

AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY
DEPARTMENT OF ALABAMA

Veteran Affairs and Rehabilitation

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What is this program and why do we have it?

The Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation program promotes our mission to enhance the lives of veterans, military and their families. The Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Program and the 2014 – 2019 Centennial Strategic Plan: Our work to enhance the lives of veterans, military and their families provides our members opportunities to serve in volunteer leadership roles within their local Veterans Affairs hospital (Goal 3), which broadens our membership pool (Goal 1) among a target population and builds brand loyalty (Goal 5) with the veterans themselves.

What can you do?

- **Assist in Activities that help homeless veterans.**

- Give a helping hand to the Legion's homeless veteran coordinator in your department and off to assist that coordinator in responding to requests for assistance from homeless veterans or homeless veteran service providers.

- Crochet hats, scarves or mittens to be distributed to homeless veterans in your community.

- Coordinate with the American Legion's Family Support Network coordinators to find veterans and their families at risk of losing their homes or housing by helping with payments, rent , utility payments and etc.

- Host or volunteer at homeless veterans' stand downs, which is an event where homeless veterans receive free goods and services such as haircuts and medical exams.

- Contact homeless veteran emergency shelters in your community and identify the organization's needs

such as meal preparation and serving, clothes collection and distribution, assembly and delivery of hygiene kits and buddy baskets and by purchasing or securing household items or furniture.

- Reach out during projects mentioned above to provide him/her practical, social or moral support.

- Compile “blessing bags” to be given to your local police department or other agencies that deal with homeless veteran population.

- Create a “Tree of Warmth” by collecting scarves, mitten, hats and attaching them to a tree in a location the homeless frequent. Include a sign that says “Please take if needed”, “Free if needed” or something similar.

- **Support rehabilitation and healing of veterans.**

- Host fundraisers to help with the Department Veterans Retreat. Plan to volunteer to help with the weekend activities such as preparation of the Friday night meal, serving at the meal, helping with the planned activities.

- Help veterans by donating to The National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. This is a program that celebrates the artistic skills and accomplishments of Veterans receiving care at VA medical facilities around the country. The NVCA competition and festival inspire pride and a sense of achievement. They establish opportunities for development of new skills and recognize the progress and recoveries made through creative arts therapies.

- Offer arts, crafts and hobby projects at your Unit for veterans rehabilitation. Offer to donate supplies to a VA facility for their arts and craft projects.

- **Help The American Legion, State Department of Veterans Affairs and Chamber of Commerce promote job fairs for veterans and their families.**

- Take part in a veteran job fair by organizing or working at an informational table.

- Help implement a Legion Family-sponsored job fair in your community

- Volunteer for Habitat for Humanity, specifically if a house is built for a veteran or it is sponsored by The American Legion.

- Host an informational table at a local fair.

- Offer a local job fair at your post home.
- **Enroll Auxiliary members as VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) volunteers at VA health care facilities.**
- If you live near a VA facility, become a regular VAVS volunteer and invite others to become VAVS volunteers with you.
- Send notes and provide supplies to support those who volunteer at VA facilities.
- Enter all of your VAVS hours into the VAVS tracking system.
- Educate your unit and community partners about volunteer opportunities available at VA medical centers, state veteran homes, Fisher Houses and other VA Health care locations.
- **There isn't a VA medical center or state veterans home close to your community?**
- Conduct projects and work for military/veterans and /or families from their homes and in their communities.
- Sew quilts for the Quilts of Valor Foundation.
- Coordinate with local quilting shops to help your unit sponsor a quilting event in support of the Quilts of Valor.
- Visit your local nursing homes and assisted living facilities. Be a volunteer once a week to help with their patient's activities. Make them Holiday cards, go sit and talk with them, carry them a book or magazine, sponsor the veteran patients at Christmas and other Holidays.
- **Transitioning back to civilian life is one of the biggest challenges veterans face today. Educate yourself about resources so you can help veterans access all their VA benefits, not just health care. Work with your local Post Service officer.**
- Help eligible veterans attain benefits through referrals.
- Encourage eligible veterans to use the VA Health care system and its services, including hospitals, community based out patient clinics and Vet Centers.
- Participate in and encourage veterans and their family members to participate in town-hall meetings.
- Plan Welcome Home Celebrations at your Unit or ask your local VA Health Care facility if they sponsor Welcome Home Celebrations. The VA supports this initiative by providing information about the opportunities available to them through the VA.

7. Assist and Support caregivers of Veterans

- Look for signs that someone in your Unit or at your Post might be a caregiver. Find ways that you or your Unit can help, such as offering to pick up groceries, mow their grass, pick up kids at school, take kids to practice, prepare meals or maybe offer to carry the caregiver out to dinner.
- Host a caregivers social or an Empowerment Circle at your Unit. Invite Caregivers, supply them with either a meal or refreshments. This will give them a chance to talk to other caregivers, to share their stories with and offer suggestions and receive suggestions. This gives the caregivers a chance to vent and to heal with others who are experiencing the same things. You can provide Yoga therapy, an inspirational speaker or an exercise class.
- Offer overnight fun bags. Stuff a tote bag with a \$10.00 gift card for new pajamas, add microwaveable popcorn, candy and a soft throw.
- Make Caregiver go bags which include a journal, mints, candy, cereal bars, magazines or a book, a soft

throw. These are for when they have to leave home suddenly.

- Host Flower therapy nights. Talk to the VA healthcare facility in your area about getting a therapist to volunteer to come and help, get a florist to donate the flowers, invite caregivers. As the caregivers create and design with the flowers the therapist can get an idea of what they are going through by the way they design the flowers.
- Plan a Day in the Park for just Caregivers and their families
- Familiarize yourself with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation's programs for caregivers and present a presentation at your Unit.
- **Hidden Heroes** - The Elizabeth Dole Foundation recognizes that the military caregivers who make incredible sacrifices to care for our Nation's injured and ill service members and veterans are hidden heroes. Military caregivers provide \$14 billion of uncompensated care annually. Learn about the Hidden Heroes Campaign by going to www.hiddenheroes.org
- **National Salute to Veterans**
- This initiative salutes America's heroes, the more than 98,000 veterans of the U.S. Armed Services who are cared for everyday in VA Medical Centers during the week of February 14 annually.

Additional Resources and How to Sheets

- How to Raise Awareness in Your Communities About the Ever-Increasing Number of Homeless Veterans
- How to Increase Donations to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival
- The Elizabeth Dole Foundation Hidden Heroes Campaign
- Elizabeth Dole Foundation Overview
- Department of Alabama American Legion Auxiliary VA&R Facebook page
- The National VA&R Committee Facebook group, search ALA Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation
- www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov
- Quilts of Valor: www.qovf.org
- VA Homeless Programs: www.va.gov/homeless/