

# Welcome



A Collaborative Model for Housing and  
Services for Veterans

# Presenters

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Community Medicine Program  
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Mt Sinai Hospital
- Kevin Fisher, MSgt, USAF (RET)  
Master of Divinity  
Director of Veterans Services, The Bridge (NYC)

# Overview



## *Working with Veterans*

Ansell Horn

# Facing the Facts

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- ❖ As of 2008, 107,000 homeless veterans were in shelters (twice the rate of homelessness in general adult population)
- ❖ 16-23 percent of homeless people are veterans
- ❖ In 2010, over 144,000 veterans spent at least one night homeless

# Limitations of Data

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- ❖ Numbers excluded from VA care
- ❖ Self-reporting

# Disparities

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- ❖ African Americans make up 11% of the veteran population, but are 34% of homeless veterans (2008)
- ❖ Fifty percent of homeless veterans are concentrated in California, Florida, New York, and Texas

# Efforts to house veterans

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- ❖ Obama Task Force established in 2009.
- ❖ Initiates plan to end homelessness among veterans within 5 years
- ❖ Legislative amendments in 2010 to expand McKinney-Vento Act definition of homelessness
- ❖ Major steps to end homelessness

# Results

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- ❖ On single night in January 2014, 49,333 veterans were homeless
- ❖ Nationwide drop of 32.6% decline in homeless veterans 2009-2014
- ❖ New Orleans, Las Vegas, and Houston claim to have effectively eliminated homelessness among veterans
- ❖ New York City claims to have reduce chronic street homelessness among veterans from 4677 to 477 (2011-2016)

The 2014 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, Chapter 5

# Total Veterans

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❖ As of 2014

- Number of Veterans: 19,386,589
- 8% of the population
- 5,857,490 use VA health care

Source: National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics  
“Profile of Veterans: 2014 Data from the American Community Survey”

# Of the remaining 13,529,109

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- ❖ Many choose not to use VA
- ❖ Experience barriers to access (wait times, distance)
- ❖ Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act gives options for insurance and health care
- ❖ Preference for HCH clinics over other health centers

# Healthcare Utilization

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❖ Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has 9.1 million enrollees (out of approximately 21 million veterans)

❖ Less than half of enrollees use the VA for regular care

# Homeless Veterans

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- ❖ Less likely to access VA healthcare services than housed counterparts
- ❖ Homeless veterans have an age-adjusted mortality 3 times higher than their housed peers (2014)

# Homelessness and Disability

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- ❖ Fifty-three percent of veterans live with disability
- ❖ Mental Health, Physical, Substance Abuse

# Health Issues

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- ❖ Homeless veterans are more likely to live with:
  - Major Depression and other co-occurring psychiatric diagnoses
  - Two or more chronic medical conditions
  - Hepatitis C/Cirrhosis
  - PTSD

# Veterans Choice Act

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- ❖ Signed into law in 2014
- ❖ Allows contracted Health Centers to serve some veterans
- ❖ Goal is to increase access to care
- ❖ Private sector cared paid for by VA
- ❖ Requires comprehensive, independent assessment of VHA care delivery and management

# Distinct Needs of Women Veterans

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- ❖ Are less likely to use VA healthcare services than male counterparts
- ❖ Experience of a male-oriented health program
- ❖ High rates of PTSD
- ❖ Forty percent of women veterans have children and 30,000 are single parents

# Military Sexual Trauma

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- ❖ At least 26% of women service members experience military sexual trauma (MST)
- ❖ MST is associated with increased risk of homelessness

# Women who served

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- ❖ 41,000 women served in the Gulf War
- ❖ 200,000 have served in OEF/OIF (post-911 forces)
- ❖ Number of female veterans to increase 17% in two decades

# Women Veterans

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- ❖ Veteran women and veteran families experienced 24% increase in homelessness
- ❖ Women comprise 7.2% of veteran population, 9.5% of veterans facing homelessness
- ❖ Women veterans are at four times greater risk of homelessness, with highest risk in OEF/OIF

# NYU Lutheran

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- ❖ In 2014 121 patients in NYU Lutheran's HCH Clinics identified as veterans

“Given the complexity surrounding VA benefits...barriers present an opportunity for providers to serve as partners and facilitators to help homeless veterans navigate this process and receive the proper care for which they are entitled.”

