manager

Happy New Year!

Every New Year I get excited and enjoy taking time to review personal goals, clean out my closets and sometimes even rearrange the furniture. I love that sense of newness that comes with everyone wishing me a Happy New Year.

In several areas at the Veterans Administration there is a sense of newness that has been prominent for the past year or two. New things are being emphasized in the care of our veterans and every year the developments are getting stronger.

Firstly, in our primary care clinics the VA has created PACT's. These are Patient Aligned Care Teams. The team members are the providers, nurses, administrative staff, dietitians, social workers and pharmacists who care for our veterans. They are working closely together to provide care to veterans using such techniques as, checking secure messages sent via MyHealthVet from veterans, organizing and attending shared medical appointments, and offering care management through the registered nurses. In the near future, our veterans will hear more about these methods of care and become very familiar with them.

It's official, so get Ready

'In It to WIN It' National Weight Loss Challenge

The purpose of this challenge is to promote health and wellness for VA employees by focusing on weight management by encouraging healthier eating and physical activity. All VA employees can participate once they have completed their online Health Risk Assessment (HRA), by logging on to the VA WIN home page at www.VAemployeeewellness.com.

Below is detailed information which you may use to answer any questions out in the field and also attached you will find marketing material pertaining to the "In It to WIN It" National Weight Loss Challenge which you can use to market and disseminate at your facilities, in your areas, or to others you feel appropriate.

Guidelines

1. Registration for the "In It to WIN It" National Weight Loss Challenge will be open from January 2, 2012 January 20, 2012 to **ALL** VA employees.
2. Challenge will officially start **January 23, 2012 and end March 2, 2012.**
3. Participants will self report their weight-loss during the challenge by going to the VA WIN website.
4. An automated "leader board" will list the top sites with the highest percentage weight loss throughout the challenge.

Registration

1. VA employees must be VA WIN participants in order to register for this National challenge.

Another area that especially concerns veterans is the VA's emphasis on prevention of diseases and injuries. The PACT members will be talking more and more to our veterans about Nine Healthy Messages that are important to preventing disease and injury. These messages are

- Be Involved in Your Health Care
- Be Tobacco Free
- Eat Wisely
- Be Physically Active
- Strive for a Healthy Weight
- Limit Alcohol
- Get Recommended Screening Tests and Immunizations
- Manage Stress
- Be Safe

Veterans will have opportunities at their health care visits to think about strategies they would like to use to meet these and their own health goals.



2. New users will need to complete the online Health Risk Assessment (HRA) at www.VAemployeeewellness.com. Once the new users get to the website they will need to create a user I.D. and password, complete their HRA and then sign-up.
3. Once you are signed in to the VA WIN Employee Wellness Program homepage at www.VAemployeeewellness.com you will be prompted with an "In It to WIN It" registration page.
4. Employees will need to make sure they select their specific location which includes their **station number**. If you do not see your location and station number on the drop down list, **please enter it manually** in the "Other" field.

5. If you have problems registering, please contact VAemployeeewellness@foh.hhs.gov.




Criteria for Winning

1. The top 3 stations with the highest percentage of weight loss by the end of the challenge will be deemed the "WINners." 2. The 1st Place, 2nd Place and 3rd Place "WINners" will receive a WIN Makeover!

The VA Health and Wellness Team would like to take this time and thank each and every one of you for dedicating your time and services to the VA Wellness Is Now (WIN) program and helping employees establish and maintain healthy lifestyles. And remember, this program is so successful because of you!



Good food, service, fellowship and of course plenty of smiles, were on the menu during the recent CRC Holiday Party in CAVHCS' East Campus Bldg. 90 Theater.
(VA photo by Eric Johnson)

2012 CALENDAR OF EVENTS VA OFFICE OF PUBLIC AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS							FEDERAL HOLIDAY
Happy New Year!		January 2012					
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	
1 • New Year's Day • Emancipation Proclamation (1863)	2 • New Year's Day (Federal Holiday)	3	4	5	6	7	
National Folic Acid Awareness Week (Jan. 2 - 8)							
8	9	10 • National Cut Your Energy Costs Day	11	12 • First Elected Woman Senator Hattie Wyatt (1932)	13	14	
Home Office Safety & Security Week (Jan. 8 - 14)							
15 • Pentagon Completed (1943)	16 • Martin Luther King Jr. Day • Gulf War Begins (1991)	17	18 • Lewis & Clark Expedition Commissioned (1803)	19	20	21	
Healthy Weight Week (Jan. 15 - 21)							
22	23 • Chinese New Year 	24	25 • National IV Nurse Day 	26	27 • Liberation of Auschwitz (1945) • Vietnam Peace Agreement (1973)	28	
National Certified Nurse Anesthetists Week (Jan. 22 - 28)							
29	30 • Tet Offensive Begins (1968)	31		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Glaucoma Awareness Month • Cervical Cancer Awareness Month • National Radon Action Month 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poverty in America Awareness Month • National Birth Defects Prevention Month • National Mentoring Month 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-Help Group Awareness Month • Thyroid Awareness Month • National Volunteer Blood Donor Month 	

The CAVHCS Community Calendar is not intended to be an all-inclusive, official calendar. It is intended rather to provide a medium for CAVHCS Salute to share upcoming events.

If you would like to add a CAVHCS event please email details directly to alan.bloom@va.gov. Submissions are not guaranteed to be published. Editorial considerations will be made for propriety, promptness and print space.