How can we address and prevent veteran homelessness in our communities?

By: Julia Letson

Homeless veterans may be homeless due to a variety of factors influencing all homelessness. In addition to a shortage of affordable housing, livable income and access to health care, a large number veterans live with post-traumatic stress disorder also known as PTSD.

According to the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, “The most effective programs for homeless and at-risk veterans are community-based, nonprofit, “veterans helping veterans” groups. Programs that seem to work best feature transitional housing with the camaraderie of living in structured, substance-free environments with fellow veterans who are succeeding at bettering themselves.”

One way that we can address and prevent veteran homelessness in our communities is by participating in local homeless coalitions. We can start by joining an awareness group and donating money. We could raise awareness and additional donations by hosting fundraisers such as car washes, 5k walks/runs, hosting a Veteran’s Day parade, or collecting pop bottles. We could make and hang posters promoting the events and encourage veterans to participate as a way to show how much our communities care for them. Funds raised could start a program called Be a Friend, Help a Hero. This program would pair at-risk veterans with another veteran who would be a coach and mentor. Both veterans would benefit from their relationship with each other. Even if a veteran is lucky enough to have a supportive family, no one can truly understand like another veteran can. Volunteers such as counselors could help create the matches.

As stated above, “veterans helping veterans” is the most effective way to support homeless and at-risk veterans. Camaraderie in a substance-free environment leads to healthier, happier veterans.