



Testimony of Terrance R. Holliday, Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs
before City Council concerning Oversight – Services Available for Veterans After Leaving the Armed
Services to Assist Them in Transitioning to Civilian Life.

Good morning Chairman Eugene and members of the NYC Council Veterans Committee. My name is Terrance Holliday, and I am the Commissioner for the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs. With me today is MOVA's Military Liaison & Service Coordinator Ms. Latisha Lemott. Thank you for the opportunity to come before you to discuss services available to New York City veterans after leaving the Armed Services to assist them in transitioning to civilian life.

The Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs ("MOVA") was established by Local Law 53 in 1987 and advises the Mayor on issues and initiatives impacting the veteran and military community. MOVA works closely with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs (NYSDVA), City agencies, veterans' organizations, area military commanders, and other stakeholders to assist active service members, veterans, their area military commanders, dependents and survivors. MOVA is one of only a handful of city-level veterans' offices in the United States.

The veteran community in New York City is extremely diverse and complex with over 207,000 veterans living within the five boroughs. The veteran community consists of those who served during World War II, the Korean and Vietnam wars, Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield, Iraqi Freedom as well as the current conflict in Afghanistan. Each veteran has concerns and issues unique to their particular experience. The current combat operations in Afghanistan and those concluded in December in Iraq witnessed the largest mobilization of United States military reserve forces since World War II. The New York National Guard and the reserve units located in the Greater New York Metropolitan area will present the demand for "reintegration support".

Reintegration is a process that is not always easy or natural. It is a process that requires time for the deployed military member to adapt to a different pace of life. The member needs to readjust from the high intensity demands and rigors of deployment, family separation and combat engagements. Likewise, the families and employers of the returning veterans have to make reciprocal adjustments.

Reintegration for the veteran-family must begin long before a service member bids his or her family farewell on the tarmac or the dock. It should start during the pre-deployment phase and be coupled with the established Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program. This program is designed to provide deploying service members and families a robust support network of information and services available from county, state, federal and private outreach organization upon their return home. The Family Support Centers sponsor Yellow Ribbon programs. Employment and work-place return are significant issues addressed at these events.

Yellow Ribbon events are held at 30 and 60 day intervals subsequent to a unit's return to home station. Family Support Programs also host "pre-deployment" events. Members are required to attend and encouraged to bring their families. These events are held at non-military, family friendly venues. In 2011 MOVA participated in Yellow Ribbon events hosted by the New York National Guard, the United States Naval Reserve and the United States Marine Corps. Approximately 1,500 New York City residents and their families were served. The next Yellow Ribbon events are scheduled for June 2012.

MOVA's presence at these events is to inform and reassure New York City residents of the services available and the constituent services role that MOVA is prepared to fill. The response by members and families has been positive.

MOVA undertakes projects to bring awareness of benefits and services available to the new generation of veterans returning from deployments from combat and hostile areas of the world. MOVA partners with City agencies, non-profit and not-for-profit organizations to promote services available to veterans in the employment, housing, mental health and education fields, and to facilitate civilian transition.

MOVA's partnership with America Works has been successful in assisting veterans with employment training, housing for homeless veterans and access to public benefits. America Works has placed over 400 veterans into employment since their program began in December 2008. On January 19,

2012, MOVA hosted an America Works Job Fair at Veterans Memorial Hall that was attended by more than 550 veterans and as well as a number of vendors.

The MOVA website provides information about Federal, State and City benefits, special events, job opportunities, and other information relevant to the veterans' community. As a constituent services agency, MOVA provides advocacy, referral and short-term case management services in an effort to ensure that veterans – including those who choose not to access VA services, are not aware of their VA entitlements, or are ineligible to receive VA benefits – have access to NYC health, mental health and social services.

Veterans may reach MOVA directly via the NYC.gov website, phone or mail and are also referred by 311 and other veterans service providers. MOVA has an active and informative social media presence on Facebook and Twitter with accounts that are updated frequently.

MOVA often operates as a conduit and coordinator for veterans in need of the many services provided throughout the City. For instance, MOVA works very closely with the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) in creating short-term and permanent housing specifically tailored for the unique needs of veterans and their families. DHS in partnership with the Veterans Administration established a Multi-Service Center (MSC) at the Project TORCH facility in Brooklyn. At this one location, veterans can access their federal benefits, obtain homeless services and receive an education and employment assessment to ascertain whether adult education is needed and to determine skill level for job placement.

In operation since May 2008, the MSC has proudly served homeless veterans and assisted them to move into permanent housing with federal HUD/VASH Section 8 vouchers, which pair rental subsidies with VA services. These come from single adult, family, and adult-family facilities or are connected to Street Outreach. Veterans not eligible, or found inappropriate for HUD/VASH, are referred to Veterans Supportive Housing as well as Advantage or other appropriate housing. Veterans are able to avail themselves of a host of HRA services through the HRA center located on-site at the MWR.

Similarly, development of veterans-only short-term housing is now complete, with the opening of a new facility, by the Doe Fund Veterans Program. Veterans at this facility spend 9-12 months in a supervised, residential work program, and receive life skills and job preparation classes, on-site adult education, GED preparation and computer classes. Many of the veterans in the program also are in the Doe Fund's Ready, Willing and Able program, which focuses on job training and placement into

permanent housing. These programs are designed to provide housing, but in providing these social services veterans are receiving much needed job training and placement, thus ensuring that the cycle of veteran homelessness ends.

