

# OUTREACH TO A NETWORK OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES: THE RECIPE FOR HELPING VETERANS



BY LORI SANDONATO

When the Florida Housing Coalition hosted two symposiums in Tampa last year sponsored by Wells Fargo and the Home Depot Foundation, Askia Aquil, a participant in the forums, shared his brand for getting the job done: Askia makes connections via email between anyone and everyone who might be able to help Veterans in need. It was my great pleasure to be one of the people who was able to answer the call for help he made on behalf of a disabled Vietnam Veteran in need of housing.

Homes for Independence, Inc. learned of the request for help through an email blast from Askia. It was sent to him from Marlene Ware, the Director of Financial Stability at Warrior Support Services and laid out the circumstances. Don Letteller, a disabled veteran, and his wife Cindy, were no longer able to pay their basic bills, such as utilities. The landlord had raised the rent on their apartment significantly above their ability to pay; an apartment which provided a great deal of challenge for the disabled veteran even if it were affordable, as it was not wheelchair accessible.

The City of St. Petersburg has a program for Veterans to live in accessible, affordable homes and one of those

homes was available. The house is fully wheelchair accessible and energy efficient. Rent is \$550 per month, nearly \$200 per month less than he and his wife Cindy had been paying for a smaller and inaccessible apartment. And this home is close to shopping and transportation, a big plus for the Lettellers, as they have no vehicle.

“I am so excited to know I can reach the kitchen and bathroom sinks, roll right into a shower and I will have a yard!” says Don, “This is a dream come true!”



**Askia Aquil, President of Community Housing Solutions, Inc., explaining the importance of reaching out to as many potential resources in the community as possible to help prevent and end veteran homelessness.**

It wasn't just the City of St. Petersburg that helped Homes For Independence acquire this house and make this deserving Veteran's dreams come true. The Home Depot Foundation through the Abilities Foundation and the Northside Christian School pitched in to do some yard clean up, painting and other activities to help keep costs down at the time of purchase.” An American flag waves proudly from the front porch.

Group efforts provide such significant rewards to all involved. It is always heartwarming to see the look of relief mixed with excitement on the faces of people who have needed help for so long. [HNN](#)

Florida Housing Coalition Board Member, Lori Sandonato is the Vice President of Homes for Independence, Inc., and Director of Housing for Service Source, d/b/a Abilities, Inc. of Florida.

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LT. COMMANDER USN DON LETTELLIER CANNOT BELIEVE THE HELP HE HAS BEEN OFFERED. HE HAS BEEN DISABLED SINCE JANUARY 19, 1969. HE HAS NEEDED HELP IN THE PAST, BUT THIS IS THE FIRST TIME HE REQUESTED IT. HE IS VERY GRATEFUL.