



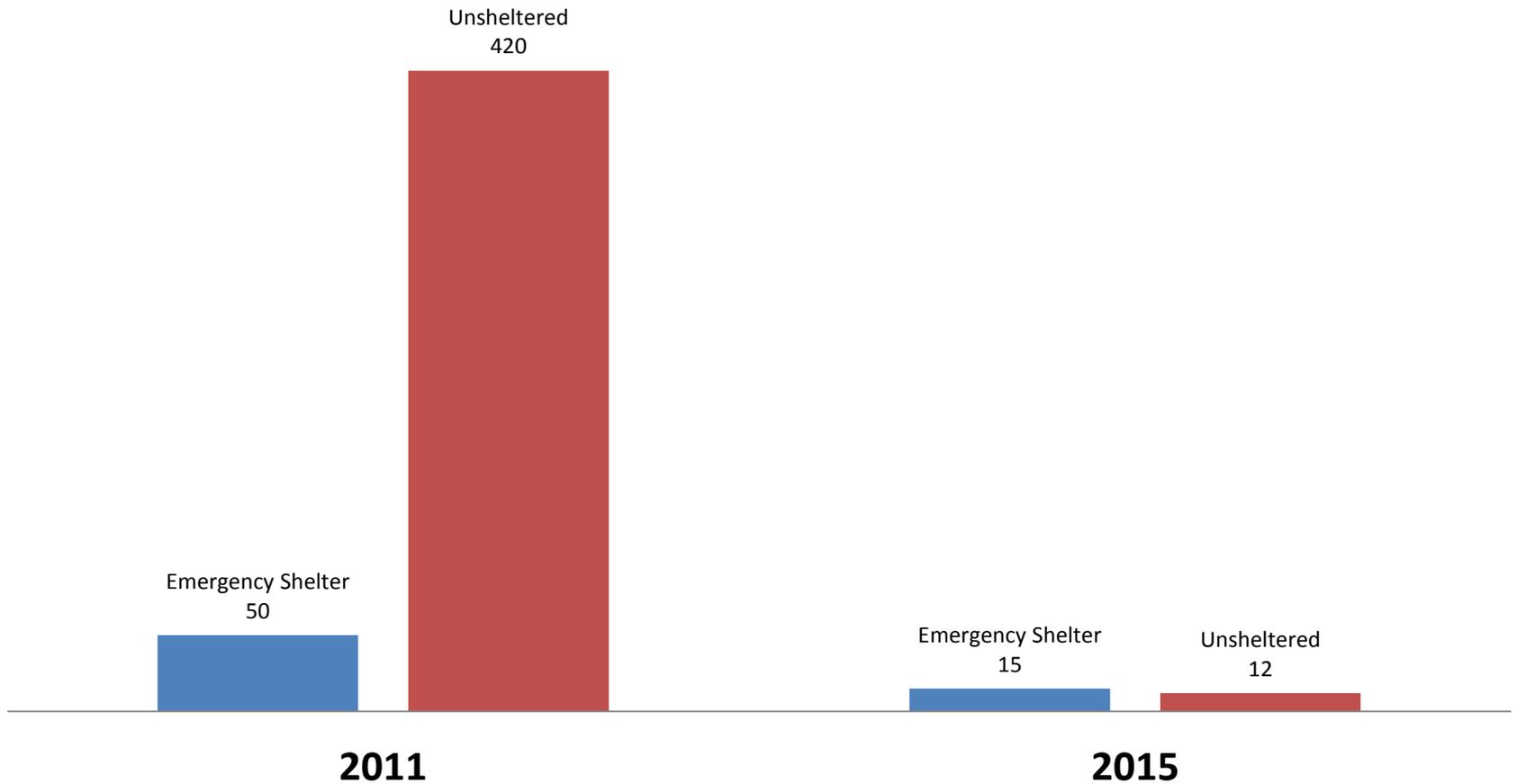
How We Did It: Working Together To End Veteran Homelessness in New Orleans

Martha J. Kegel
Executive Director
UNITY of Greater New Orleans

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Veteran Homelessness in New Orleans





Definitions: Ending Veteran Homelessness in New Orleans

Ending homelessness in New Orleans meant that we provided permanent housing to all veterans living on the streets and in emergency shelters who could be located and would accept housing.

Between July 25, 2014 and Jan. 2, 2015, we permanently housed **227** veterans living on the streets or in emergency shelter. Nine veterans adamantly refused housing so their cases were “rolled over” into the Functional Zero Initiative.

