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

A man is sitting against a building; his clothes worn, shoes broken, and a single blanket to keep him warm. He looks around, discouraged, as people pass him by. This man is judged and ignored because of the way he looks and his quality of life. What people don't know, is this man is actually a veteran. He put his own life on the line for his country. Most people don't think of veterans when they see the homeless, yet, in reality, about 23% of the homeless population are veterans. Why are the valiant people who fight for our country ending up living on the streets they risked their lives to defend? We can prevent veteran homelessness by getting the word out, organizing support groups, and addressing the root of the problem.

What does it mean to "get the word out?" It means to make the problem known. Many people might be living in ignorance. The more people who know, the more people will help. Today there are so many ways of spreading information, and spreading it fast. If everyone works together to raise awareness through social media, in their families, and in school, support and help will increase.

Technology can also help to organize support groups. With all the information we know now about veterans and the need to talk about experiences, this would be an excellent outlet. The veterans can find people to trust within these support groups and friendships will be made. If, they ever feel they have nowhere to turn, help is always available and they know where to go until they get back on their feet.

The best way to solve a problem is to get to the root of it. Romeo Vitelli, in an article from Psychology Today, said, "Another cohort study looking at formerly homeless veterans found that 44 percent experienced at least one day of homelessness (...) and that drug use and post-traumatic stress were the strongest predictors of later homelessness." Many other articles
have pinpointed substance abuse and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to be one of the main causes of veteran homelessness. If we can help with substance abuse, PTSD will diminish as well. An article from the Alcohol Rehab Guide said, "The consumption of alcohol can also affect a veteran's PTSD. Not only can it prolong PTSD symptoms, but it can also intensify them as well. Since alcohol is a depressant, drinking can exacerbate some PTSD symptoms such as anxiety, depression and insomnia." If we can help with substance abuse, we will find less veterans on the street.

Veterans deserve our respect and our best efforts. They gave so much for us; it is time to give back and help. We can help veteran homelessness by getting the word out. People will help if they know. We can help by organizing support groups so they have a place to go. And finally, we can help by addressing the root of the problem of the problem and helping veterans with substance abuse.