New York City veterans may have Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury and Military Sexual Assault diagnosis which will require mental health services to facilitate their transition to normalcy. MOVA refers veterans to mental and medical healthcare providers to address these issues: the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and The Rosen Family Wellness Center for Law Enforcement, Military Personnel and their families. The Weill-Cornell Medical College coordinates a DOD funded program to work with service members suffering from PTSD. Weill-Cornell developed telemedicine treatment providing services to members in remote areas of the state and country.

Some of the many New York City resources available to veterans are:

- Veterans Courts in Queens and Kings County helping veterans survive non-violent criminal charges
- City Bar Justice Center free legal assistance for qualified veterans needing assistance with VA benefits claims.
- Family Justice Centers providing legal assistance to veterans with foreclosures and other legal issues.
- City University New York - CUNY
- Human Resources Administration/One shot deal/food stamps and Medicaid
- Department of Homeless Service/Project Torch
- Small Business Services/Workforce1
- Consumer Affairs/Vendors License
- DCAS/Extended Military Buy Back
- Department of Finance/Property Tax Exemption
- Motor Vehicle/Disable Parking permits and registration fee waivers (if qualified)
- Uniformed Service's Employment and Reemployment Act (USERRA) – US Department of Labor protections for returning service members.

It is important to note that addressing the issues associated with reintegration, such as potential unemployment, should begin when a member of the military receives a deployment notification. The

earlier the military member begins to think about deployment and redeployment, the smoother the transition from military to civilian life will be for the individual, the family and the society to which he or she returns. With the approval of local command authority, updates of available benefits can be provided as part of the ancillary training received and coordinated by the unit. I will be meeting periodically with local commanders to discuss these issues.

I look forward to a continued dialogue with Veterans organizations, the military community and their families in ensuring that they receive the services and respect they have earned. I look forward to working with you in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Heroes to Heroes Foundation – Presented by Judy I. Schaffer, Founder and President

Thank you to the members of the committee for your concern about and actions on behalf of our veterans and my special thanks to you Councilman Gentile who has been a friend of Heroes to Heroes from our the beginning.

History

The idea for the Heroes to Heroes Foundation began in December 2009. As part of a group that included Councilman Gentile, I traveled to Washington, DC to visit our soldiers in Walter Reed Army Medical Center. During this visit we delivered holiday gifts and necessities to the soldiers and their families. We had the opportunity to spend time with soldiers from all over the country and their parents. During the visit I kept hearing the same line from the soldiers “I want to get back to my unit”. I saw the sad reactions of the families and knew that as an American, I had to do something. Also, I was raised in a family with two generations of veterans (World War I, World War II, and Korea). My father, who spent almost four years serving our country in Europe during World War II and in later years during his retirement, volunteered to help disabled veterans, perished as the result of a car accident on his way to a Jewish War Veterans meeting. It is in my blood to give back to our veterans.

After the visit with our soldiers and their families, the idea for Heroes to Heroes was born. At first I researched the various Veterans organizations with the idea of volunteering and incorporating my ideas with an existing organization. It was on a plane to Israel where I spoke with the Israeli sitting next to me when most of the program came together. We discussed programs in Israel for wounded veterans. I took copious notes and, upon landing, began my research. The Heroes to Heroes Foundation is a result of that research and the open arms of so many who are happy to help our most vulnerable veterans.

Who We Are

The Heroes to Heroes’ mission is to give our veterans on 100% disability due to PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder), a lifeline and a chance to improve their lives. Our goal is to make sure they know that they matter.

We form a team of ten veterans from the same geographic area. The team is run by a coach – a veteran who has experience working with his or her peers. All team members commit to a one year program where they meet quarterly, support one another, and agree to use what they learn to help their fellow veterans. The coach works with the team individually and as a group.

The program begins with a ten day trip to Israel. Why? First, Israel has a citizen's army. Our first team of veterans were immediately comfortable with the population. Many opened up the first day when they felt understood by almost everyone they encountered. Second, Israel has recognized, studied, and worked with PTSD for both their veterans and civilian population (mainly children) for decades. Due to the size of the country, they are able to provide services that reach 100% of their population that suffer from PTSD. Since there is no central government program such as the VA, organizations created by and led by disabled veterans. Our veterans saw how wounded Israeli veterans created programs to help themselves to provide the basics, outside of a government system. Third, Israeli PTSD therapy includes a significant amount of physical therapy in the form of exercise. Our participants bicycled, swam, played tennis, went sailing, and took small hikes. Many had not had a significant amount of physical exercise since they returned from service and were proud of themselves for getting on a bicycle, taking a swim or going sailing. Fourth, due to the fact that Israel has a civilian army, our veterans learned how Israel uses military experience for civilian employment. They learned how accommodations are made for people with disabilities – including PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury. Finally, Israel provides spiritual opportunities that allow our veterans to explore their spiritual side as they visit holy sites of all major religions.

All teams travel with an Israeli team, staying together and meeting each evening to review the day and their individual goals. For some, goals are simple and basic. Others get inspired and return home to work on major projects. At the end of the ten day Israel journey, all participants are responsible for developing goals and working with their team to stick to those goals.

Our veterans were hosted in the Knesset, Israel's Parliament, by the Speaker of the Knesset, Reuven Rivlin, five Members of Knesset, and many of Israel's Generals and wounded veterans. They were overwhelmed and honored by the reception. They also met with the American Ambassador to Israel, Daniel Shapiro and were particularly interested in hearing military strategy from Israeli Generals who took the time to speak with them.

Our first team developed wonderful relationships with their Israeli and American counterparts. Aside from developing lifelong friendships, their Israeli friends are there when needed – due to the time difference – even in the middle of the night with ideas and words of support. Our most vulnerable no longer need to feel alone.