The New Orleans Mayors Challenge definition of maintaining a functional zero in veteran homelessness:

Every newly discovered veteran living on the streets or in emergency shelter is provided permanent housing within an average of 30 days of finding them, unless they choose to enter a longer-term treatment program instead.



New Orleans' Rapid Response Initiative for Veterans: Eternal Vigilance is the Price of Ending Homelessness

Methodology: Every night HMIS agency personnel physically enter the emergency shelters to identify any veterans, and street outreach workers comb the streets. SSVF agencies then quickly perform assessments, the VA confirms veteran status and whether potentially eligible for VASH, and the SSVF agencies place confirmed veterans in apartments. Those in need of PSH are eventually transferred to a VASH voucher or CoC PSH program. To ensure a periodic comprehensive scan of the streets, a quarterly mini PIT-style nighttime survey of people living on the street is performed in partnership with active duty military volunteers. The Functional Zero system is coordinated by UNITY, the CoC lead agency, in partnership with the City and VA.

Our progress to date: Since Jan. 2, 2015, when we reached a functional zero by housing the 227th homeless veteran on the Master List used in our six-month-long Mayors Challenge Campaign, we have permanently housed an additional 55 homeless veterans, including four of those who had adamantly refused housing during the Mayors Challenge.

Average length of time to house them: 29 days

Median length of time to house them: 16 days

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Step 1:

Mayor Landrieu Set Goal With a Deadline



- On June 4, 2014, First Lady kicked off Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness
- One week later, Mayor Landrieu set goal of ending veteran homelessness by December 31, 2014
- “How in the world will we do this?” everyone asks!
- As the backbone organization, UNITY was called upon to propose much of the strategy
- Mayor’s staff convened weekly meetings of Leadership Team consisting of those with major resources (CoC lead agency, VA, Housing Authority, State, VOA) to track progress, set policy and hold partners accountable for use of housing resources

Step 2:

Compile a Master List of Veterans Living on Street or in Emergency Shelter

- In June 2014, UNITY began compiling a comprehensive Master List of all veterans known to be living in emergency shelter, on the streets or in abandoned building using HMIS, 2014 PIT, and PSH Registry data. VA was asked to review the list and add others, as well as begin the process of verifying veteran status. By July 25, 2014, the list was compiled (Group 1).
- The Master List is dynamic and is never closed. Every day every effort must be made to scour shelters and streets to find more homeless veterans, as well as find those already on the list. Veterans who became homeless after July 25, 2014 were called Group 2.
- Just as important as who you add to the Master List is who you do not add. Do NOT add persons who are not living on the streets or in emergency shelter. Do NOT add those whose homeless status is self-certified or certified only by friends and relatives, or certified by professionals who have not actually seen the person sleeping on the street. Otherwise scarce housing resources intended for homeless veterans will be spent on those who are not actually homeless, and you will not end Veteran homelessness.



Step 3:

Increase Communication Between the VA and CoC



- **Very close communication between VA and CoC is essential. The CoC typically has the best capacity to find the homeless veterans, while the VA can best verify their veteran status and determine what VA-funded housing programs they are eligible for.**
- **UNITY staff was designated as “VA staff without compensation” to make it easier to share information. Each week UNITY submitted a list of newly found homeless veterans, and the VA confirmed whether they had military service, whether they were eligible for VA health care and therefore VASH, and whether they had been dishonorably discharged (and thus were not eligible even for SSVF).**
- **In New Orleans, about 10 percent of those who claimed to be homeless veterans turned out not to have served in the military. To confirm military service, we checked the VA’s military service data base (HINQ), our Navigators requested DD214s, and any documents veterans had were examined.**

Step 4: Plan for Housing: Create More Housing and Precisely Target Existing Housing