# The Bridge Veterans Services

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Kevin Fisher

# The Bridge



A nonprofit that assists vulnerable New  
Yorkers including the homeless

- ❖ Trauma-informed
  - ❖ Mental health integrated with Health services
  - ❖ Addiction services
  - ❖ Forensic program
  - ❖ Community case management
  - ❖ Urban Farm
  - ❖ Client-focused
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- ❖ Beds in development  
350
  - ❖ 2,300 clients annually
  - ❖ 850+ housed
  - ❖ 300 in Vocational
  - ❖ 25 Wellness program groups
  - ❖ 100 in Arts program

*“Report Finds Sharp  
Increase in Veterans  
Denied V.A. Benefits”*

By DAVE PHILIPPS

New York Times  
MARCH 30, 2016



- ❖ Joshua Bunn was in the bloodiest infantry battles in Afghanistan
- ❖ Lost more comrades than any other Marine battalion
- ❖ After deployment went AWOL, suffering suicidal thoughts and nightmares
- ❖ Less than honorable discharge
- ❖ As a consequence, the VA does not consider him a veteran
- ❖ Now working as part-time dishwasher

# Denied

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- ❖ “Former members of the military like Mr Bunn are being refused benefits at the highest rate since the system was created at the end of WWII”
- ❖ More than 125,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans (6.5% of all war veterans) have what are known as ‘bad paper’ discharges

# Left Behind

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- ❖ In local experience 30% to 45% are excluded from VA care
- ❖ A jigsaw puzzle to access needed care
- ❖ Feel “abandoned,” ‘left out’, “discriminated against,” “betrayed”
- ❖ Military “justice” has lifelong effects

# Denied VA Disability

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- ❖ Those denied VA Disability Compensation and Pension, compared to veterans granted benefits, have poor health, greater poverty, unemployment, social isolation, homelessness, and premature mortality

# Effects of ineligibility

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Veterans with ‘bad paper’ are more likely to commit suicide, be homeless, or be incarcerated than their peers.

# Bridge Veterans Services

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Director of Veterans Services hired in January, 2015

- Bridge initiative to reach out to veterans and coordinate housing, substance abuse, mental health, and other services
- Oversee Veterans Residences at the Bridge

# Funding Source

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- ❖ 4-year \$400,000 grant from the Oak Foundation
- ❖ Based in Geneva, Switzerland
- ❖ Oak Foundation commits resources to address issues of global, social and environmental concern, particularly those that have a major impact on the lives of the disadvantaged. With offices in Europe, Africa, India and North America, making grants to organizations in approximately 40 countries worldwide.

<http://oakfnd.org/>

# Defining ‘Veteran’

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Anyone who had discharge papers (DD214), regardless  
of length of service or discharge status

# Program Principles

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- ❖ Collaborative practice
- ❖ Build outreach network
- ❖ Chaplaincy model of service
- ❖ Every human story is a sacred text
- ❖ Open to all veterans

# Results to date

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Since February, 2015 we have served over 300 veterans.

# Supportive Housing

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- ❖ Collaboration with NYC Department of Homeless Services and Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, NYU Lutheran and other agencies
- ❖ On-site case management