Results

The results of our first team are as follows:

1. One team member found full time employment with a Heroes to Heroes sponsor
2. Two team members secured funding to start nonprofits thanks to a Heroes to Heroes sponsor

3. Two team members are working on building a “kibbutz-like” community for veterans in South Dakota
4. One team member is starting a committee to build an organization to mimic Israel’s ‘Beit Halochem’, the “Home of the Warriors” in NYC.
5. Two team members have joined the Heroes to Heroes board to help other veterans have the experience that changed their lives.

Our Goal

All team members have connections with one another as well as their Israeli counterparts. Due to the time difference in Israel they now have a lifeline 24 hours a day.

The Heroes to Heroes Foundation’s goal is to have five teams per year participate in the program. Since we are looking for veterans who have ‘fallen through the cracks’ we are relying on contacts at the VA, the various military branches, the Department of Defense, and people like you to refer veterans. Our organization is funded largely through private donations. The Israeli organizations do not charge our veterans for participation in their programs.

The Heroes to Heroes Foundation brings a lifeline to those who are truly alone. It is hard to feel as if you matter when you are unable to work, unable to participate in activities with your peers, and uncomfortable leaving your home. The Heroes to Heroes Foundation opens a door to those most in need. Thank you for your time and support.

Heroes to Heroes: improving the lives of disabled vets ... now and in the future

Executive Summary:

There are tens of thousands of disabled veterans who have left the military after having returned home from Iraq and Afghanistan. Even though they may still have connections with their units, theirs can be a frustrating day-to-day existence, whether they are homebound and/or without a job. It is often difficult, if not impossible, for them to cope with life-changes caused by their physical or emotional wounds. They may have doubts about the validity of their service.

What happens in this regard to disabled vets in the United States does not happen in Israel. In Israel, military or national service is universal and mandatory. Israeli society honors military service. When disabled veterans of the IDF, the Israel Defense Force, return home, their family, friends, and neighbors accept and appreciate what they have done for the country. Vets, whether disabled or not, have an appreciation of their own role in the military and have the acceptance and support of the whole of Israeli society.

Heroes to Heroes proposes giving disabled American vets an opportunity to meet and link up with Israeli vets, whose military experience mirrors their own, but whose post-military experience is different. Heroes to Heroes will arrange for groups of ten to fifteen American veterans to travel to Israel, and connect with Israeli vets.

The two groups will travel together on a set itinerary that will take them throughout the country for meetings with Israeli military and business leaders, medical personnel, and educators. The most important element of the trip will be the attachments they form with their Israeli counterparts, the experiences they share and how they learn from each other.

To get the word out, to market the concept properly, Heroes to Heroes will develop materials, including a website, Facebook fan page, Twitter, blog, brochures, other materials potentially to include direct mail, e-blasts, public and media relations as needed. On the first mission to Israel, Heroes to Heroes will engage a professional videographer, who will produce a short video.

Heroes to Heroes will network and form connections with other organizations and entities who have interest in improving the quality of life of disabled veterans.

Vision:

Improve the quality of life for disabled American veterans; provide them with better access to self-acceptance and validation of service.

Mission:

Heroes to Heroes is dedicated to helping disabled veterans who have returned home from Iraq and Afghanistan, bridge the gap between their military experience and civilian life.

Strategies:

Heroes to Heroes will **connect** disabled American veterans with their peers in Israel.

Heroes to Heroes will **strengthen connections** between disabled vets and provide them with new and wider support systems to share their knowledge and teach what they know to others.

Tactics:

Provide all-expenses paid* ten-day trip to Israel, during which they will form a unit with disabled Israeli vets.

Upon their return from Israel, provide online chats, discussion groups, alumni events, and lectures to keep them connected, feeling part of something, and moving forward.

*Includes air, transfers, hotels, all touring, all breakfasts and various meals. No veteran will be turned down because of an inability to cover incidental and other expenses.

The Heroes to Heroes Board will:

1. Be responsible for overall policy, direction, and fundraising
2. Have a majority of seats held by veterans of the American Armed Services
3. Receive no compensation
4. Meet semi-annually

Judy Isaacson Schaffer, Founder

Judy has spent most of her career in the advertising and media industry. Her areas of expertise include advertising, planning, buying, sales, and sales management. As a media executive at CBS Radio, she managed sales teams and negotiated effective and efficient programs for her clients. At various advertising agencies she managed media planning and buying groups.

Judy's experience in the non-profit world includes:

Women's Political Caucus (Bergen County) – media relations

Teaneck Township Financial Advisory Board – Teaneck, NJ

Wounded Warrior Project – volunteer, fundraising

UJA Federation of Northern New Jersey – Women's Business & Professionals

Congregation Beth Aaron – Executive Board Member



Serving American Wounded Veterans, Now and in the Future

Mission: To help American disabled veterans who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan, bridge the gap between their military experience and civilian life.

Method: Heroes To Heroes Foundation provides the gift of a working trip to Israel for teams of our disabled veterans and the continuity of team support upon their return to the United States. The ten day trip to Israel for 10-15 veterans who will travel with 5 Israeli counterparts is designed to provide them with the following:

- *International Peer Support
- *Self confidence
- *Different perspectives on their service and transition
- *Employment Direction
- *Emotional support
- *Shared positive experiences
- *Individual goals and team support to meet those goals when they return to the United States
- *A team project to work on upon their return

Why Israel?

- Shared Values
- Shared war against terrorism
- Innovative veterans programs
- Positive feelings for the military
- Appreciation for our veterans and their contribution to the war against terror
- Holy and Tourist sites that are interesting, educational, and fun for people of all backgrounds.

