

HopeSource Reaching Out to Veterans



By Mike Johnston
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A member of HopeSource's Support Services for Veteran Families program learned about a veteran living in a pop-up tent trailer, with no heat, at a year-round campsite outside Cle Elum last week.

On Monday that veteran moved into an apartment in Upper County, and for the first time in a long time, had a warm place to call home.

That's an example of what the five-county Support Services for Veterans Families can do, said SSVF program Task Force Director Pete Hudlow on Monday.

"We not going to just stop there to help this veteran," said Hudlow, a retired U.S. Air Force officer, after a ceremonial kickoff in Ellensburg of the new program that serves Kittitas, Grant, Chelan, Douglas and Okanagan counties. "We'll be working with him one-on-one in guiding him to get the help he needs to help himself for the long term."

We're committed to working closely with our men and women veterans in this region and their families. We're connecting them with the services they need to move forward in their lives," Hudlow said.

The program through HopeSource was made possible with a nearly \$883,000 grant late last year from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs aimed at contacting economically struggling veterans and their families. The goal is to work with them where they live, not wait for them to come to HopeSource.

Last week was the first week of the field team's community outreach, and it's gratifying to get a few early successes, Hudlow said. The field members are veterans of military service, some with combat experience.

"It's definitely veterans helping veterans," Hudlow said.

The program's new personnel are hitting the ground running, so to speak, said Hudlow. Six field team members travel the five counties, with three support employees.

The Monday kickoff event was at Kelleher Motor Company's showroom and introduced the SSVF's field and administrative team to the community. On hand were representatives of local veterans groups, the Kittitas County Veterans Coalition vets assistance officers, city and county governments, law enforcement, emergency medical and fire departments, social service agencies and others who have contact with U.S. military veterans.

Hudlow said the field team members will, if need be, transport veterans or their family members to the agencies that can help them and walk them through the steps needed to obtain local support.

"We'll be right there with them, every step of the way, if that's what they need," Hudlow said.

Hudlow said the program also is seeking the help of those in the community who are military veterans who could come alongside fellow veterans and their families who need a friend in the community to talk to, someone who understands their challenges.

The program will first target housing needs of veterans with low incomes and assist them in gaining access to other services, said HopeSource CEO Susan Grindle.

The low-income veterans in the five counties have historically remained underserved, with fewer available services than can be found in metropolitan areas, she said.

The veterans in these rural counties also have less access to health care services and are often required to travel up to 200 miles to veteran hospital centers in Spokane, Walla Walla or Seattle to receive needed services, Grindle said.

With the federal grant, low-income veterans will have access to housing services that will assist them in stabilizing their lives and moving toward self-sufficiency, she added.

The overarching goal of the program is to allow veterans to focus on education, health care, counseling support for physical and emotional barriers, and other needed services once they have established a stable housing situation, she said.

Task force director: Pete Hudlow

Field team members:

Chad Larson, Andrew Pruitt, Doug Heimbigner - Chelan and Douglas counties

Brent Paine, Cynthia Turner - Kittitas and Grant counties

Shane Barton - Okanogan County

HopeSource technical support services:

Joel Allen

HopeSource administration: John

Raymond