



## NEW ENGLAND CENTER FOR HOMELESS VETERANS

EDUCATION | SUPPORT | EMPLOYMENT | HOUSING

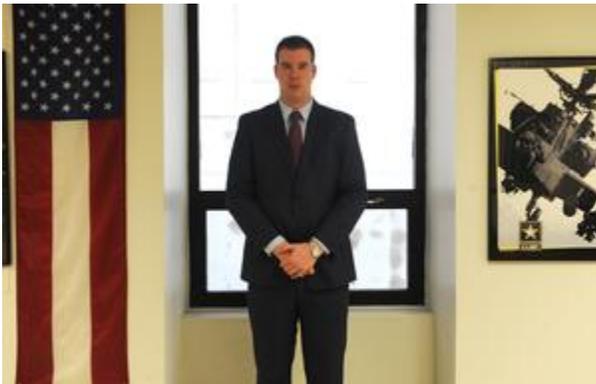
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# Gifts of Hope

## Job training program gives vets second chance

*“With demands for services continuing to rise, Wicked Local has designated the nonprofit as this year’s recipient of its annual Gifts of Hope fundraising campaign.”*

The fifth in a six part series of reports being published in December in local papers throughout Greater Boston, Gatehouse Media and [www.wickedlocal.com](http://www.wickedlocal.com) selected the NECHV as the 2012 recipient for the “Gifts of Hope” features.



Army veteran Ed Jennings, one of the New England Center for Homeless Veterans' clients, Dec. 17, 2012.

**WICKED LOCAL** NEWTON  
WITH NEWS FROM THE NEWTON TAB

**By Lee V. Gaines**  
Wicked Local  
Dec 26, 2012

Boston — For many, a bad breakup could mean a broken heart, and perhaps a few sleepless nights. But for Iraq and Afghanistan War veteran Ed Jennings, it meant homelessness.

Jennings, a former Airborne Ranger in the U.S. Army, left the Quincy home he shared with his girlfriend after an ugly breakup in May 2012.

With nowhere to go, Jennings — a decorated vet who completed two tours in Iraq and two in Afghanistan between 2004 and 2008 — made his

way to Boston and the New England Center for Homeless Veterans.

The center has provided Jennings with lodging since his breakup, but more than that, he said the center’s Veterans Training School, Information Resource Center and employment program has provided him a way to further his own career ambitions and teach other veterans in need of job training.

Most recently a buyer and global commodity manager at Fusion Trade, based in Andover, Jennings has had to leave his job because the company plans to relocate to New Hampshire, he said.

“I don’t want to relocate,” Jennings said, because it would be too far away from the VA Medical Center in Jamaica Plain where he receives treatment for PTSD.

Jennings spends his time in the center’s Information Resource Center to search for housing, jobs and also finds time to teach other vets basic skills, like an introduction to computer basics class, in the training school.

“[Jennings] has been diligent in looking for work and for housing,” said Debby Weisen, co-founder, vice president and dean of the school. “He’s a real important component to the school. He continues to give back and make a name for himself.”

According to Weisen, the 300-500 vets enrolled in the school have varying needs when it comes to job training; some, like Jennings, are already highly skilled, while others need more help with basic skills.

The school, which was founded in 2005, is composed of three tracks, Weisen said. The first track, basic life skills, is aimed at homeless and at-risk vets, and includes courses like smart money management, introduction to computer basics and anger management classes.

The next track includes prevocational courses like advanced business skills, Photoshop software, website design and a business plan class.

Vocational level courses, the third track in the school, offers a security officer training course, a commercial driver’s license course and a course in the fundamentals of culinary arts.

Weisen said the job placement rate for graduates of the commercial driver’s license course is 90 percent, and 80 percent for the security officer’s training course. The culinary arts course, she said, offers a more basic training.

NECHV and the training school serve vets from all walks of life, wars and training backgrounds, Weisen said.

“You don’t know who will walk through the door,” she said. “But we try to have programs that meet them where they are at.”

In tandem with the NECHV’s training school, the center also offers an employment program, funded by the U.S. Department of Labor through the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program, which helps vets conduct job searches, and also assesses vets’ skills and ambitions as they come in to the program.



Chuck Santos, Information Resource Center Manager at the New England Center for Homeless Veterans, helps a veteran do an internet search to find housing,

Dec. 17, 2012.

Jennings said many vets returning to civilian life often have “grandiose ideas” about what they’d like to do now that they are no longer in the military. The program’s intake assessment takes those ideas and finds a practical fit, Weisen said.

Ultimately, she said, “you excel at what you want to do and what makes you happy.” Through events like veterans only career fairs and daily outreach to Boston area employers, Weisen said the program places about 80 out of 100 veterans assessed annually.

But the time it takes for a vet to find a job “varies wildly,” Weisen said.

“We’ve had vets find jobs as early as four to six weeks, and it can take as long as nine months to a year,” she said.

With help from the program, Jennings is still job searching.

“I’m hopeful I’ll find something in a production supervisor role to continue with my past background,” he said.

For now though, Jennings is thankful to have a roof over his head and the resources he needs to find employment.

“Without this program, the vets that come through the doors after I leave wouldn’t stand a chance,” he said.

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## **How you can help**

You can donate money to the New England Center for Homeless Veterans.

Send a check or make an online donation. Check may be mailed to the New England Center for Homeless Veterans, 17 Court St., Boston, MA 02108 ATTN: Gifts of Hope. Or visit [www.nechv.org](http://www.nechv.org) or call 617-371-1882.