# Bridge Gardens Veterans Residence, the Bronx

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# Requirements

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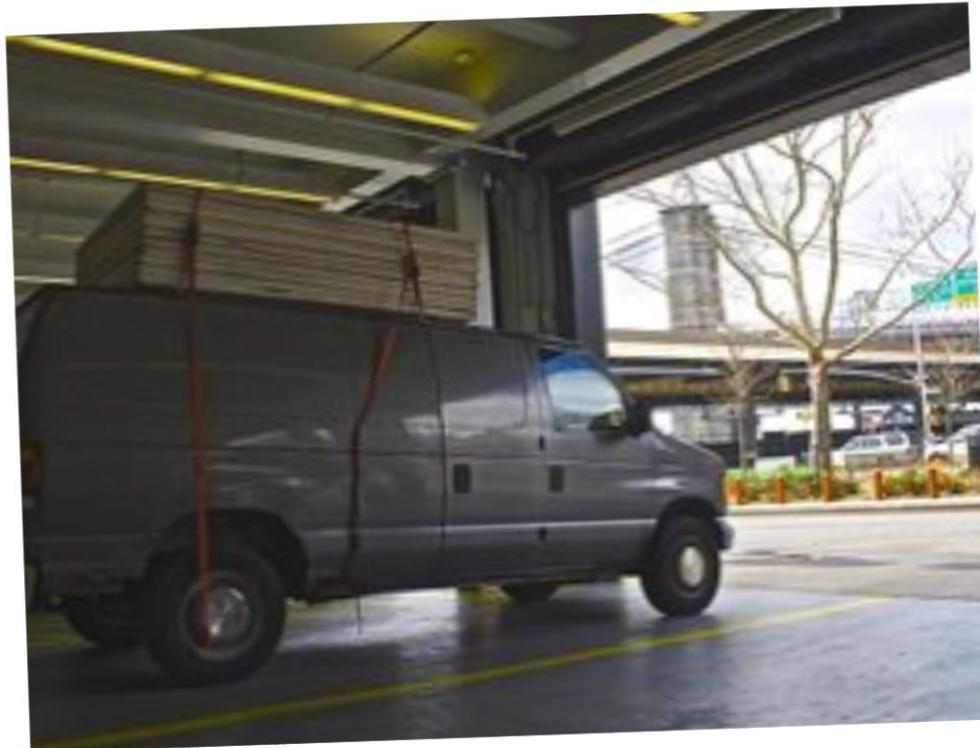
- ❖ Application for Supportive Housing
- ❖ Psychiatric evaluation, psychosocial assessment, PPD, health assessment

# Tim



# Jeffery





# The Van

Home and workplace



## Street Vendor

Air Force veteran, completed basic training only. Focuses on art work 'Idol Portraits" - grand scale portraits. Sells smaller prints and t-shirts.

Referred to NYU Lutheran Health for psychiatric and health evaluation to obtain supportive housing



## Spike and Me

Was living in a  $\frac{3}{4}$  house in Jamaica, Queens. Collaborated with NYU Lutheran for initial evaluations. Housed in studio apartment steps from Central Park West.

# Dan

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# Dan

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- ❖ USMC, 4-year tour
- ❖ Two combat tours in Iraq
- ❖ Honorable discharge
- ❖ Receives VA care, but complex issues require support outside VA system
- ❖ PTSD, TBI
- ❖ Legal involvement



# Intensive Care

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- ❖ TBI treatment
- ❖ Supportive housing
- ❖ Inpatient substance abuse
- ❖ Inpatient PTSD
- ❖ Veterans Court – diversion program in lieu of jail

# Stephen



# Stephen

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- ❖ USMC Four years
- ❖ Referred by Dr. Kenneth Marx, NYU Lutheran, Community Medicine, MD
- ❖ Two combat tours in Iraq
- ❖ Two Purple Hearts
- ❖ Dishonorable Discharge for striking Marine officer (who had made disparaging remarks about his best friend killed in combat)
- ❖ PTSD/TBI

# Takeaways from experience

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- ❖ Overall, VA provides excellent care to those who are eligible, particularly psychiatric care
- ❖ VA has taken major steps to improve access and service
- ❖ Some who are eligible do not apply because of perceived stigma, perceived difficulties dealing with 'the government'
- ❖ Reducing barriers caused by geography, paperwork, and stigma

# Addressing the Issues

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- ❖ Veterans may challenge discharge status
- ❖ Attorneys provide pro bono service, but wait to resolution is about four years
- ❖ Recent directives from DOD to review discharges based on behaviors that may have been related to PTSD

# The Challenge

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Less than one percent of the population is serving on active duty

Veteran community comprises approximately eight percent of the national population

Given that the burden of war is placed on so few for so long, how do we as a society help to shoulder that burden?

