

VETERANS HOUSE



AN INITIATIVE BY
MULTIFAITH HOUSING INITIATIVE



INTRODUCTION

The City of Ottawa has recognized the issue of homelessness among Canadian Forces veterans as an issue through its action of hosting a Support for Veterans Networking Initiative at the end of April 2013, as well as a follow up networking breakfast in April 2014. At these meetings many stakeholders introduced the issue, some of the potential causes of the issue, as well as encouraged collaboration amongst service providers to address the issue of homelessness for this specialized target group. In response to this call from the City, a group of organizations lead by Multifaith Housing Initiative has come together with the intention of developing a purpose built housing complex on the former Rockcliffe Airbase located in Ottawa.

THE PROJECT

The Multifaith Housing Initiative (MHI) is a charitable non-profit housing organization and a community of many faith groups working collaboratively around the lack of affordable housing in Ottawa. Through outreach to other faith groups, MHI now counts over 70 faith communities as members, including Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus Baha'i's and Unitarians. Its mission is to provide safe, well maintained affordable housing and supports for individuals and families who are either homeless or at risk of homelessness.

MHI will create an affordable housing project with supports for veterans who are homeless, or are at risk of homelessness on the site of the former Rockcliffe Air Base. This site has been declared surplus by DND, and the Canada Lands Corporation (CLC) has undertaken the required site planning and servicing needed to dispose of the property. MHI is working with the *Surplus Federal Real Property for Homelessness Initiative* run by ESDC to secure the land from CLC. The project will use a supportive "Housing First" model which seeks to help the veterans deal with health, mental health and addiction issues, specifically focused on support services designed to meet the explicit needs of homeless veterans in the Ottawa area. Ottawa Salus will manage the mental health component of the building. The individual units will be modest and self contained, while there will be stress placed on the development of sufficient communal areas and treatment rooms in the building. This project will be 40 units of permanent housing. However, it is important to note that MHI sees this first Veterans House as a model that could be replicated in other locations.

THE NEED

While there is no estimate of the proportion of Canada's homeless population that are veterans, a potential indicator is that the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) release about 5,000 personnel a year amongst which 20-25% are released for medical reasons. A 2013 Toronto study of homelessness found that 11% of all homeless 'living rough' outdoors had a history of military service and veterans comprised 7% of all homeless surveyed. With the likely post-Afghanistan up-turn in early retirement by younger soldiers, the situation can only deteriorate in the coming decade.

A Government funded study in 2013, combined with studies coming out of the UK & the US has given us the following insights:

- Alcoholism, drug addiction and mental health problems contribute to, and perpetuate, homelessness among veterans, especially where any were pre-existing conditions.
- The transition from military to civilian life is dislocating for many; the abrupt change to the relatively unstructured civilian world from a very highly-structured one can also disrupt focus, trust and friendships.
- A variety of reasons conspire to separate vets from their CAF/Veterans' Affairs Canada (VAC) benefits (legal obligations to others, no fixed address, no ID, etc.). Homeless veterans describe a complex relationship with VAC. Some felt abandoned by VAC once they were discharged. Others felt well supported by VAC, indicating they were getting the help they needed to move ahead in life.

Other points to note:

- In a recent Alliance to End Homelessness Canada survey (April 2015), 8.5% of the homeless persons surveyed in Ottawa reported Canadian military service (compared to 6.4% in Hamilton and 5% in Waterloo).
- Alliance to End Homelessness gives us the number of separate homeless individuals living in Ottawa in 2014 of 6,500. This number only includes those that are accessing shelters.
- Soldiers Helping Soldiers, an Ottawa based organization serving military members who volunteer in the shelters, have encountered over 375 homeless with prior military service - over the past 3 years.
- Homeless shelters in Ottawa agree that the number reported by ESDC of 2,225 homeless veterans in the country (2.7%) is low.