- A housing plan was created estimating how many veterans we would need to house and how many housing vouchers would be needed. We planned for at least twice as many housing slots as we thought necessary.
- The VA and CoC reported weekly on what percentage of housing resources were going to veterans on the Master List. The VA committed to using 100 percent of VASH vouchers to the campaign; as of January 2015, the VA committed to using 80 percent of VASH vouchers for persons on the Master List, in order to help maintain a functional zero.
- Because most homeless veterans needed PSH and did not qualify for VASH and there were so few VASH vouchers available, the CoC committed 70 percent of its PSH slots to homeless veterans for the duration of the campaign; however, during the last two months of the campaign in order to meet the goal, the CoC used virtually all of its permanent housing slots for homeless veterans, other than those set aside for families and the chronically homeless (exceptions were made for non-veterans at risk of dying on the street).
- The CoC created a Rapid Rehousing for Veterans Program to house up to 40 veterans. The Sacred Heart Apartments, prioritizing chronically homeless Veterans, opened December 19.
- The Housing Authority provided 200 Housing Choice Vouchers to the initiative. Because of the lack of funds available for services, these vouchers were used for persons who still needed affordable housing but no longer needed on-site services who were ready to “graduate” from VASH or CoC PSH. The VASH and CoC PSH slots thus freed up would go to homeless veterans on the Master List.



Step 5:

Finding Unsheltered Veterans

- **Increasing the capacity of your community's professional Outreach Team is critical to finding all unsheltered veterans. Outreach teams regularly should go out at night or in the early morning, to ascertain who is actually homeless, assess their needs, and navigate them into permanent housing. The team should also be verifying claims of homelessness.**
- **New Orleans has at least 15 people who are full-time or part-time street outreach workers. We also have the only team in the country that regularly searches abandoned buildings for signs of life and re-houses those squatting in them. Our outreach workers are paid for primarily by CoC Supportive Services Only grants, PATH, and SSVF.**
- **To look for veterans already on our Master List, to find newly homeless veterans and to begin the process of getting them housed, New Orleans conducted five major Veteran Outreach Nights in the fall of 2014 in which all known homeless hot spots were searched. The Mayor's staff recruited active duty military and the VFW to assist with these efforts.**

Step 6: Assess Needs and Navigate to Housing



- Assign each homeless veteran to a navigator who assesses their needs using coordinated assessment tool and takes responsibility for getting all the paperwork done to get them into permanent housing
- Navigators include CoC outreach workers, SSVF staff, VA outreach and VASH staff, day and night shelter staff
- We assigned two Jesuit Volunteers to our city's Community Resource and Referral Center, a day center located in the former VA Hospital where a variety of services is offered to homeless veterans and non-veterans, including VASH applications. The two JVs alone navigated 70 homeless veterans into housing.
- UNITY hosted weekly lunch meetings of the Veteran Navigators
- Weekly prizes were offered to navigators who had housed the most veterans or accomplished something difficult



Step 7: Coordinate Federal Housing Resources

- **Communities like New Orleans, where there are scant housing resources other than those provided by the federal government, cannot end veteran homelessness without tight coordination of those federal resources.**
- **We used SSVF as a bridge to VASH and CoC PSH, though Progressive Engagement**
- **We also used Rapid Rehousing as a bridge to CoC PSH**
- **With help from USICH, we received clarification from national HUD and VA that veterans documented as sleeping on the street or emergency shelter can be housed using CoC PSH resources, with VASH assuming responsibility once a VASH voucher becomes available**
- **We also received clarification that SSVF can provide time-limited case management services to homeless veterans living in housing provided through Housing Choice Vouchers**
- **SSVF should be amended to allow rental assistance and case management to be used for at least 12 consecutive months for veterans who are moving off the street or out of emergency shelter if the need for ongoing rental assistance and case management can be shown**



Step 8: It Takes a Village: House Every Homeless Veteran You Can Find Who Will Accept Housing!

- **UNITY HousingLink**
- **Assistance from the Housing Authority in Finding Landlords**
- **The Mayor Put Out a Call to Landlords**
- **Bring a list of pre-inspected apartments to weekly navigator meetings**
- **Trouble shoot Challenging Cases Together!**

Permanent Housing Destinations to Date

VASH	39
SSVF	32
CoC PSH	64
Rapid Rehousing	43
Own resources/Family/Friends	39
ESG RR	1
Section 8	4
Senior Housing	5
Total	227

Martha J. Kegel

Executive Director

UNITY of Greater New Orleans

mkegel@unitygno.org

(504) 821-4496 x109

www.unitygno.org

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Martha J. Kegel is an attorney, graduate of Stanford Law School, and recipient of the 2002 Career Public Interest Award from the Louisiana State Bar Association.

Since 2003, she has served as Executive Director of UNITY of Greater New Orleans, which was honored by the NAEH in 2010 for its work combating the crisis of homelessness resulting from the Hurricane Katrina levee failures.