# NYC Department of Veterans Affairs

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- ❖ Led by Commissioner Loree Sutton, Brigadier General, psychiatrist
- ❖ Drive to create “VA” type services at the local level

# VA Homeless Services

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# VA Crisis Help

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- ❖ <https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/>
- ❖ Website offers online chat option
- ❖ Call 1-800-273-8255 press 1

# AmericaServes

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- ❖ <http://americaserves.org/>
- ❖ Growing, nationwide network of veteran provider agencies
- ❖ The Bridge Veterans Services member of NY Serves network

# National Coalition for Homeless Veterans

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<http://www.nchv.org/>

Serves as the primary liaison between the nation's care providers, Congress and the Executive Branch agencies charged with helping them succeed in their work. NCHV's advocacy has strengthened and increased funding for virtually every federal homeless veteran assistance program in existence today.

# National Service Officers

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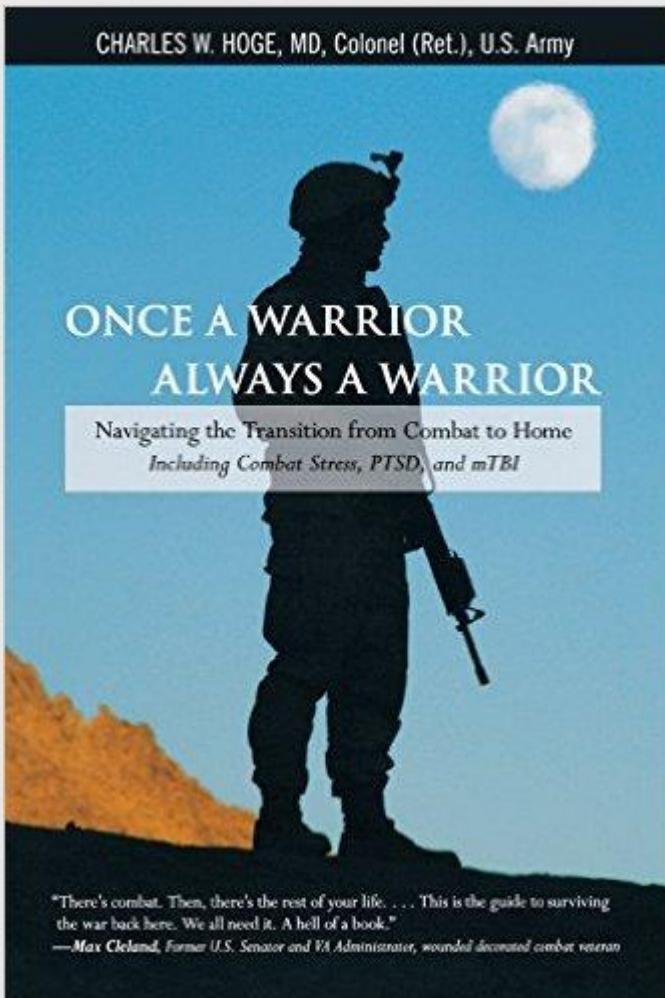


- ❖ Represent veterans in service-connected disability claims
- ❖ Disabled American Veterans
- ❖ American Legion
- ❖ Veterans of Foreign Wars

