



Veterans Matter National Summary

The lack of funding for security deposits and move-in costs is the most significant barrier to regaining housing nationwide from a systems level. This barrier to securing housing in most communities is even more of a challenge than the scarcity of available affordable housing units.

Veterans Matter is a systems level program leading an innovative collaboration with the VA homeless programs by providing a critical connection that integrates technology, housing and a national collaborative funding network of businesses, foundations, individuals, veterans service organizations, musicians and celebrities. This network provides immediate assistance - removing housing barriers for homeless veterans wherever there is perceived greatest need.

This evidence based strategy has proven to quickly help our heroes move from the streets into housing. As of today, Veterans Matter has housed over 1,800 veterans in 195 cities.

Removing the deposit barrier unlocks and magnifies the impact/value of the intervention strategy by facilitating opportunity for immediate connection to additional services through Veterans Matter, the VA social and employment workers nationwide, while leveraging the capacity and resources of the local community collaborators. In military terms, Veterans Matter clears the landing zone for the veteran, allowing partners and community collaborators to provide needed support. Using this model, research shows that every dollar Veterans Matter uses to house veterans unlocks \$100 in additional leveraged services to each now-housed veteran.

Veterans Matter prioritized creating a systems level on-line cloud-based response capable of scalability that did not duplicate efforts, but would instead leverage all community level resources and relationships first. This allows Veterans Matter to work at a systems level nationwide, filling gaps and removing barriers wherever the need is greatest, so no veteran “falls through the cracks.”

In other words, Veterans Matter does not desire to become a program that just helps homeless veterans, we will remain an efficient, niche focused program identifying and helping the homeless veterans who need us most.

Background

Veterans Matter is a program of 1Matters.org, the Toledo, OH, non-profit sparked and supported by singer John Mellencamp and others in the music industry. 1Matters creates and funds the startup of new local and regional initiatives to move people to financial and domestic autonomy. Veterans Matter is the organization’s first national program and has organically grown to house over 1,800 veterans in 17 states.

Using business logic, community collaboration leverage and technology, 1Matters.org/Veterans Matter uses solid outcome metrics and accountability structure that allows us to operate at maximum efficiency with admin costs for 2016 of just 8%.



The Need

[The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\) estimates](http://www.hud.gov/press/20150811) that there are 39,725 homeless veterans living in their cars, on the streets, and in shelters across the United States. According to the VA, it is known fact that veterans are homeless longer and at higher rates than their non-veteran counterparts. This is directly related to: pride, untreated mental health issues (including substance use disorder and post-traumatic stress syndrome), undiagnosed and untreated traumatic brain injury, unemployment, and barriers to transitioning back to civilian life (http://nchv.org/index.php/news/media/background_and_statistics/#facts).

Providing chronically homeless veterans with permanent housing is facilitated through the HUD-VASH program. HUD provides rental assistance through public housing authorities and vouchers for privately owned housing to veterans who are eligible for VA health care services and are experiencing homelessness. VA social workers provide and connect these veterans with support services such as healthcare, mental health treatment, and substance use counseling to help in their recovery process and their ability to maintain housing in the community (<http://www.va.gov/homeless/housing.asp>).

According to HUD-VASH Best Practices working document, “Hands down, the most common obstacle faced by veterans during the lease-up process as described by HUD-VASH sites is a lack of funds for security deposits and other move-in costs.” (<https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=VASH-BestPractices.pdf>)

Priorities

Our focus now is to expand our National Collaborative Funding Network and raise new funds to:

- 1) **Scale up to serve areas of high veteran homelessness.** We are collaborating with the VA to identify additional Areas of Operation where these critical rental deposits are in greatest need nationwide. Once housed, community collaborators work with the VA and Veterans Matter to provide needed resources to return veterans to stable housing, self-sufficiency, and financial stability.
- 2) **Scale system-wide our new Training and Re-Employment Program (TREP).** This demonstration project in partnership with the VA homeless veterans employment programs, integrates our same systems technology, housing, and national collaborative funding network to assist (now formerly) homeless veterans who have soft or moderate barriers preventing them from becoming employed. Again, we will target serving the veterans who need us most.

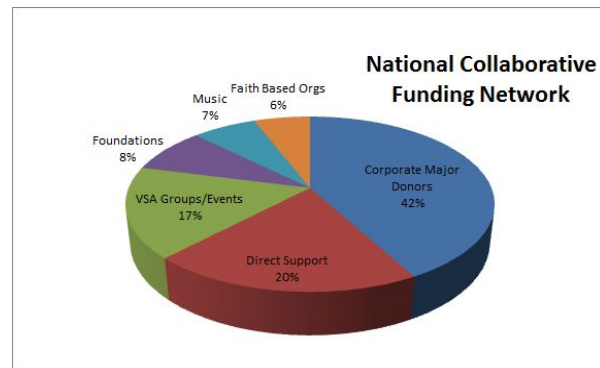
Veterans Matter and the VA Secretary have recently signed a Memorandum of Agreement to partner in order to execute these priorities.

Veterans Matter System Scalability

Veterans Matter created cloud-based delivery system technology to be scalable to help house veterans in Houston, TX. We now use this technology, and our strong partnership with VA's homeless coordinators throughout the U.S., to scale immediately to any funded geographic Areas of Operation. We literally have the capability, and have already housed waiting veterans in Houston, TX and Seattle, WA the very same day we obtained funding commitments.

