ADDRESSING LEGAL NEEDS THROUGH SSVF

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SSVF-A BRIEF DESCRIPTION

- Developed as an effort to end homelessness among Veterans

- Program awards grants to non-profit organizations and consumer cooperatives to provide supportive services to very low-income veteran families residing in or transitioning to permanent housing (90 days)
DEFINITIONS

• Veteran Family—a single person or a family in which the head of the household or spouse is a veteran
• Low Income—cannot exceed 50% of area median income
• Permanent Housing—either residing in permanent housing, transitioning into permanent housing within 90 days, or have left permanent housing in the last 90 days to seek alternative housing

*In order to qualify for SSVF services, a veteran family must pass the “but for” test
Supportive Services

- healthcare
- daily living services,
- personal finance planning
- transportation
- child care
- temporary financial assistance
- housing counseling
- legal services
CRISIS MINISTRIES-
AN EVEN BRIEFER DESCRIPTION

• Established in 1984 by the City of Charleston and a group of local churches as an overnight shelter and soup kitchen

• Since 1999 added services to move from a “shelter” to a “program” to end homelessness
**Added:**

- health clinic with full-time nurse and volunteer doctors
- case managers with advanced degrees
- mental health services with a part-time psychiatrist
- Help Center providing educational and job placement services
- specialized services for veterans (both male and female)
- housing and homelessness prevention
- legal services (Homeless Justice Project)
• Currently serve approximately 150 individuals per night in four facilities (Men’s Shelter, Family Center, Transitional Living Center, and Palmetto House)
• Serve approximately 1,600 unduplicated guests a year
• 80% engage in services, with 50% moving out in housing
• In addition, serve approximately 200,000 meals a year in the Soup Kitchen
• In process of building a new Men’s Shelter that will triple the number of beds for veterans who are homeless
WHY SSVF WAS A NATURAL FIT FOR

CRISIS MINISTRIES

• Most grantees were human service agencies, not a homeless shelter but

• Early on, Crisis Ministries realized that barriers to housing was one of the key issues that was keeping people homeless and

• Case management services were already in place that were housing focused with all guests assessed for housing barriers
• Prior to SSVF, Crisis Ministries was an HPRP grantee and as a result there was already a system in place to provide assistance and rapid re-housing.

• Crisis Ministries, at the time, was the only SSVF grantee that had a full-time attorney on staff (52% of caseload were veterans).

• In October 2013 a second attorney was added to the staff to work exclusively with the SSVF to provide legal services to veterans.
INCORPORATING LEGAL SERVICES INTO HOUSING PROGRAMS

• A means to help veterans who are homeless overcome legal barriers to obtaining permanent housing

• Why offer? Because many veterans who are homeless lack the resources and support networks to access legal services that are willing to assist them in obtaining permanent housing
In 2012/2013 served 635 clients with 824 legal issues
- number of veterans served (52%) was impetus to include legal services in SSVF grant
- resulted in funding first for a legal assistant, then for a second attorney

Clients referred by SSVF, VA, or Family Services case manager

Seen at Legal Clinic (Tuesday & Wednesday afternoons) or by appointment
Primary legal issues

- Disability benefits (both VA and SSA)
- Family Law (child support, divorces, child custody)
- Landlord/tenant issues
- Driver’s licenses/ID’s
- Consumer/credit issues
- Wills/powers of attorney
- Expungements
Partnerships:

- Charleston School of Law
- Pro bono attorneys
- Veterans Administration (funding)
  - Veterans Justice Outreach Coordinator
  - Homeless veterans program & HUD/VASH
- Family Services (SSVF grantee)
Special Programs

• Veterans Child Support Initiative
  -partnership with VA, Family Court, and Support Enforcement

• Veterans Treatment Court
  -partnership with VA, Probate Court (Mental Health Court), Solicitor’s Office, Public Defender, Probation & Parole, and Mental Health
SUCCESS STORY

• 1989 Mr. and Ms. Y marry. There are no children from the marriage
• 1998 Mr. and Ms. Y separate, Ms. Y granted Temporary Order for spousal support
• 1999 case struck from pending roster due to inaction
• 2001 Ms. Y again files for divorce
• 2002 divorce granted, Final Order does not include alimony
• Since 2002, despite Final Order, Temporary Order has been enforced against Mr. Y resulting in numerous jail sentences (at times for nonpayment of child support)
• Mr. Y made several attempts to seek relief at court hearings, told to get a lawyer
• Over the years Mr. Y’s health has deteriorated, work hours cut to 2 days a week, and he could no longer afford his apartment
• Mr. Y referred to Legal Clinic by SSVF case manager
• Homeless Justice Project agreed to represent Mr. Y
• Researched old Family Court records
• Located Ms. Y discovered she had been cohabitating since 2004, verified by criminal records
• Researched relevant law
• Filed Motion for Relief from Judgment arguing:
  o Final Order settled divorce controversy
  o Alimony requirement ended in 2004 when Ms. Y began cohabitating (SC Law)
  o Change in circumstances requires alimony to be modified
What happened at the Hearing?

• Nothing!
• We believe that when Ms. Y saw Mr. Y walk into the courthouse with two lawyers, a legal assistant, and a law student she contacted the lawyer who represented at her divorce
• Over our objection the judge continued the hearing because it was “complicated,” although he indicated that he agreed with our argument
• Important to remember: the role of the lawyer in SSVF is to level the playing field by giving a voice to those who normally are ignored by the justice system, a good outcome in a case is icing on the cake