

How TAP works with the local VA Hospital to help end veteran homelessness

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October 31, 2018



Working Together to Serve Our Nation's Veterans

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When the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced the ambitious goal of ending veteran homelessness in 2009, the agency knew that it would need to do things differently to make the impact it wanted. Its new plan involved bringing more partners to the table to make the care veterans received truly comprehensive.

As part of the Salem VA Medical Center's efforts to help reach that goal, Katherine "Kate" Donaldson serves as its eyes and ears in central and western Virginia. As the outreach worker for the VA's Healthcare for Homeless Veterans program, Kate is not just the first point of contact for veterans living in homeless shelters in Roanoke, Lynchburg, and Staunton, but also a hub for dozens of supportive service programs for the veterans she works with.

Since she joined the Healthcare for Homeless Veterans program four years ago, she has worked closely with our Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program. She describes the working relationship with her SSVF counterpart and TAP employee Evelyn Jordan as not merely a point of contact, but as an extremely close and trusted colleague,

emphasizing that they have joint outreach sessions and rely on each other to help meet the needs of the hundreds of veterans they meet each year. “I know her program like the back of my hand and she knows my program like the back of hers, so if anyone comes into TAP and she thinks they’d be appropriate, she can give them all the information about my program that they need to know, and vice-versa.”

In addition to all her efforts to meet veterans firsthand and make sure they can get into the programs they need, Kate also oversees another program—Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Administration Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH)—that works in tandem with SSVF to help end veteran homelessness.

“HUD-VASH does not help with security or utility deposits, but SSVF is able to provide that,” she explained. “And then there are clients that SSVF sees that don’t have income, and won’t have it soon, so without HUD-VASH they would be sitting in shelter a very long time without being able to get housed.”

For the nation’s veterans facing homelessness, service providers collaborating isn’t a question of making efficient use of available resources—it’s the only way to start closing the service gaps that veterans can fall through.

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