

NCHV

Newsletter of the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans

2016 NCHV ANNUAL
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SAVE THE DATE: JUNE 1-3, 2016

This year's NCHV Annual Conference will take place at the Grand Hyatt in Washington, D.C. Hundreds of attendees from across the country will converge as we set the new precedent for a new era beyond the Five-Year Plan.



FORT COLLINS HOUSING AUTHORITY MAKING NEW WAYS TO HOUSE VETS

Ending veteran homelessness in any community takes creativity, collaboration, and a shared sense of urgency across your entire network of partners in these efforts. Your local Public Housing Authority (PHA) can be a great resource, and last issue we featured some things the Winnebago Housing Authority in Illinois was doing to house veterans in that area, including the process of opening a new drop-in center for veterans.

The Fort Collins Housing Authority (FCHA) in Colorado is another outstanding example of finding ways to work in a tight rental market to move closer toward the city's goal of ending veteran homelessness.

Michele Christensen, FCHA's Director of Program Development, explained that as rental rates began to rise in Larimer County, there were few rental vacancies at any price in the area, let alone at rates that would work for veterans with HUD-VASH vouchers.

Looking to find ways to continue to serve homeless veterans even in these challenging conditions, FCHA has made two breakthroughs to help house veterans.

"When the rental market in Larimer County began tightening up ... FCHA submitted a request to HUD Headquarters to project-base 15 HUD-VASH vouchers at its proposed new permanent supportive housing development, Redtail Ponds," explained Christensen. "With the support of the HUD Regional Director Rick Garcia, and the VA Network Homeless Coordinator Rich DeBlasio, HUD Headquarters approved [the proposal]."

The approval had a big impact: "It has allowed FCHA to have 12 percent of its current allotment of HUD-VASH vouchers covered by specific units that don't require a homeless veteran to go out and find a scarce one bedroom unit on their own in the community," Christensen said. "It has also been beneficial for the formerly homeless veterans living at Redtail Ponds to have access to all of the supportive services available at the property."

Another major breakthrough involved FCHA receiving a waiver from HUD for an exception payment standard for one- and two-bedroom units for the VASH program. "The payment standard is set at 120 percent of the 50th percentile rents for Larimer County," Christensen said. The Region 8 HUD Field Office was actively exploring ways to raise lease-up rates for the HUD-VASH program in the area, but with a competitive rental market it was a challenge to find solutions.

"Our CEO/Executive Director, Julie Brewen, asked that they support our request for a payment standard waiver due to local market conditions, low utilization rates, long lease-up

times, and concern for the health and safety of veterans still on the street," said Christensen. FCHA was able to get approval from HUD Headquarters for the exception payment standard with the support of the local Field Office.

"Since approval of the exception payment standard our utilization rate has increased to 90 percent. Veterans have had more units to choose from using the new payment standard, and housed veterans have been able to stay in their units even with significant rent increase requests from their current landlords."

These are two exemplary instances of working with the right partners, and gaining support and backing to find workable solutions to hurdles holding back progress. With this type of collaboration happening across departments and organizations, FCHA has made significant progress in streamlining their processes to help homeless veterans get into permanent housing.

Another recent development furthering progress in Fort Collins was the recent announcement that Mayor Wade Troxell signed on to the Mayor's Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness. Mayor Troxell added Fort Collins to the hundreds of communities participating in the challenge in October 2015 – an important landmark for Fort Collins, expanding collaboration and putting efforts under a microscope to make sure they are effective.

Working with the Department of Veterans Affairs, FCHA, Volunteers of America, and Homeward 2020, the mayor's office is seeking to better understand the needs of homeless veterans in Fort Collins. Local media coverage and City Council attention helped raise awareness of the effort, and the mayor's office now may assist in efforts including communication with potential landlords, providing letters of support to potential funders, and more fully supporting efforts already in place in Fort Collins.

Learn more about the Fort Collins Housing Authority at <http://fchousing.com/>.

Does your community or organization have a unique innovation or strategy to share? Contact Randy Brown at rbrown@nchv.org to be featured in the NCHV newsletter.