Alumni Program:

- Quarterly in-person team support meetings
- Monthly online international team meetings (with Israeli counterparts involved)
- Informal online discussions
- Teams will work on group projects and individual goals and projects
- Business sponsors to guide them through employment and self-employment
- Alumni will have the opportunity to apply for positions with the Heroes To Heroes Foundation. Our goal is to have alumni be an integral part of our growth.



Sponsor a Veteran Program

- There are over 36,000 disabled veterans who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan. Most are having an extremely difficult transition to civilian life. The suicide rate is high. Depression, divorce, and emotional separation from family and friends are common.
 - Conquering the loneliness, isolation, misunderstanding, and challenges from their disabilities, requires help from many sources – help that you and your employees can give.
 - Our disabled veterans need opportunities, introductions and business/employment advice that no one can give better than business owners and their key employees.
 - Please sponsor one of our heroes. **Your support can save a life.**
-
- **Your sponsorship of a Heroes to Heroes Disabled Veteran provides he or she with:**
 - A ten day 'unit building' trip to Israel
 - Group support program upon their return
 - Peer-to-peer support system facilitated by Heroes To Heroes facilitator
 - Your company's expertise to help your sponsored veteran with introductions and business advice.
 - **Your company will receive:**
 - Logo on Heroes To Heroes Foundation website
 - Logo and Thank you in video presentation of trip
 - Goodwill both inside and outside of your business
 - A feeling of purpose and pride for all of your employees
- Sponsorship Donation - \$5,000 Per Veteran

P.O. BOX 2508

CINCINNATI, OH 45201

Date:

AUG 04 2010

HEROES TO HEROES FOUNDATION
C/O JUDY SCHAFER
750 LEXINGTON AVE
NEW YORK, NY 10022

Employer Identification Number:

27-2037965

DLN:

17053077309040

Contact Person:

DAVID A DOEKER

ID# 31168

Contact Telephone Number:

(877) 829-5500

Accounting Period Ending:

December 31

Public Charity Status:

170(b)(1)(A)(vi)

Form 990 Required:

Yes

Effective Date of Exemption:

March 4, 2010

Contribution Deductibility:

Yes

Addendum Applies:

No

Dear Applicant:

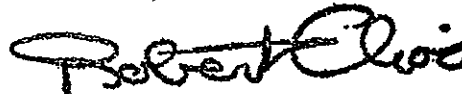
We are pleased to inform you that upon review of your application for tax exempt status we have determined that you are exempt from Federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Contributions to you are deductible under section 170 of the Code. You are also qualified to receive tax deductible bequests, devises, transfers or gifts under section 2055, 2106 or 2522 of the Code. Because this letter could help resolve any questions regarding your exempt status, you should keep it in your permanent records.

Organizations exempt under section 501(c)(3) of the Code are further classified as either public charities or private foundations. We determined that you are a public charity under the Code section(s) listed in the heading of this letter.

Please see enclosed Publication 4221-PC, Compliance Guide for 501(c)(3) Public Charities, for some helpful information about your responsibilities as an exempt organization.

We have sent a copy of this letter to your representative as indicated in your power of attorney.

Sincerely,



Robert Choi
Director, Exempt Organizations
Rulings and Agreements

Enclosure: Publication 4221-PC

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U.S. Vets Feeling At Home In Israel

Ten injured American soldiers get close-up look at how their IDF counterparts are treated.

Tuesday, October 11, 2011

Gabe Kahn

Special To The Jewish Week

Richard Sanchez, an explosives handler for the United States Navy, was in his second tour overseas in 2005 when the truck he was driving hit an improvised explosive device about 10 miles from the Iraqi border. He sustained a spinal cord injury from the roadside bomb and returned to the U.S. for surgery, keeping him out of a wheelchair but in constant pain.

"It's a pain [where you think] you'd rather be dead than go through it every day," Sanchez said.

The Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) he and so many other veterans suffer from wreaked havoc on his personal life. He was turned down for help at his local Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital in the Bronx because the Navy had yet to send him the correct paperwork. Sanchez retreated to his home where he stayed for the next five months, much of it in his bedroom, as he isolated himself from his wife and two sons. He and his wife are now separated and Sanchez says his oldest son won't speak to him.

Sanchez felt alone, unable to relate to people anymore. When he learned about a 10-day trip to Israel in September with other U.S. veterans who had been injured in Iraq or Afghanistan, he jumped at the opportunity to spend time with some kindred spirits. But while he expected to bond with his countrymen, he was surprised to find how well he connected with the Israelis he met.





"It's like we were brothers," Sanchez, 44, said. "Even though we were in different wars in different parts of the world, it felt like a family."

Sanchez participated in a program run by the Heroes to Heroes Foundation, an organization dedicated to helping U.S. service-disabled veterans make a smooth transition to civilian life, with cooperation from the America-Israel Friendship League (AIFL), which aims to strengthen the ties between the two countries. Leaving New York on Sept. 11, the group of 10 U.S. vets toured the holy sites, visited the Knesset and met Israeli veterans.

Of course, in Israel, veterans can be almost anyone.

"Many of [the American veterans] felt more comfortable in Israel than they did in the U.S. because of that connection," said Judy Schaffer, president of Heroes to Heroes, who accompanied the vets to Israel last month. "[The country is] almost 100 percent veteran."

The American soldiers traveled the country with Israeli veterans to develop a peer group to combat the constant fits of loneliness that Sanchez and so many others like him frequently encounter.

"They were facing injuries, facing a lot of isolation, and what they needed more than anything was that support group," Schaffer said.

The other major goal of the trip, which was privately funded, was for the Americans to see the many services Israel offers its veterans and, if possible, to bring some of those experiences back to the U.S.

