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Initiative close to sheltering all homeless veterans, affordable housing goal remains elusive

(Port Orchard, WA) – The *Homes for All Who Served* initiative – a partnership of federal, state, and local veterans programs – is redoubling its effort to ensure that all veterans have access to shelter and housing as quickly as possible. A July 2016 survey of homeless veterans identified 19 who were living without shelter, down from 45 identified in September 2015. As of November 2016, that number is five. Initiative partners are optimistic that in the next few weeks all of these veterans will have an offer for placement in shelter or housing programs, effectively ending unsheltered homelessness among Kitsap County veterans.

Homes for All Who Served partners recognize that additional veterans will become homeless in the future. Therefore, the system of housing programs and supports established through the *Homes for All Who Served* initiative will stay in place to serve them as quickly as possible. In addition, some veterans refuse offers of housing assistance. Programs work to build relationships over time with these veterans to build the trust needed for them to accept help.

To date, the initiative has housed 103 veteran households and made referrals for 428 housing-related services, such as legal aid and case management.

Mayor Lent, who is responsible for starting this initiative in Kitsap County, commented, “We have had so much success getting veterans off the streets and inside again. Our city and county have really stepped up to this challenge, but we still have work to do ensuring that there is affordable permanent housing available for our veteran families.”

The extreme shortage of affordable housing units in Kitsap County has made it very difficult to achieve the original goal of reaching “functional zero” for homeless veterans – all homeless veterans having quick access to shelter and permanent housing – by Veterans Day 2016. Despite robust outreach to private landlords, and commitments from a number of landlords to provide units to homeless veterans, the need is greatly eclipsed by the demand. Veterans living in shelter or temporary housing situations are often unable to take the next step into permanent housing despite having rental subsidies in hand.

“This creates a real bottleneck in our resources for homeless veterans. They are ready to move back into permanent housing, but it is simply not available. They have to wait in shelter or temporary housing until a private market unit opens up -- and even then, the market is so tight that there is lots of competition for that unit,” commented Kirsten Jewell, Housing and Homelessness Program Coordinator for the Kitsap County Department of Human Services.

A variety of different local, state, and federal programs provide rental subsidies and support services for veterans in private market units.

Resources for landlords and veterans

The Homes for All Who Served initiative spurred creation of Kitsap Veteran Housing Options Group – a weekly drop-in, one-stop connection point for veterans to get linked to housing resources and services. Many qualify for programs the same day. The group meets at 1 p.m. every Monday at Kitsap Community Resources, 1201 Park Street, Bremerton.

Landlords and property owners interested in the Homes for All Who Served project may contact Jackie Fojtik at the Housing Solutions Center, (360) 473-2035. The Housing Solutions Center of Kitsap County is a one-stop program for people experiencing homelessness and housing instability to be linked with social services and affordable housing resources.

Additional statistics and information about homelessness in Kitsap is available on the Kitsap County website: www.kitsapgov.com/hs/housing/housing_grant.htm

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