At this time, partners of the project include the following organizations with the following roles:

THE BUILDING: THE MULTIFAITH HOUSING INITIATIVE

MHI is a federally registered charity and a grass-roots coalition of many different faith communities who are working together to alleviate the affordable housing crisis here in Ottawa. MHI focuses its work on concrete and practical ways to provide low-cost, safe and secure housing, while helping to create vibrant, mixed neighbourhoods. MHI is committed to practices which ensure inclusivity, transparency and good governance. Our vision is communities where residents care about each other and a city that welcomes people of every income level and background. MHI currently owns three buildings, making up 41 units that house around 100 people, and is currently developing a 98 unit community for families. For this Veterans House initiative MHI will own the Veterans House building and manage the property.

THE SUPPORT SERVICES: OTTAWA SALUS

Ottawa Salus is a registered Canadian charity that provides life changing housing and support services to people living with serious mental illness. Community support allows Salus to provide services that are

otherwise not possible from basic government funding, for Salus clients. Salus offers a range of supportive options for adults with serious mental illness and concurrent challenges including addictions, homelessness and cycles of hospitalization. For this Veterans House initiative Salus will manage and run all support services and programs offered to the Veterans House tenants.

PEER MENTORING: SOLDIERS HELPING SOLDIERS

SHS a win-win-win initiative by serving members, conducted in the hopes of aiding their partner agencies to reach out to our homeless and nearly homeless CF veterans. When asked by the clients they meet why they are volunteering, their standard answer is "we are here to serve our community", which is the first win. The second win is the increased positive morale in the soldiers, who volunteer their time, and the third win is being able to assist homeless and nearly homeless CF veterans gain access to the benefits that they are entitled to. SHS will assist in the identification, and transitioning of the homeless veterans to their new housing community. SHS will also have an ongoing presence in the building offering peer mentoring, and peer support.

SUPPORTS FUNDING: THE ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION ONTARIO COMMANDS HOMELESS VETERANS INITIATIVE AND DISTRICT G

The Ontario Command of The Royal Canadian Legion is comprised of over 400 branches throughout Ontario. With a total membership of over 160,000, the Ontario Command of the Legion is the largest service oriented organization in Ontario.

The Royal Canadian Legion's main focuses continue to be remembering those who gave their lives for freedom, and looking after the needs of veterans, their dependants, and those still serving in the Canadian Forces. In partnership with the Ladies Auxiliaries of Ontario Command, the Legion operates a charitable foundation which brings the collective strength our branches together. Funds to support this foundation are raised by Legion branches through Poppy tagging campaigns and various fundraising events. The Legion has committed \$100K annually to offset the cost of the support programs in the building.

EMERGENCY 24/7 ASSISTANCE AND TRANSITIONAL SUPPORT: VETERANS EMERGENCY TRANSITION SERVICES CANADA

A federally registered Charity, VETS Canada is a recognized leader in the fight against homelessness within the ranks of Canada's forgotten veterans. Contracted to Veterans Affairs Canada as the service provider of "In Crisis Outreach" to Canada's veterans, VETS Canada provides critical services across the country to our veterans who are in-crisis, at risk of, or in homeless situations. Working with volunteer Boots on the Ground field teams and a multitude of corporate partners, VETS Canada is dedicated to improving the quality of life for those veterans that need its assistance, and helps to facilitate the transition from a life on the streets to a standard of living that every Canadian deserves to enjoy.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT: CENTRETOWN AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Centretown Affordable Housing Development Corporation (CAHDCO) will act as the lead developer, performing the development and construction management for Veterans House. CAHDCO is Ottawa's only dedicated non-profit affordable housing developer. Established in 1996, CAHDCO provides development and construction management consultancy services for affordable housing projects. CAHDCO is the development corporation for the Centretown Citizens Ottawa Corporation (CCOC). CCOC has 40 years of experience as an innovative affordable housing developer in downtown Ottawa.

BENEFICIARIES

This proposal targets the needs specifically and solely of homeless veterans who are living rough in Ottawa. The supportive housing model will help these individuals gain stable housing, recover from health, mental health and addiction-related issues and improve their overall quality of life, as well as the lives of their families who are unable to provide them with the support that they need.

