



NEW ENGLAND CENTER  
FOR HOMELESS VETERANS

EDUCATION | SUPPORT | EMPLOYMENT | HOUSING

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## Gifts of Hope Vet center looks ahead to future goals, challenges

*"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 sixth 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.

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**By Wei-Huan Chen**  
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Boston — Shortly after coming home, the Army veteran was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and given a 60 percent disability rating from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

War's atrocities never fully left him as he struggled to readjust to civilian life.

"I'm always on alert, on edge. I don't find pleasure in a lot of things that I used to," said Jim, 26, who did not wish to reveal his last name for this story.

"It's hard for me to get to know anybody or make friends," he added.

He simply couldn't connect with people and made everyone around him nervous, he said, including the people living with him. His family, meanwhile, "has always been pretty messy." After being evicted twice for vaguely personal reasons, he began living out of his car.

That's when he found the New England Center for Homeless Veterans, a nonprofit shelter and resource center located at 17 Court St. in Boston, where he has been staying for the past three months.

"I really appreciate they give me a bed to sleep in. That's all I came here wanting and I got it," said Jim. Currently a theater student at Suffolk University, he's working on seeing psychiatrists to improve his demeanor. The nightmares, depression and social anxiety haven't lessened since 2009, and in many ways he feels "stuck," said Jim.

But having a roof over his head was a first, but an essential step, toward recovery.

### **Future goals**

Members at the Center said money raised from the 2012 Wicked Local Gifts of Hope campaign will go toward services that help veterans like Jim.

Jim represents a growing group of twentysomethings from deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan for which the organization hopes to better tailor their services. The organization has seen an influx of post-911 veterans, serving 170 of them in the 2012 fiscal year, said NECHV President Andrew McCawley. Veterans like Jim, he said, face many challenges when they come back home.

"Younger veterans are finding themselves facing homelessness faster than previous generations," he said.

Giving these "post-911" veterans the shelter, food, treatment and job skills they need is one of the Center's many future goals.

Another emerging group within the veteran community, for example, is women, and that's why the Center plans to add entire floor consisting of 11 rooms for women by sometime in 2014, said McCawley. The organization currently houses 350 homeless veterans a night, with 16 of its rooms designated for women.

"Women are the fastest growing subpopulation within veterans," said McCawley. "It's an underserved population, which is why creating a specific floor for women is among our key initiatives."

Aside from understanding the needs of younger vets, the NECHV also wants to keep up with the evolving challenges of older veterans as they age, said McCawley.

"It's not only anticipating the needs of the current cohort coming back, but to anticipate the needs of all veterans," he said.

Finally, the Center's most ambitious goal is to help the nation end veteran homelessness by 2015. The Obama administration has indicated a goal to get all veterans in the U.S. off the streets through the help of federal and state agencies, resource centers and nonprofit organizations like the NECHV.

"I think there should be no other mission," said McCawley.

NECHV is doing its part through on-site housing, free meals, career counseling, clinical services and outreach and prevention programs. Since January 2011, the number of homeless

veterans in Massachusetts has decreased by 21 percent, which is two times more significant a reduction than the national average.

Eventually, the Center could shift some of its focus from providing temporary shelter to tackling the deeper issues that lead to homelessness, said McCawley.

"It's about being ahead of the curve," said Director of Community Affairs Stephen Cunniff.

"We want to be able to move to prevention," said McCawley. "We don't want to wait for a veteran to have to live on the streets for months, years, decades, and then find us. We want to be proactive at reaching folks and understanding those paths to homelessness. That's achievable, and it's the only goal we should have."

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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.