

## **PA Senate Hearing on Homeless Veterans**

### **Progress Made by Washington City Mission Through Their Crabtree-Kovacicek Veteran's House**

**Dr/LTC (Ret) Sally A. Mounts  
July 26, 2022**

Washington City Mission is a 160-bed, Christ-centered homeless rehabilitation program in Washington, PA, with extensive wraparound services to assist the homeless to move to independent living. We serve four distinct populations of the homeless: men, women, women with children and veterans.

In 2021, we served 1,085 unique individuals and provided:

- 79,204 meals
- 28,364 bed nights
- 15,601 medical clinic services
- 111 family-sustaining jobs

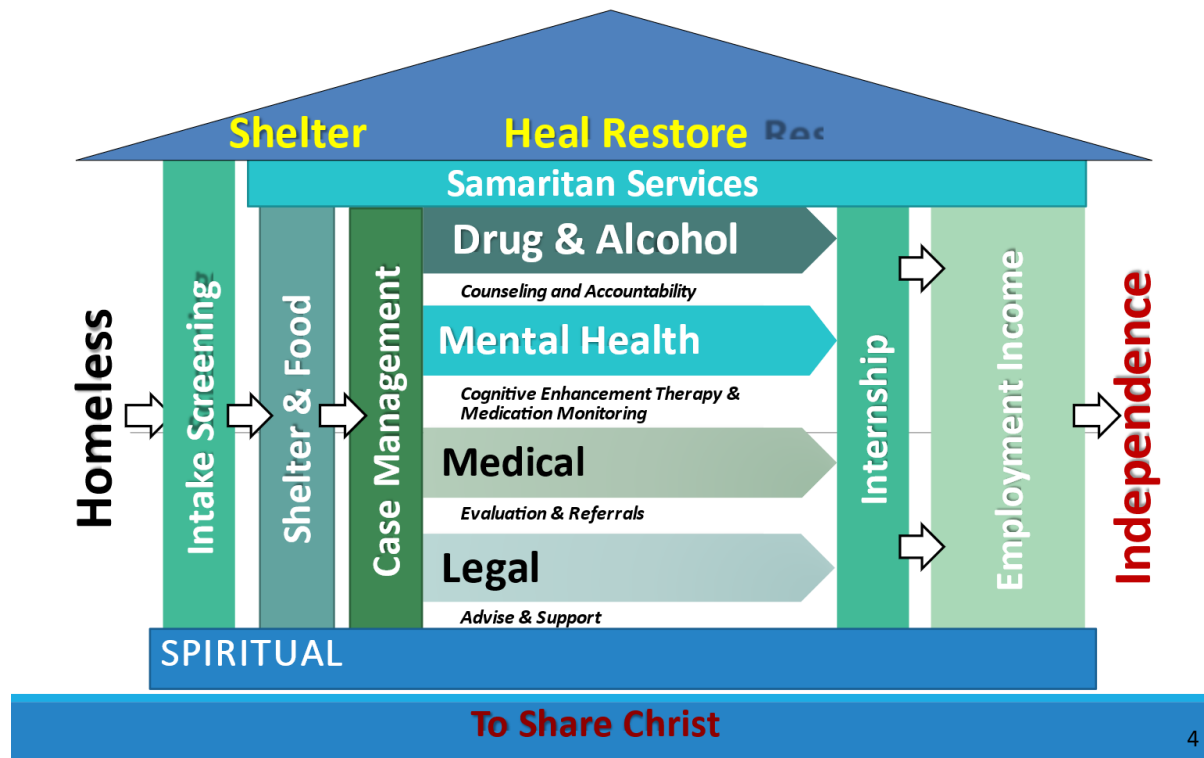
City Mission has long wanted to make serving veterans a priority. Prior to 2018, veterans who came to our program would fail to engage in the extensive drug and alcohol rehabilitation programming we provided and even leave without warning in the middle of the night. Clearly, a new approach was needed, especially since so many veterans were “falling through the cracks” of the VA (only 1 in 5 veterans access VA services for care).

Research on veteran trauma has increasingly focused on group therapy as the most effective treatment for traumatized veterans. The PTSD Programs of the Veteran's Administration are all based on this model, with veterans showing robust treatment gains in study after study. Therefore, we elected to follow this therapeutic approach in our Crabtree-Kovacicek Veteran's House. The house was completed in July, 2018, and was full less than two weeks later. The house has 22 beds—a significant number for our veterans, since an average of 22 veterans commit suicide every day in the United States.