Charles Hernandez, one of two participants to travel with a service dog, believes that the U.S. could learn a lot from how Israel treats its veterans.

"Israel's in a league by itself," said Hernandez, 48, a former paratrooper in the U.S. Army. "They take care of their people. You serve in combat over there, Israel will take care of you."

Like Sanchez, Hernandez, a New York native, suffered severe PTSD — among other physical injuries — during a tour in Iraq in 2004. He, too, is separated from his wife and has difficulty spending time with his son and two daughters. Hernandez said that since returning from duty, he no longer trusts people and is frequently looking to get into fights.

But though Hernandez has tried, he said that he's gotten almost no help from the VA. The trouble he's had in the U.S. securing veteran services made his experiences in Israel even more eye opening.

"You come to America, you've got to wait to get the GI Bill, and if you qualify you only qualify for 22 months," he said. "In Israel, they say, 'If you want to go to school, go to school. You've got children? We'll take care of your kids, too.'"

Sanchez agreed with Hernandez's assessment of the American policy toward veterans.

"A lot of bureaucracy and politics hold the VA medical system back," he said.

Even in a more relaxed environment, it wasn't always easy for the Americans. According to Harley Lippman, president of the AIFL who was also on the trip, at one point the team was walking in Jerusalem's Old City during an Arab wedding and shots were fired into the sky. The vets feared they were back in Iraq.

"One of them said he was looking to grab his gun. Another one said he was getting ready to jump under a table," said Lippman. "You see the stress of the PTSD on their faces. It was a very unsettling moment."

When the group visited Beit Halochem, a center for injured Israeli veterans, they were shocked at what they saw. As opposed to VA hospitals — one soldier remarked to Schaffer that at the VA people sit in wheelchairs and wait to die — there were people playing tennis and billiards, dancing and swimming in an Olympic-sized pool.

During the tour of the center, Hernandez said an Israeli veteran with one arm took out a ping-pong paddle and challenged him to a game. Though he said his initial instinct was to say, "Dude, you got one arm," he thought better of it and took the Israeli's offer to play. Within minutes, they were just two guys playing table tennis.

"We smiled at each other because there was a connection, veteran to veteran."

Sanchez said the size of the rehabilitative staff in Beit Halochem far outnumbered those in VA hospitals. The fact that the doctors were all veterans was the icing on the cake.

"We feel comfortable when we are among our peers," said Sanchez. "Here in the U.S. we have a lot of non-veterans in the medical staff, and they don't really understand us. They're quick to write a prescription, but they don't really sit down with us and talk to us."

Sanchez was particularly enamored with Beit Halochem's programs for the families of injured veterans. He said the U.S. ought to adopt this practice because "our families don't understand the perils we've gone through; maybe if they can go in the system with us they'd understand a lot more."

Since coming home in late September, the American soldiers have kept in touch with their Israeli counterparts. In order to go on the trip, each participant is required to commit to contacting another at least twice a month for the next year, and the group will meet up quarterly. Hernandez said that last week he received a Shanna Tova card for Rosh HaShanah.

Though socializing is still not easy for him, Sanchez, who is working toward his bachelor's degree at Berkley College, said that the experience has entered him into a brand-new network of friends.

“Once I walk out that door of my house, anywhere I go, to school, a shopping mall or wherever, I don’t see anyone around that I can relate to,” he said. “But [now] I can always pick up the phone and talk to somebody that’s closer to me here, or even [far] out there.”

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THE NEXT GREATEST GENERATION:

***“How Can I Be Entrusted to Defend the US Against
Terrorism in Iraq and Now I Cannot Be Entrusted to Hold A
Job in My Own Country” – Army Sgt. Scott Sheridan***

Testimony Before the New York City Council

By

Wesley Poriotis, Founder, Veterans Across America

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www.veteransacrossamerica.org

As the Founder of Veterans Across America, I would like to first acknowledge not only the commitment but the passion by Councilman Mathieu Eugene and his dedicated staff, David Suarez and Jonah Rogoff to enhancing the economic wellbeing of all our veterans in New York City. Councilman Eugene, as the Chairman of the City Council's Veterans Subcommittee, bears witness to the notion that his work on behalf of veterans is not just a job, but an emotional constant that has been unwavering to provide every opportunity to this cohort of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who will become America's "Next Greatest Generation". I too, like all of us in this City Council hearing, have an emotional inspiration behind having forged Veterans Across America's innovative services to reach a 65% job creation success record for veterans...Especially for the underserved enlisted servicemen and women who are often so tragically at, near, or below the poverty level. And, this unemployed and deeply underemployed status persists despite their diligently sending out hundreds and hundreds of resumes via job boards and internet portals to, all too often, a **depressing and numbing silence**. The brutal reality is very evident to those of us who are in hand-to-hand combat in the veteran employment trenches. People hire people. Computers do not! I am sure almost everyone in this room got a job somewhere in their career through a network, an introduction, a casual meeting, a friendship, or through a chance linkage at a social gathering. Based on this networking premise, Veterans Across America has formalized the "who you know" approach to job creation through Champion Mentoring. If you are an unemployed or underemployed veteran, VAA will pair you with a Champion Mentor – a business person who will aggressively unleash their personal and business networks built up over many years to – not teach you how to network – but to provide you with an actual network. Our best Champion Mentors are both veterans as well as non-veterans who want to give back and who intensively court their own networks on behalf of veteran job creation.

