

Ending Veteran Homelessness in Florida



by Gladys Schneider

The campaign to end veteran homelessness by 2015 has only 16 months to go. To crank up production, Florida stakeholders met in Tampa April 15-17 for a Boot Camp sponsored by the Community Solutions' 100,000 Homes Campaign and led by the Rapid Results Team. This was the second round of Boot Camps in Florida.

Teams made up of representatives from public housing authorities; Continuum of Care members; local government staff; VA Medical Centers; and other public and private providers gathered from Miami-Dade, Pinellas, Lee, Sarasota, Manatee, Hillsborough, and Pasco counties. Boot Camp attendees are greeted by state and national leaders from HUD, the VA and funders including Chase Bank and Home Depot. The Boot Camps set a 100-day goal, July 14, 2013, as the benchmark for local teams to place veterans in permanent housing at the rate needed to end veteran homelessness by December 31, 2015. Members of the 2012 Boot Camps, including Orlando, Alachua, Escambia and Jacksonville had a head start and their progress served as an example, along with the work in other states.

The Rapid Results Team is made up of energetic facilitators who provide tools, leadership and expertise so the local teams can develop their own solutions to overcome obstacles and accelerate the placement of veterans who are homeless into permanent housing.

Mark Johnson, HUD Deputy Assistant Secretary for Special Needs and Community Planning and Development, announced an additional 915 HUD VASH vouchers would be coming soon to Florida to increase the total available since 2008 to 5,015. Amy Sawyer, Regional Coordinator

of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, welcomed the crowd and urged the teams to take advantage of the information and advocacy of the Council including, "Opening Doors," the national report and plan that has brought federal agencies together to solve the problem once and for all, using tools such as the HUD VASH voucher.



Boot Camp attendees actively worked on homeless vet process mapping.

After three days of team building, process mapping, targeting and committing to meet their goal, the teams returned to their communities to keep the energy going. The 100-Day Challenge launches the teams into action to focus on Housing First, developing mainstream housing, prioritizing veterans who are chronically homeless, and making data driven decisions. For example, to meet the goal of housing 2,200 veterans by 2015, the Tampa Hillsborough team committed to housing 67 veterans per month. At a current rate of 30 per month, the Boot Camp energized the team to double their production, as well as commit to housing people who are chronically homeless as a priority. Boot Camp teams across the state meet weekly to report and share innovations in the process.



Amy Sawyer, Regional Coordinator of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, welcomed Boot Camp attendees.

It is exhilarating to be part of a group that says "we can do this!" With weeks to go to the 100-day benchmark, we know that if we can do this, we can end all homelessness-as the Rapid Results team says, All Hands On Deck! **HNN**