Our National Collaborative Funding Network includes support from foundations, corporations, veterans service organizations, faith-based organizations, direct support from individuals, and a growing cadre of celebrities and musicians. Over 20 artists, writers, and celebrities are helping us raise money and awareness.

(<http://veteransmatter.org/celebrity/>)



To date this funding network has raised \$1.3 million, allowing us to house over 1,800 veterans in 17 states.

Accidental Innovation

Veterans Matter was created to house 35 local, Toledo, OH area veterans. Founder Ken Leslie created a fax-based referral system suitable to the scale of need, and then returned to his day job as CEO of an executive search firm he started in 1997, processing referrals as they came in.

At the urging of Dusty Hill of ZZ Top and his wife Chuck, who wished to help house Houston veterans, Ken created and refined the online cloud-based system to allow the Houston based HUD-VASH social workers to submit referrals with immediate approval of all conforming referrals. This group has now housed over 700 Texas veterans.

We scaled the program to Indiana and Michigan when John Mellencamp and Mitch Albom wished to do the same and became the chair persons for their home states. Indiana has now housed over 200 veterans. With funds donated by Mitch Albom and First Nation Jordan Reses, and funds raised by Katy Perry and Kid Rock, Michigan has now housed 350 veterans.

As the sphere of funding advocates, celebrities, veterans service organizations, corporations, foundations and Americans who just care about homeless veterans increased, state by state we scaled based on funding capacity. At the end of 2015, Ken closed his executive search firm to work to help house every veteran still living on the streets of our nation.

Veterans Matter Best Practice Evidence Based Success

Steps to Getting Veterans Housed:

1. The VA homeless outreach coordinators identify veterans who are homeless and who qualify for the Housing and Urban Development – VA Supported Housing program (HUD-VASH) long term housing choice voucher program.
2. Once the VA social workers and the veteran identify potential housing, the social worker obtains a housing voucher from the local housing authority.
3. Only needing a deposit to move in, currently the veterans are referred to local programs or the federal Supported Services for Veteran Families program (SSVF). Depending on funding availability and a redundant process, securing the deposits can currently take an additional 30 – 60 days.
4. With long wait times, evidence supports the fact that during this time some at risk veterans can disappear and some landlords choose to rent to others rather than wait the required time.
5. Alternately, managing this housing process is our cloud-based referral system which allows the VA social worker to request the deposit at point of contact with both the landlord and veteran present to sign the lease. Our Veterans Matter Housing Advocate approves all qualifying referrals **within minutes** and immediately confirms via email generated to the landlord, veteran, and social worker directly. The check is mailed to the landlord the same day. Our Veterans Matter Housing Advocate collaborates with the landlord, VA staff, and community partners to facilitate the elimination of any additional barriers, if present.
6. Because of our strong community collaborations and the music industry's support and diverse funding streams, many landlords allow our confirmation email to serve as the actual deposit and will house the veteran or veteran family immediately, thereby reducing the time to obtaining housing from months to literally minutes.

Once housed, the VA social workers and community collaborators are able to connect the veteran and/or veteran family to needed services including food, household goods, medical, mental health, and employment assistance.

Veterans deemed eligible for employment but with unique needs or moderate barriers to employment are referred to our Training and Re-Employment Program (TREP) for assistance to overcome their particular barriers to employment with the goal of returning the veteran to self-sufficiency and financial stability.



About 1Matters Systems Level Development

Ken Leslie started the Toledo Tent City Stand-Down event in 1990. Today this annual weekend long “Festival of Compassion” serves as a community rallying point on the issue of homelessness for political, business and community leaders, and over 300+ volunteers. Over 900 guests are now served annually at the event.

In 2003, Ken also provided the start-up funding for the community’s Continuum of Care.

A chance visit by musician John Mellencamp to Tent City in 2007 resulted in Mr. Mellencamp being moved enough that he invited all the guests at Tent City to his show that night; 60 homeless individuals attended. One came back afterwards and said, “Ken, John talked to us from the stage, I guess I really do matter.” From this moment, 1Matters.org was born as a non-profit 501(c)3. Mr. Mellencamp has continued his support in a multitude of ways, even returning in 2016 to serve as Honorary Mayor of Tent City in Toledo, OH, and to kick off the Veterans Matter Walk.

From this, 1Matters.org evolved into a regional systems development initiative - identifying gaps in services and creating programs to fill those gaps including programs to address rural (Project Connect) and youth homelessness (Within). 1Matters created the Toledo Streets newspaper to fill an employment gap for those on the streets in Toledo, and replicated it by providing startup funding for the Ground Cover News in Ann Arbor and Thrive Detroit in the namesake city.

Veterans Matter is the first national systems level program of 1Matters. The second, Veterans Matter Training and Re-Employment Program (TREP) is currently in development.

In late 2016 Veterans Matter and the VA Secretary signed a Memorandum of Agreement in order to expand each of these system level programs.

About the Founder

Ken Leslie brings a 23 year history as CEO of a successful technology-based, national executive search firm and a 27 year history of philanthropy, community leadership, and advocacy for the homeless.

This background provides a deep understanding of the issues surrounding homelessness on the local and national level, as well as the business and technology acumen to create and execute non-profit programs with solid business plans, outcome metrics, and an accountability structure.

Having been homeless at one time himself, Ken’s background also brings inspiration to the homeless that Ken works directly with on the streets.