When a veteran enters our program, he begins his stay of 3 months to 2 years in a semi-private space with four beds. Here, we spend time getting to know him and assessing his specific needs. During this phase, the veteran is connected to Veteran's Affairs for medical care and the all-important service connection that funds his/her medical treatment. We have a well-established “buddy system” where senior veterans mento our new veteran residents. The

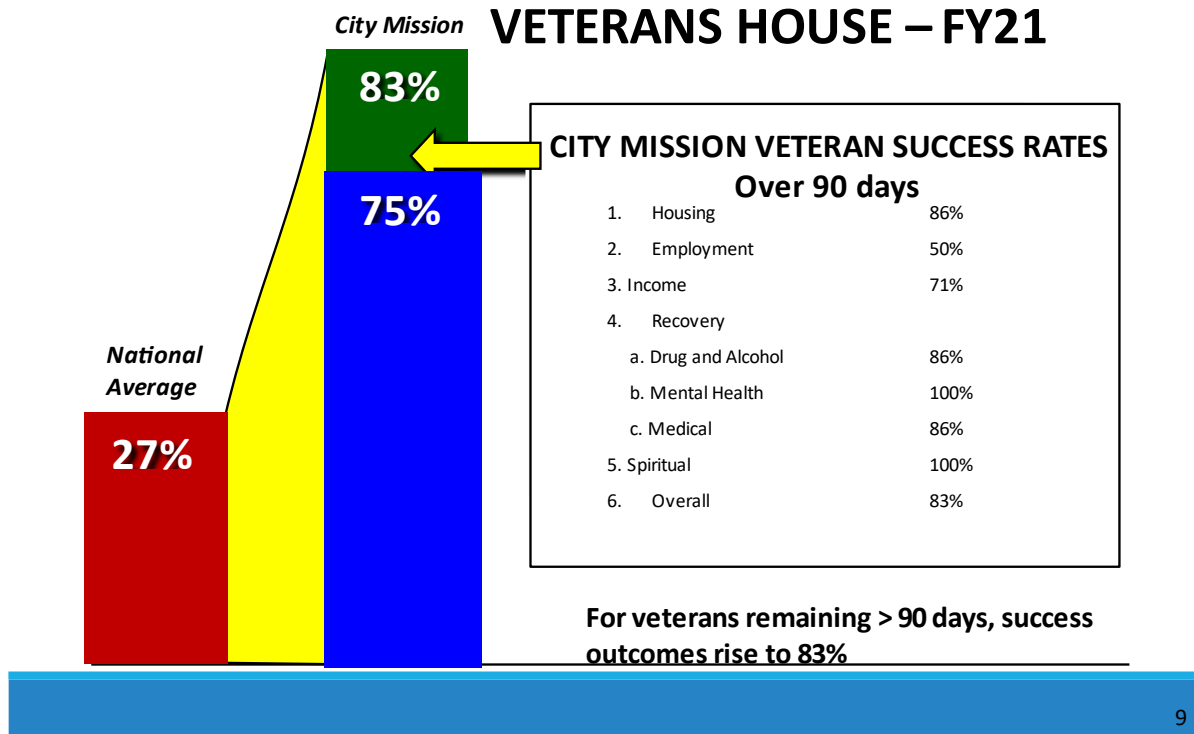
Manager of Veteran Services (himself a combat veteran) works closely with each veteran to develop goals. Below is the model for our program:

## DESCRIPTION OF OUR 22-BED VETERAN’S PROGRAM



We emphasize five core areas: Housing, Employment, Income (for those with documented disability), Recovery (from alcohol and drug use, from medical problems, and from mental health issues) and Spirituality (connection to an area church). Of particular note is the overall success of this approach: In the average “three hots and a cot” mission, the overall combined success outcome average for Housing, Employment, Income, Recovery and Spirituality is from 9-27%. In our program, our overall veteran success rate in these five domains is 75%. And if they remain longer than 90 days in our program, the overall success outcome score is 83%. This is delineated on the next page:

# RECOVERY RATES: NATIONAL AVERAGE VERSUS CITY MISSION CRABTREE KOVACICEK



Stabilization is also an important component of our rehabilitation. We emphasize shared experiences, spirit de corps, and building trusting relationships. No one is forced to leave before they are stable, sober and ready. Veterans have their own unique program with two veteran-led groups per day. These groups not only focus on the root problems that cause homelessness, but also on healing the many interconnecting factors that disenfranchise our nations veterans:

- the deep-seated trauma associated with combat
- military skills that do not translate easily to civilian life
- frequent moves that erode social support
- reluctance to being labelled with a mental health diagnosis that hurts employment prospects

Veterans also participate in our overall work readiness program and utilize our Career Training and Education Center, where they learn the skills necessary to re-enter the work force.

Once our veterans achieve stability, they move into our re-entry phase. During this phase, they work to gain employment and secure independent housing. It is in this phase that community

veteran's organizations offer much-needed assistance. The Veteran's Leadership Program, Veteran's Place and other agencies work to help our veterans make the final move to a sustained successful and independent life. It is an occasion of much rejoicing throughout the Mission when one of our veterans gets a key to his own home or apartment.

Our successes speak powerfully of the assistance provided to veterans at the City Mission Crabtree-Kovacicek Veteran's House. Many veterans have moved on to successful independent living. Several have returned to City Mission as staff. One is currently enrolled for the fall term in Washington and Jefferson College, where he will play football.

## Crabtree Kovacicek Veteran's House

