On any given night, nearly 50,000 homeless veterans sleep on America’s streets. Estimates suggest that over a 12-month period, 100,000 U.S. veterans are homeless for some time. Those who served in Vietnam or Kuwait are in deteriorating health while younger veterans, who have survived multiple deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan, return with brain injuries, post-traumatic stress, and other lifelong medical problems. Some men and women are suffering not only from combat-related disabilities, but also addictions. In a struggling economy it is hard for them to find and keep jobs.

Homeless veterans don’t just need a place to live; they need permanent, supportive housing, an environment where they can access a range of services from case management to job counseling. These services will help stabilize them and their families over the long-term. This troubling circumstance has become a major focus of policymakers in Washington and across the country. As a result, the number of homeless vets has been greatly reduced, from more than 200,000 in 2008. We are working together to end homelessness among veterans because we believe that none of our returning soldiers should be abandoned.

The mission

For more than two decades, LISC and National Equity Fund (NEF), its investment affiliate, have developed a successful approach toward creating permanent supportive housing. An important part of our work is bringing new life to struggling communities. We have built a network of relationships with investors, government agencies and developers that ease the path to construction. The result over 25 years has been an investment of $1.9 billion to build nearly 13,000 permanent supportive housing residences, which includes 2,500 homes specifically targeted to meet the needs of homeless veterans.

Now LISC-NEF is expanding and accelerating its program. Over the next three years, we expect to complete 40 projects that

Valley Brook Village, located on the VA Medical Center Campus in Lyons, New Jersey, provides 61 units of permanent affordable housing and support services to homeless and at-risk of becoming homeless veterans. Rents for 50 units are funded through project-based VASH subsidies, and the remaining 11 target at-risk veterans earning at or below 40 percent of Area Median Income.

Residents enjoy a village-style setting on more than 16 acres designed to maximize the landscape with open green spaces, patios and walking trails. Other amenities include a fitness center, community room with kitchen, computer learning stations, laundry facilities and nearby recreational areas.

Supportive services are provided on-site and include counseling and medical/mental health services. Two full-time case managers work with veterans to create individual recovery plans and a full-time employment training specialist assists with job placement.

Phase II of this project is in predevelopment and received a planning grant from Citi Community Development through LISC-NEF’s Bring ‘Them HOMES. National Equity Fund® invested $8.4 million of LIHTC equity in phase I.

Developers: Peabody Properties, Inc. and Windover Construction, LLC
Development Cost: $15.5 million
will create an additional 2,500 units of supportive housing. We have an efficient system in place to make that happen including early money to prime the pump -- funds that we use to smooth the way for developers and help them get projects from concept to construction. Citi Community Development, MetLife Foundation, Northrop Grumman and The Home Depot Foundation have already made substantial contributions, and others are promising more.

The work is underway, but with the wind-down of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the return of 100,000 new veterans, the need for more permanent supportive housing is growing ever more urgent.

Financing:
LISC-NEF offers pre-development grants and loans – early money for architects’ plans, permits, deeds/titles and environmental reviews. Without that money, projects cannot get forward; with it, the closing process goes faster and building starts sooner. These funds also help attract developers to projects.

Facilitating:
LISC-NEF provides technical assistance to help developers navigate the myriad of federal, state, local and nonprofit programs for veterans, using our expertise to combine government subsidy programs with tax credits to finance low-income housing at the project level. We also provide New Markets Tax Credits for community health and service centers.

“These projects aren’t just bricks and mortar. They aren’t just deals to be closed or foundations to be laid. They are projects that change lives. They rescue men and women who have served our country with honor, people who today find themselves sick and largely abandoned. Our veterans need a way to recover their health, find good jobs and reclaim their independence. Permanent supportive housing offers all of that. And it makes good economic sense. Housed in safe, service-enriched environments, surrounded by peers, homeless veterans do, in fact, recover some of what they’ve lost and find a way to move forward.”

Debbie Burkart, National Equity Fund

The national vice president of supportive housing, Debbie Burkart is a passionate advocate for permanent supportive housing for homeless veterans.

Advocacy:
LISC-NEF works with federal and state lawmakers, federal and state government agencies (including the U.S. Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development) and national organizations to help streamline programs and ensure their requirements are compatible with each other and with accomplishing the mission. One top priority is working with the VA and HUD to find new and creative uses of existing resources. Demonstrable progress will unlock state and private money.

Implement:
The VA owns thousands of acres of unused land and buildings near its healthcare facilities. This land on VA medical campuses could be ideal for supportive housing. Veterans need easy access to VA healthcare and support services, but only a small portion of available land has been developed. LISC-NEF can help speed up and implement proposals to put those sites to good use.

Looking Forward to the Future
We have demonstrated over the last several years that we know how to finance veterans supportive housing projects, and how to speak up for housing policy. We need to continue coordinating access to existing resources and tap into new resources to expedite developments. We know how to move projects forward. It is time to make that happen across the country.

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