# Veterans Treatment Courts

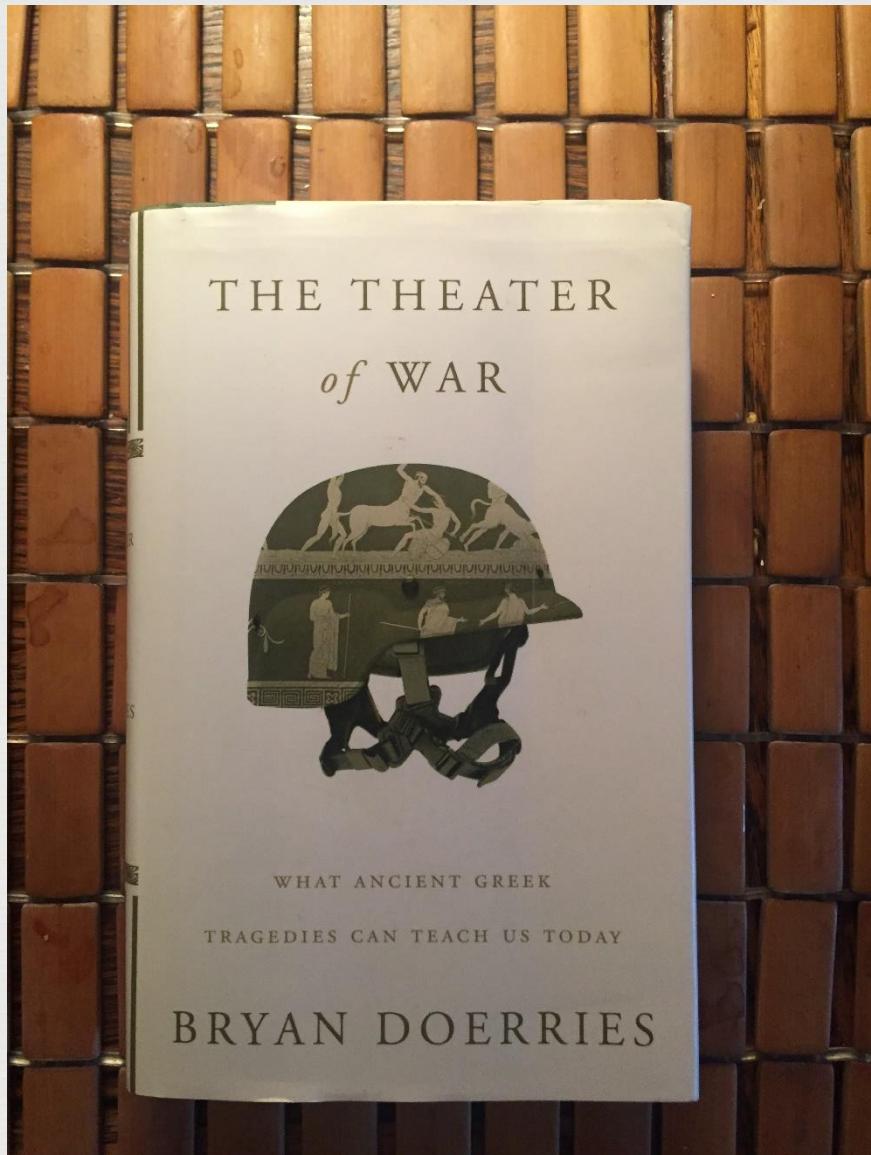
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- ❖ <http://www.justiceforvets.org/>
- ❖ Currently 170+ Veterans Treatment Courts
- ❖ Diverts veterans to treatment rather than incarceration



If you read but one book.....

Published 2010 Globe Pequot Press  
Very good, articulate, intended for veterans, their families, caregivers of all disciplines. Vignettes from veterans of their experiences, discussion of PTSD, TBI, and other issues, resource list



Published 2015  
Alfred A.Knopf

Greek tragedy gives insight into modern situation

Greek tragedy functioned by helping “those who'd been to war make meaning out of their fragmented memories AND (my emphasis) to evenly distribute the burden of what they brought back from battle upon the shoulders of ALL Athenians” (76).

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"...CLEARLY ONE OF THE MOST ORIGINAL AND MOST IMPORTANT SCHOLARLY WORKS TO HAVE EMERGED FROM THE VIETNAM WAR. BEYOND THAT, IT IS ALSO AN INTENSELY MOVING WORK, INTENSELY PASSIONATE, REACHING BACK THROUGH THE CENTURIES TO TOUCH AND HEAL."

—TOM O'BRIEN, AUTHOR OF *GONE AFTER CACCIATO AND THE THINGS THEY CARRIED*

# ACHILLES IN VIETNAM

COMBAT TRAUMA AND  
THE UNDOING OF CHARACTER



JONATHAN SHAY, M.D., PH.D.

Published 1994  
Scribner

Classic text on combat trauma

# Handouts available



Bibliography of books and scholarly articles,  
resource list, brochures, pamphlets