My own inspiration stems from a World War II veteran who was the first soldier to set foot on soil during the famous Anzio Beach invasion. From 1995 to 2008 he participated and was also an observer of my work with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, personal meetings with President Clinton, and four House and Senate Testimonies on the need to market military service aggressively to America's employers on innovative solutions to the massive problem of veteran chronic unemployment. "We GIs returned from overseas combat with limited education and few transferrable civilian skills. But, we had PSD degrees. We were Poor, Smart with a Deep desire to make it. Someone gave us a shot, we learned a business, we learned a trade, and we became what Tom Brokaw calls "The Greatest Generation"". Then this humble Greek Immigrant, proud to be an American soldier simply said, "Do the same thing for these kids – and create **America's Next Greatest Generation**". We WWII GIs like these young veterans had no business or professional network to stand on to get a job. It was "who you knew, or who could introduce you to someone they knew who could give you an opportunity". So, while it's nice for Veterans Across America to be intellectual and interact with all these top people, get back to basics and formalize job creation through "who you know" and the networks they can provide". So in September 2009 Veterans Across America launched its Champion Mentoring Program. Like 5,000 other WWII veterans who die weekly in our country, this WWII veteran died several weeks ago. But, he had the satisfaction of knowing that Veterans Across America created jobs for – as he called them – The Grunts – the Privates, Corporals, and Sergeants. Like Sergeant Scott Sheridan, who lived in a cargo container in Fallujah with three other soldiers at a Check Point with temperatures rising to 140-150 degrees and no running water or electricity. After long unemployment, this 22 year old Sergeant simply asked Veterans Across America, "How Can I Be Entrusted to Defend the US Against Terrorism in Iraq and Now I Cannot Be Entrusted to Hold A Job in My Own Country". We have been proud to help hundreds of other veterans like Scott. But, there are over 3,000 young African American and Latino veterans whose unemployment may reach levels of 70-80%. We need to embed Champion Mentoring Hubs in all the boroughs to reach them and provide Veterans Across America's services. We should do this knowing full well that these veterans, once embedded in the workforce, will, like their WWII counterparts from another era, become America's Next Greatest Generation.



AMERICAN VETERANS FOR EQUAL RIGHTS

AMERICAN VETERANS FOR EQUAL RIGHTS NEW YORK

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February 27, 2012

The Council of the City of New York Committee on Veterans
Re: Oversight: Services Available for Veterans After Leaving the
Armed Services to Assist Them in Transitioning to Civilian Life

Testimony by Denny Meyer
President, American Veterans For Equal Rights New York
National Veterans Affairs Officer, AVÉR

When the heroes of America's Greatest Generation returned home, victorious, from World War II and Korea, no effort was spared to enable them to transition to civilian life. Our nation was transformed as housing was built for them and they went to work building our interstate highway system from coast to coast. They married, moved to suburbia, started families, manufactured American made products, and became the American Middle Class living the good life that they had earned by fighting for freedom around the world.

Of course, back then, some American minorities were left out and not afforded equal benefits due to old biases and assumptions about their worth, even though they had fought as valiantly as any other Americans.

The Vietnam Era Veterans were the children of that WWII generation. Somehow, however, we were left to battle on our own to transition to life without war. The benefits, such as they were, were at least more equal than they had been a generation before.

And now the children and grandchildren of the Vietnam Era vets are returning from the hell of wars. Perhaps because we have not forgotten, we want them to have every opportunity to transition to as healthy and successful a life as possible after they stepped forward to serve our nation. And once again, there is a newly enfranchised minority not getting equal benefits, due to old biases and assumptions about their worth.

As of last year, patriotic gay and lesbian Americans can serve openly, proud to serve our nation. They can even marry their partners in states where that is legal, including here in New York. But, when it comes to equal benefits for service members and veterans, their families are left out without recognition. The Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) prevents the Department of Defense and the VA from providing the same family benefits that other veterans get.

The question is, when it comes to veterans' benefits provided by the State of New York and the City of New York, where discrimination in housing and employment are prohibited by law, is there a proactive program ensuring equal family benefits for our LGBT veterans?

Is it enough to assume that such benefits are available and provided equally? Or should legislation and program guidelines ensure equality by stipulating in writing that they should be provided and how that can be facilitated?

Finally, New York State and City elected officials are urged to advocate for equal benefits for all of our veterans. As the NY City Council was the first in the nation to advocate the end of Don't Ask Don't Tell in a 2005 Resolution, we now urge advocating the end of DOMA.

Meeting of Veterans Committee of NYC City Council

Military Families Speak Out Handout

February 26, 2012

Veteran After Care: How Can It Be Improved? Respectfully submitted, by MFSO & veterans Veterans from Recent Wars Responded to the above question with the following suggestions:

1. Reintegration back to society: Veterans are seeking identity. There ought to be a program for that because now many veterans are left to seek out help on their own or with elders. Many veterans are homeless for two years or more, partially due to being radicalized by experiences, and are consequently estranged from family. They feel distant, and would not feel comfortable with family. Suggestion: To have a (Counselor) Listener- in individual or group sessions for 3-5 sessions – once a week the first month after discharge, with the opportunity to extend. Followed by Family Counseling. Many veterans want to get far from VA, with its militaristic aura, as possible. Suggestion: Use Senior One Stop Centers in the community as ideal alternate place.
2. Career development counseling would be a Big Deal. Typical veteran spends time at Unemployment talking to the Veterans' Representative there. They do a little bit of that. Mainly they try to just help you find a job, not training. VA is humungous resource. Reinforcement needs to be given that VA is not part of military, it is a resource for us as veterans. VA had the aura of military and now am grateful for it. e.g., Farmer Veterans coalition
3. Daily stress reduction practices-meditation or yoga. Usually these communities give for free. Builds the internal mechanism to Regulate behavior and reactions. In military soldiers are trained to react, never trained not to react.
4. Diet and nutrition-what you eat affects ability to control impulses. Dramatically affects your life, learning how to cook foods that reduce stress. Resources could be: cooking classes or nutritional consultation.
5. Instead of Crisis intervention-hotline these veterans suggested having Veteran Support Groups bi-weekly crisis prevention instead of intervention. Weekly or bi-weekly struggles. Community formed such as, e.g. AA or NA. At Chicago's VA, they have a battlefield experienced leader of the PTSD department and it has made a tremendous difference. Also, they hire and train paraprofessional counselors who are veterans with war experience. They make about \$25,000 a year. The most successful programs for PTSD have been Vets . Vets, IVAW's program at Ft. Hood and other places. Within the DOD auspices, they sometimes ignore or cover up problems by stuffing soldiers with anti-depressants which sometimes are suicide-causing, and redeploy sick soldiers and avoid therapy. There may be a year long waiting list to get counseling. IAVA has counseled 20,000 in crisis intervention hotline with the motto: "Take some time to add the Veteran Crisis Line to your phone: 1 800 273 8255 press 1 or text 838255." Visit them online at <http://veteranscrisisline.net/> for confidential chat. Soldiersproject.org
6. Housing very important it could be coupled into Reintegration Session. Most vets are not told during discharge about unemployment insurance. Therefore, if they had some funds they could avoid homelessness by renting a room. Food stamps are also available to unemployed.
7. There should be family counseling available to wives, parents, loved ones including children from military families for secondary post traumatic stress disorder. The military families are now bearing the brunt of support for veterans and soldiers and are not trained to do so.
8. End the war in Afghanistan asap as most soldiers get battlefield trauma, mental ailments, are displaced from job market, housing, nexus, families and do not believe in this mission.

**New York City Council Hearing
February 27, 2012
Services Available for Veterans after Leaving the Armed Services
To Assist Them in Transitioning to Civilian Life**

Good afternoon. My name is Audrey Carr. I am the Director of Immigration and Programs at Legal Services NYC. I thank the Committee and other Council Members for hosting this hearing to address the needs of veterans adjusting to civilian life.

Legal Services NYC is the largest provider of free civil legal services for the poor in the country. With offices in every borough, our attorneys and advocates have long represented low-income veterans who have a variety of civil legal needs.

In October 2011 we created the Veterans Justice Project (VJP) to better serve this population, including military service members who would be returning to New York with the end of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Project aims to provide legal services to prevent homelessness and preserve economic security for veterans and their families.

Advocates in our Project partner with Veterans Healthcare and Social Services facilities to provide legal services in locations frequented by veterans. We screen clients to identify barriers to stable housing and economic security and gaps in social support services. We represent veterans, military service members and their families to prevent evictions and foreclosures, obtain federal rent subsidies and other federal and state benefits, avoid abusive debt collection, address child support challenges, and apply for naturalization. Through our city-wide hotline, veterans and their family members can be connected to the Legal Services offices in the borough where they live. To date, we have responded to over 170 calls both in English and Spanish and we have served more than 300 veterans, service members and their families. Of these, 42% required assistance with housing problems, 19% needed help in obtaining public assistance, and the rest required help with employment, consumer debt, family, and other problems.

As an example of the types of cases we see, we recently prevented the eviction of a 78 year old Korean War veteran when his landlord refused to accept rent payments from a charity willing to provide him with an advance. As Council Members know, under City law a landlord cannot discriminate against a renter based on his income source. Our advocate representing the client

wrote a demand letter to the landlord, who then accepted the veteran's rent payment provided by the charity.

In another instance, Legal Services represented a 64 year old disabled veteran who was scheduled for eviction. The veteran has a rent subsidy through the HUD VASH Section 8 program and allegedly owed less than \$700 in back rent. Unfortunately, due to his disability, the veteran could not get to court by 11 AM because he is unable to walk in the morning until his medication takes effect. Because he did not appear in court on time, the Court ordered a judgment and warrant of eviction. Our advocates successfully stayed the eviction and presented defenses demonstrating that the veteran does not owe the alleged arrears.

In addition to our direct service work, we provide training to both veterans and VA social service staff and health care providers to help them identify and address problems that can be solved without a lawyer.

We also work in partnership with others in the City's advocacy community. We collaborate with the City Bar Justice Center's Veterans Assistance Project and the Urban Justice Center by making cross-referrals on issues, including VA benefits and PTSD. Through our partnerships with the VA and our other service partners we receive regular referrals of veterans who need legal help.

Despite the availability of legal services through our Veterans Justice Project, there are many barriers that hinder veterans' transitions into civilian life. For instance, our advocates have repeatedly heard that housing options for female veterans are limited, as is housing for veterans with children. Income problems are also frequent, as low-income veterans and service members often have their bank accounts frozen or their wages garnished because of unaffordable debt. And finally, veterans, service members and their families often need to draft health care directives, wills, powers of attorney, and guardianship agreements, but there are no organizations that provide veterans with assistance of this type in the City.

Additional funding is needed to allow legal services providers to expand services to address these needs and the broad range of other legal problems faced by low-income veterans and their families.

We applaud the Committee for addressing the concerns of veterans as they adjust to civilian life. We are committed to working with the Committee and other programs to help those who have served our country make a smooth transition into civilian life.

Thank You

Audrey Carr
Director of Immigration and Programs
Legal Services NYC

Legal Services NYC Veterans Justice Project

Since the launch of the Veterans Justice Project in October 2011, Legal Services NYC (LSNYC) has successfully helped more than three hundred veterans, service members and their families address a variety of legal problems.

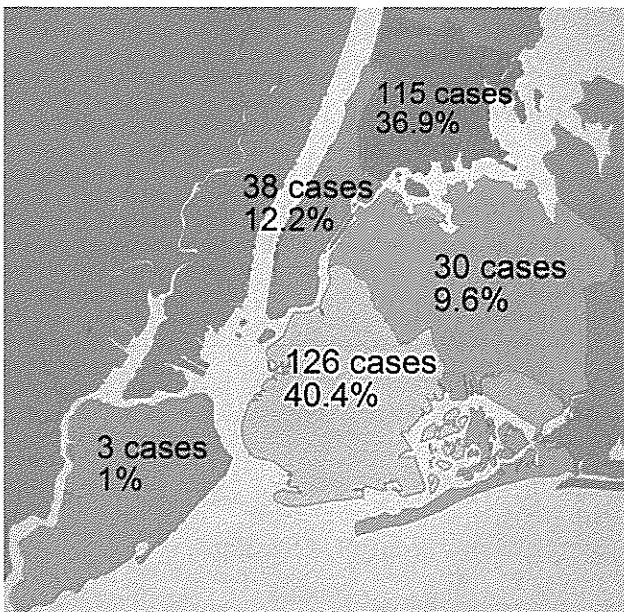
We have been successful in rapidly scaling up our services because we partner with Veterans Health Clinics and other providers of social and healthcare services for veterans in all five boroughs, allowing us to reach this population of men and women that have not historically sought legal help.



The VJP leverages LSNYC's nearly 45 years of experience to identify systemic barriers that prevent housing stability, economic security and basic survival, and challenge them through coordinated advocacy. Through the VJP, LSNYC is currently providing services to veterans in the following areas:

- HUD VASH Voucher issues
- Non-payment cases
- Foreclosure
- Unemployment
- Tax
- Collection/wage garnishment
- Child Support
- Public Assistance
- Wills and Powers of Attorney
- Divorce
- Custody
- Special Education
- Consumer
- Social Security/SSI

VJP Cases opened between May 1, 2011 and January 30, 2012: **312**



Cases by Problem Type

- Consumer** 27 cases, 8.7%
- Education** 3 cases, 1%
- Employment** 19 cases, 6.1%
- Family** 43 cases, 13.8%
- Health** 7 cases, 2.2%
- Housing** 133 cases, 42.6%
- Income Maintenance** 60 cases, 19.2%
- Immigration** 6 cases, 1.9%
- Wills/Estates** 4 cases, 1.3%
- Advance Directives/Powers of Att'y** 4 cases, 1.3%

Veterans Justice Project Hotline: (347) 592-2409

Focus On...

Veterans' Immigration Assistance

Legal Services NYC's Veterans Justice Project assists veterans who are lawful permanent residents in applying for naturalization or citizenship. Many veterans legally immigrated to the U.S. but have no evidence of their immigration status. Others came to this country as young children without immigration status, served in the military, and always believed that they were U.S. citizens until they were placed in removal proceedings. Additionally, lawful permanent veterans with criminal convictions are being deported from the country. The result of these deportations has been devastating—breaking up families, leaving children with one or no parents, and often removing the sole breadwinner from the home. The VJP seeks to help these individuals obtain U.S. citizenship through an expedited service created by the Department of Homeland Security that accelerates the processing of citizenship applications for veterans and military personnel. In addition, the Project assists the spouses and children of active-duty military personnel remain in the U.S. by applying for parole or deferred action.

VJP in Action

LSNYC currently represents a 64 year old disabled veteran who is scheduled for eviction. The veteran has a rent subsidy through the HUD VASH Section 8 program, and less than \$700 was alleged due. Prior to our involvement, the veteran failed to get to court by 11 a.m. one morning because of a serious medical condition. As a result, a judgment and warrant of eviction was ordered, and the court refused to vacate it. We have successfully stayed the eviction and presented defenses demonstrating that the veteran does not owe the alleged arrears. We are confident the case will be resolved in the veteran's favor.

Legal Services NYC Contacts

Legal Services NYC – Central

Raun Rasmussen, Executive Director
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Legal Services NYC – Bronx

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Bedford Stuyvesant Community Legal Services

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The Brooklyn Family Defense Project

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Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A

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Legal Services NYC – Brooklyn Branch

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Manhattan Legal Services

Peggy Earisman, Project Director
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Queens Legal Services

Jennifer Ching, Project Director
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Staten Island Legal Services

Nancy Goldhill, Project Director
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**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Denny MEYER

Address: POB 15060 KEN GARDENWAY 11415

I represent: AMERICAN VETERANS FOR EQUAL RIGHTS

Address: AS ABOVE

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/27/2012

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LATISHA REMOTT

Address: _____

I represent: MOVA

Address: 346 BROADWAY, NYC.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/27/2012

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: COMMISSIONER TERRANCE HOLCIDA

Address: 346 BROADWAY, NYC.

I represent: MOVA

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/27/12

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kloppke Horowitzka

Address: 60 York St New York NY

I represent: Military Families Speak Out

Address: 152 MAD NY NY 10016

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Wesley Porter

Address: _____

I represent: Veterans Across America

Address: 152 MAD NY NY 10016

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Judy Schaffer

Address: 261 Grayson Place, Teaneck, NJ

I represent: Heroes to Heroes Foundation

Address: 96 Linwood Plaza, Ft Lee, NJ

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/27/12

Name: Audrey Carr Legal Services (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 40 Worth

I represent: Legal Services

Address: 40 Worth NY NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: AUDREY CARR (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: LEGAL SERVICES NYC

I represent: 40 WORTH STREET, #606

Address: NEW YORK, NY 10013

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms