



Pod— Veteran/Military Support and Advocacy

- Legislative
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- Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

2011-2012 American Legion Auxiliary Plan of Action

Purpose: To initiate, sponsor and participate in programs and services that assist and enhance the lives of veterans and their families; ensuring restoration and/or transition to normally functioning lives, physically, mentally, socially and vocationally.

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For examples on how to implement each objective in this Plan, refer to the *How To* component at the end of this section.

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

National-level Objectives

1. **Objective:** To bring awareness to the plight and ever-increasing number of homeless veterans. Today it is estimated that 1 in 4 homeless are veterans and that includes approximately 6,500 women veterans. *Source: 2005 Veterans Census*

Action Steps

- a. Educate Unit members about homeless veterans. Forty-five percent who have entered a treatment program have mental illness. Three out of four have a substance abuse problem while 35 percent have both.
 - b. Every Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) has a homeless coordinator. Call and make an appointment with him/her and ask what your Unit can do to help the homeless veterans. Ask if they have a stand down at that medical center.
 - c. Locate a homeless shelter in your area and try to find out if any veterans are there. The person in charge will not give out personal information but could give you the number of homeless veterans staying at the shelter.
 - d. Contact elected officials on every level about public issues affecting homeless veterans.
 - e. Work with your American Legion Post's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Chairman and the Sons of the American Legion to triple your efforts.
2. **Objective:** To raise \$150,000 to fulfill our obligation as a corporate sponsor of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. (NVCAF)

Action Steps

- a. Promote the annual competition that recognizes the progress and recovery made through recreation therapy and raise the visibility of the creative achievements of our nation's veterans after disease, disability or life crisis. Increase the donations in each Department.
 - b. On the Unit and Department level, encourage fundraising with a goal of 18 cents per member to fulfill our obligation as a corporate sponsor.
 - c. Issue news releases announcing the event to be held in Fayetteville, Arkansas, October 17-23, 2011.
 - d. Publicize the Bronze (\$1,000 to \$1,999), Silver (\$2,000 to \$4,999) and Gold (\$5,000 and above) awards presented to Departments who made donations to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. Awards are determined at national close of books 2012.
3. **Objective:** To increase participation in Ride to Recovery (R2R) events. To encourage fundraising and volunteer participation for all scheduled events.

Action Steps:

- a. Promote participation and in-kind donations to R2R events. Assist the VA committee when a ride is scheduled for your area by serving as site coordinators, hosting fundraising and meals for wounded warriors, and promoting community support.
- b. Support Spinning Recovery Labs and outdoor cycling programs at military and VA locations around the United States to help injured veterans overcome

For examples on how to implement each objective in this Plan, refer to the *How To* component at the end of this section.

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obstacles they face. Cycling is an important part of the veteran's recovery and rehabilitation.

- c. Identify those local VA facilities that do not have Spinning Recovery Labs by collaborating and encouraging the adaptation of spin cycle programs and recovery labs.
- d. Sponsor a wounded warrior for the R2R.
- e. Join the ride as a contributor.
- f. Develop a public relations campaign to educate the community on the benefits of cycling. Cycling promotes morale and welfare benefits by strengthening the body, reducing stress, depression and anxiety and provides a life-changing experience that can impact the lives of our wounded warriors forever.

4. **Objective:** To increase volunteer services within a VAMC or outpatient clinic by 10 volunteers per Department and to increase volunteers outside a VAMC through Field Service and Home Service by 10 per Department.

Action Steps

- a. Assist National Headquarters in the placement of volunteers recruited from the online national volunteer recruitment campaign. National Headquarters forwards the volunteer's information to the respective Department VA&R Chairman (Department Secretary is copied) who places the volunteer in local VAVS or Unit opportunities depending on their preference indicated on their volunteer form. The Chairman completes the "Initial Contact Form" and returns it to National Headquarters. This helps recruit new members as well! Please e-mail volunteer@ALAforVeterans.org with questions.
- b. Educate Auxiliary members about opportunities available through Veteran Affairs Medical Centers/Clinics, Field Service or Home Service volunteering. Host American Legion Auxiliary forums and recruitment tables at Department meetings, Post and Unit functions, conventions and community events.
- c. Work with your VA facilities to create meaningful assignments for every volunteer based on the volunteers' availability.
- d. Offer volunteer opportunities on Department and Unit websites, newsletters and other types of communication.
- e. Promote special emphasis on methods of recruiting, retaining, motivating and recognizing volunteers' availability.
- f. Promote veteran-related outreach volunteer opportunities for members living in rural communities with no access to VA facilities. Seek out veterans living in your communities through assistance from your VAMCs, VA clinics, local nursing homes, local American Legion Posts and other veterans organizations.
- g. Assist VAVS representatives and deputy representatives in working with VAVS Chiefs of Voluntary Services in establishing a youth service project for student volunteers.

Programs

1. VA Medical Center (VAMC) & Outpatient Facilities

The American Legion Auxiliary fills a vital role at VA facilities (VAMCs and outpatient clinics) across the country—enabling facility and program administrators to stretch their resources with our guaranteed aid and assistance so they can concentrate on the delivery of core services.

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2. Field and Home Service
Field Service volunteers provide service to veterans outside a VAMC. Volunteers complete a Field Service Orientation Course initiated by the American Legion Auxiliary. Field Service volunteers maintain their own recordkeeping and dollars spent. Home Service volunteers do projects and work for active-duty military/veterans and/or families from the home and also maintain their own recordkeeping and dollars spent.
3. National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF)
Promote the annual competition that recognizes the progress and recovery made through recreation therapy and raise the visibility of the creative achievements of our nation's veterans after disease, disability or life crisis. As a national sponsor, the American Legion Auxiliary should strive to increase monetary support by encouraging Departments to sponsor fundraisers that will contribute to the increased awareness and support of this program.
4. Homeless Veterans Initiatives
Work collaboratively with the VA Homeless Veterans Program, The American Legion and National Coalition of Homeless Veterans to encourage active participation in homeless veterans initiatives.
5. Welcome Home Celebrations
Provide assistance to your local VAMC in supporting returning servicemen and women and their families in the community. VA supports this initiative by providing them with information about the opportunities available to them through the VA system. Every VAMC has been mandated to sponsor Welcome Home Celebrations in their facilities and community.
6. Fisher House
Provide volunteer resources and annual donations to Fisher House.
7. Veterans Affairs Voluntary Services National Advisory Committee
Actively engage in the activity of the VAVS Committee enabling the American Legion Auxiliary national representative to better represent the interest of and exert influence on behalf of the American Legion Auxiliary on a national level. Develop a deeper connection between the national representative and deputy with the representatives and deputies in each Department.
8. Support American Legion Programs
Promote The American Legion's legislative efforts that support programs at the Department and Post level to increase awareness of and participation in programs and resources to assist transitioning service members from military service to civilian life while maintaining the highest quality of life.
9. National Recognition Programs
To annually salute America's heroes: more than 98,000 veterans of the U.S. Armed Services who are cared for every day in VA Medical Centers during the week of February 14 annually.
10. National Volunteer Month (April)
Encourage the organization, at all levels, to recognize and celebrate the important work that volunteers do every day on behalf of veterans.

For examples on how to implement each objective in this Plan, refer to the *How To* component at the end of this section.

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Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Awards

1. Honoring Their Service Award
A citation plaque will be presented to the Unit that implements and carries out the Most Outstanding Event that brings honor and recognition to our veterans and/or service members at any VAMC or VA facility, veterans home, Fisher House, vet centers, homeless veterans shelter or any facility where more than 60 percent of the residents are veterans. Entry must be typewritten in narrative form not to exceed 1,000 words. Pictures and newspaper articles may be included but not to exceed six pages. Entry cannot be in bound book or hard cover. Cover sheet must include Unit name and number, address, Unit Chairman's name, address and phone number, date and location where the event was held. Submit to national committee member Rosemarie Hauck by June 1, 2012.
2. Department VA&R Program Awards
A citation plaque will be presented to the Department Chairman in each Division who reports the Most Outstanding Overall VA&R program as per the goals stated in this Plan of Action. Entry must be typewritten in narrative form not to exceed 1,000 words. All entries must be postmarked by June 1, 2012, and sent by the Department Chairman to the National Division Chairman.
3. Field Service Volunteer Hours Award
A citation plaque will be presented to a Field Service volunteer serving the greatest number of hours from April 1, 2011 – March 31, 2012, in each Division for Junior and senior members. Units should send their nominees to the Department Chairman, who is responsible for informing Units of the due date. Unit is required to certify hours of any nominee – the Department Chairman may ask for this information. The Department Chairman will then send the top hour volunteer Junior and senior volunteer to the National Division Chairman by June 1, 2012.
4. Home Service Volunteer Hours Award
A citation plaque will be presented to a home service volunteer serving the greatest number of hours from April 1, 2011 - March 31, 2012, in each Division for Junior or senior members. Units should send their nominees to the Department Chairman responsible for informing Units of the due date. Unit is required to certify hours of any nominee – the Department Chairman may ask for this information. The Department Chairman will then send the top hour volunteer Junior and senior volunteer to her respective National Division Chairman by June 1, 2012.
5. National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF) Contribution Recognition
The NVCAF will recognize Departments that contribute at the Bronze, Silver and Gold level. This recognition will be made at the 2012 festival. ALA National Headquarters will submit qualifying donations to NVCAF staff in July. Donations considered are those received in the national office August 1, 2011, through June 30, 2012.
6. Unit VA&R Program Awards
A citation plaque will be presented to a Unit Chairman in each Division reporting the Most Outstanding Overall VA&R program as per the goals stated in this Plan of Action. Entry must be typewritten in narrative form not to exceed 1,000 words. Units will submit entries to the Department Chairman by her required date. All entries must be postmarked by June 1, 2012, and sent by the Department Chairman to the National Chairman.

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7. VAVS VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR AWARD/ALA NAC NOMINEE
The Department VA&R Chairman or ALA Department director of hospital volunteers will make nominations for consideration. A Department nomination must be prepared in a narrative format not to exceed 500 words and may include up to two letters of recommendation. This nomination is due to the national VAVS deputy by June 1, 2012. This award will be made to the nominee who has given extraordinary service to our nation's veterans through the ALA VA&R program and the VAVS program. Specifically this nominee must serve in an established VA assignment and be defined as a regularly scheduled volunteer. In addition, we are looking for an individual who is actively involved working with veterans in any one of the following areas: outpatient clinics; nursing homes; homeless veteran programs; hosted veteran-related functions outside the VA; or visiting veterans confined to their homes (as assigned by VAVS). The national winner will receive \$500 to be donated to the VAVS facility of her choice or to Veterans Creative Arts Festival and in recipient's name, and she will be profiled in the national *Auxiliary* magazine. In addition, the ALA will forward her name as our candidate for the VAVS National Advisory Committee Volunteer of the Year.
8. Volunteer Recruitment & Service Department Award
A citation plaque will be presented to the Department in each Division with the largest increase of regularly scheduled volunteers and regularly scheduled volunteer hours at a VA Medical Center from April 1, 2011 – March 31, 2012. The award winner will be determined by the national VAVS representative through verification of Department hours and number of volunteers as recorded by VAVS.
9. 100 PERCENT VAVS MEETING ATTENDANCE
An "Attendance Card" will be awarded to each representative and deputy who has 100 percent attendance to VAVS committee meetings at her assigned facility. The national VAVS representative will verify the winners from VA records.
10. 10,000 – Hour Volunteer Service Award
A special volunteer citation will be awarded to the eligible volunteer and a \$100 donation will be sent, in the eligible volunteers' name, to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival Fund. Volunteer must have accrued 10,000 hours of volunteer service in a VA facility. Verification of hours must be received at National Headquarters by June 1, 2012.
11. 20,000 – Hour Volunteer Service Award
A special volunteer citation will be awarded to the eligible volunteer and a \$200 donation will be sent, in the eligible volunteers' name, to the National Creative Arts Festival Fund. Volunteer must have accrued 20,000 hours of volunteer service in a VA facility. Verification of hours must be received at National Headquarters by June 1, 2012.
12. Homeless Veterans Outreach Award
The ALA, TAL and SAL come together annually to select a Department that has done an outstanding job in the area of homeless veterans outreach. Award nominations are solicited each fall and the winners are recognized at national convention and the National NCHV Conference held each June in Washington, D.C. For more information, visit www.ALAforVeterans.org.
13. Hour Bar Recognition For Field, Home and Hospital Volunteers
Volunteers are recognized when specific hour milestones are reached: 50, 100, 300, 500, and 1,000. After the first 1,000 hour bar is awarded, the next bar will be earned in
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1,000 hour increments. Hour bars are provided at no cost to Departments; however, the appropriate pin (from which the hour bar is affixed) can be obtained from Emblem Sales at the Department's expense. For further information, see *Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation: A Guide for Volunteers*.

Resources

1. *Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation: A Guide for Volunteers* provided through the Auxiliary.
2. Gulf War Benefits and Programs, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Vietnam Veterans - Guide to Agent Orange Benefits, What to do Before a Veteran Dies, Women Veterans - Identifying Risk, Services and Prevention: brochures available through The American Legion.
3. National Veterans Creative Arts Festival: www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov.
4. <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#!/pages/National-Veterans-Creative-Arts-Festival/151623167130>
(This page can also be accessed by performing a search.)
5. www.ride2recovery.com/
The American Legion Auxiliary's Involvement with Ride To Recovery
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/American-Legion-Auxiliarys-involvement-with-Ride-2-Recovery/213335562736> (this page can also be accessed by performing a search)
See program page for VA&R on www.ALAforVeterans.org for additional resources

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Committee:

Legislative

Submitted by:

Ann Rehbein, National Legislative Chairman

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Objective:

#1 Promote support of The American Legion priorities/agenda by American Legion Auxiliary members.

Step-by-Step Instructions:

- Know what the priorities are.
- Visit The American Legion website at <http://legion.org/legislative> to find the latest information. Legislative agendas, point papers and priority sheets are a few of the topics listed.
- Receive updates by email by joining a subscription link to the Legislative Action Center at <http://capwiz.com/legion/mlm/signup/>.
- Act on the priorities by distributing information at Unit meetings, through newsletters, phone trees, emails – whatever works best for your Unit. Convey the information so it is easily understandable by all members. Any action taken should be in your own words. The publication *American Legion Auxiliary Legislative Advocacy Guide* is an informative tool to guide you through the process.
- Contact your Representative or Senator (contact information is available in the Legislative Action Center at <http://capwiz.com/legion/dbq/officials/>).
- Write – mail is still being irradiated if sent to the Washington office; send it to your District office where it will reach the official much sooner. A sample letter is available in the *American Legion Auxiliary Legislative Advocacy Guide*. It can be found online here: <http://www.alaforveterans.org/Brochures/AdvocacyGuide-lp.pdf>
- Call – The District or Washington Office. You will usually talk to an aide and they will do their best to convey your message. Try to establish a relationship with the aide responsible for the topic (usually the Veterans Affairs aide).
- Email – When you write an email, it is in your own words and thoughts and not subject to interpretation.
- Visit in person – in the Washington or District office. Make an appointment or attend a town hall meeting.
- Report back on the response received to your Unit, District, Department and/or National Chairman.



Committee:

National Security

Submitted by:

Vickie Koutz, National Security National Chairman

Contact Information for Questions:

vkoutz@aol.com

Objective:

#1 Develop, implement and monitor programs and activities that contribute to the practical and emotional well-being of military service members and their families.

Step-by-Step Instructions:

- A. Participate in Department of Defense and other outside programs that support our military and their families throughout the entire deployment cycle.

Yellow Ribbon Project

- Invite unit members to meet and make yellow ribbons and display them throughout your communities to show support for the troops.
- Approach the local Chamber of Commerce or other nonprofits (example: Yellow Ribbon Program) to help promote welcome-home events.

Adopt a Military Family

- Look for contacts who know of active-duty military families.
 - Contact your Family Readiness Group.
- Send handwritten notes or emails inviting families to functions.
- Offer help with household chores (lawn mowing, babysitting, grocery shopping, handy-man needs, etc).
- Contact local discount department stores to see if they will donate gift cards.

- B. Participate in the military and family support programs of The American Legion.

- Utilize networking opportunities to find families who have active military.
- Take care of the wounded warriors and their families once they get home by collecting family comfort items.
- Suggest they go to the local VA office in their county and get signed up in the VA system.
- Host job fairs.
- Present Blue Star Banners to the families in honor of their soldier.
- Present Gold Star Banners to the families in memory of their soldier.

Join with The American Legion and Sons of The Legion to host a ceremony on National POW/MIA Recognition Day on September 16, 2011, to honor the sacrifices made by this nation's Prisoners of War and those still Missing in Action.

- Abide by The American Legion's POW/MIA empty chair Resolution 288, with a display at all official meetings and events.
- Write letters/emails to your state legislators supporting The American Legion Family's commitment to achieving a full accounting of POWs and MIAs from all wars.

continued



National Security How To (Objective #1) continued

Set up webcams in your Legion Home so family members can actually see their soldier.

- Acquire necessary hardware (up-to-date computer, fast Internet connection, Skype or other similar software, webcam).
- Advertise the opportunity to use computer/webcam to community (newspaper or local news station).
- Create events with this opportunity.

C. Support implementation of homeland security programs of The American Legion and the American Legion Auxiliary.

- Have a training exercise in your post home to give training in first aid, CPR, or any other type of emergency skills.
- Collect supplies for emergency preparedness kits and distribute them in your community.
- When a disaster strikes, be there to volunteer as a unit.

D. Provide recognition and support for ROTC and JROTC groups.

- If you have a JROTC unit at your local high school, have them post colors at various functions.
- Reward them by having dinners and recognizing their accomplishments; after all, they will be future leaders of our military.



Committee:

Poppy

Submitted by:

Krisann Owens, National Poppy Chairman

Contact Information for Questions:

541-297-1898, krisannmo@msn.com, or your Department Poppy Chairman

Objective:

#1 Promote/circulate the history of the poppy and the significance of its distribution.

Step-by-Step Instructions:

- Create a promotion of "Poppy Fields Across America" by encouraging our members to plant poppies in their communities as beautification projects.
- Contact a local nursery or discount retailer to obtain the best prices of red poppy seeds and/or to obtain donations of seed packets.
- Contact local governments to determine best areas for planting.
- Promote planting poppy seeds at all community events including city council meetings, at your post home, and/or at fairs, street markets, craft fairs, etc., or wherever membership is being promoted.
- Recruit TAL, SAL and Juniors as well as student volunteers (as most schools require a certain amount of volunteer hours before a student can graduate) to assist with this project.
- Place a sign in the planted area that notates that the area was planted by the American Legion Auxiliary.
- Unit Public Relations Chairman can partner with local media to publicize information about the Poppy Program and the purpose of the poppy field.



Committee:

Poppy

Submitted by:

Krisann Owens, National Poppy Chairman

Contact Information for Questions:

541-297-1898, krisannmo@msn.com, or your Department Poppy Chairman

Objective:

#2 Increase unit poppy revenues.

Step-by-Step Instructions:

- Host a Poppy Day.
- Check with your department on their Poppy Day rules. If they allow only a limited time for distribution, encourage departments that have their standing rules preventing year-long promotions changed to reflect permission for a year-long program.
- If the poppies are available, this shouldn't be a program that operates only during Poppy Days around Memorial Day or Veterans Day; it should continue beyond that short timeframe.
- Ask local businesses for permission to distribute poppies in front their stores. Be aware that permission must be granted for liability reasons; sometimes that needs to come from their corporate offices. Permits may also be required from the city.
- Sign up members as volunteers by posting a sign-up sheet in your Unit or Post home.
- Ask TAL, SAL and Juniors to participate in Poppy Days alongside the ALA.
- Distribute materials from the poppy toolkit available from National Headquarters, including poppy bookmarks, media fact sheets, and have the poem *In Flanders Field* available at all events.
- Utilize local governments to announce distribution of Poppies by obtaining Proclamations declaring "Poppy Days" in your community.
- Unit Public Relations Chairman can create a relationship with local media to publicize information about the distribution and history of the Poppy Program.



Committee:

Poppy

Submitted by:

Krisann Owens, National Poppy Chairman

Contact Information for Questions:

541-297-1898, krisannmo@msn.com, or your Department Poppy Chairman

Objective:

#3 Increase the number of poppy makers in each Department.

Step-by-Step Instructions:

- Check with your Department headquarters before soliciting new poppy makers to ensure additional volunteers are needed and you do not infringe on your Department's policies.
- All American Legion Auxiliary poppies are handmade by disabled or hospitalized veterans, so approach staff at facilities that are likely to have these residents, such as VA hospitals, outpatient clinics and state veterans homes.
- Veterans can be recruited by hanging posters in the Volunteer Services Office and on bulletin boards at each VA facility including Community Based Outreach Clinics and veterans homes.
- You may also recruit veterans from your local American Legion Posts or other veteran organizations in your community. Nursing homes and rehabilitation facilities may also have eligible veterans.
- Meet with staff members who instruct creative arts and recreational therapy, such as creative arts therapists, recreational and occupational therapists, or craft care specialists.
- Let all interested facilities know that their veterans will be paid a stipend for each poppy completed.
- Process new veteran poppy makers in accordance to your department's policies.



Committee:

Poppy

Submitted by:

Krisann Owens, National Poppy Chairman

Contact Information for Questions:

541-297-1898, krisannmo@msn.com, or your Department Poppy Chairman

Objective:

Poppy Usage Contest (formerly known as the Poppy Corsage Contest) VA&R #2

Step-by-Step Instructions:

- The Poppy Usage Contest will be held at the Unit and Department levels only. There will not be a National poppy contest at Awareness Assembly.
- Rules on the submissions will be at the discretion of the individual Units, with the winners of each Unit contest being sent to the Department Poppy Chairman where an overall winner will be selected.
- Encourage members to get creative with the way they use the poppy.
- Ask members to submit an 8x10" picture of the way they used the poppy.
- Collect pictures early and often.
- After the deadline to submit pictures when all pictures are collected, post them on display boards and open the contest to voting in your Unit home. Be sure NOT to display names with pictures on the display boards. Votes should be based on the use of the poppy, not on whose picture it is.
- Members can vote for their favorite use of the poppy by donating \$1 per vote. All money collected will go the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. Members should be encouraged to vote multiple times.
- The winning picture gets sent to your Department Poppy Chairman Be sure to let her know how much money you raised (total) and how much the winning picture raised.
- Send all money collected to your Department noting the Poppy Usage Contest.
- DEPARTMENTS: Please submit the one picture that collected the most votes/money from your units to National Headquarters, Attn: Poppy Usage Contest. The picture that brought in the most money from each Division will be highlighted in National communications. Include Department and Unit name, along with members' contact information.
- DEPARTMENTS: Collect all the money from your Units and write National Headquarters one check for the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. Departments will be recognized for their donations on the National website and in other communications with a highlight on the departments that raised the most in each Division per this contest.
- Deadline: One check to National Headquarters per Department is to be sent by June 1, 2012, for this contest. Be sure to keep track of what units send throughout the year, and let the Poppy National Chairman know your total when you send your check to National Headquarters. National Headquarters will not be keeping track of check amounts to compare with other departments; it is up to departments to let the National Poppy Chairman know the amount submitted for the current year's contest. The National Poppy Chairman will announce the Departments with the highest amount of money collected.
- See Poppy Usage Contest form on the poppy page at www.ALAforVeterans.org for help.

**Committee:**

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

Submitted by:

Nancy Brown-Park

Contact Information for Questions:

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Objective:

#1 To bring awareness to the plight and ever-increasing number of homeless veterans. Today it is estimated that 1 in 4 homeless are veterans and that includes approximately 6,500 women veterans.

Source: 2005 Veterans Census

Step by Step Instructions:

- Your Unit can get involved in several ways. We hope to supply you with ideas that will help you participate in the fight against homelessness and its impact on veterans.
- First, learn about the homeless veterans in your area. Work with your local community officials and homeless shelters to see what the homeless veterans needs are in your community. If you have a VA hospital in your area, work with the VAMC homeless coordinator to see what your Unit can do to help.
- After you learn about the veteran homelessness in your community and the need of your VAMC, here are some things that you can do to bring awareness of their plight to your members and community and ways in which your Unit can help homeless veterans and their families. Remember: Poppy funds can be used for homeless veterans.
- The Department of Veterans Affairs has a new national call center for homeless veterans. Your unit can make a difference by posting this number in all homeless shelters, community centers, VA hospitals/homes, local hospitals, schools, mental health services facilities, and any other public place that veterans and their families might visit. The number is 1-877-4AID VET (1-877-424-3838). This number is free and confidential, and trained counselors supply information about VA homeless programs and mental health services in the veteran's area. Posters are available on the National Auxiliary website (www.ALAforVeterans.org) which you can print and post in your community. You can also visit <http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/NationalCallCenter.asp>.
- The Department of Veterans Affairs also has founded a national suicide prevention hotline to ensure veterans in emotional crisis have free 24/7 access to trained counselors. Ask the local homeless shelter, hospital, schools, community centers, mental health services facilities and other public places to post the flyer or hand out brochures. Brochures and flyers are available at no cost. Visit www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/Veterans/Default.aspx.
- Homeless veterans are a priority for the VA, but we all know it takes funding for resources to end veteran homelessness. Members of Congress and their staffs tend to act on issues they perceive as important to their constituents. Your Legion Family can make a difference by making personal visits, sending emails and making phone calls about your concern to see veteran homelessness ended in the next three years. Perhaps your Legion Family can set up a day and time at your post home for a call and letter writing campaign. Invite local politicians and leaders of your community to help. Keep in mind that this should be done at all levels of government.

Here are three projects that your Unit might consider:

- Check with your VAMC or veterans home to see if they have a stand down. If they do, ask them how you can participate and develop a plan based on their needs. If not, meet with your Legion

continued



Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation How To (Objective #1) continued

Family and see if they are willing to work with your Unit to hold a stand down in your community. To develop your plan, visit the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans. They have a simple guide to follow: *Stand Down Guide*.

- The Department of Virginia has a recipe to welcome homeless veterans to their new homes. It's called a Buddy Basket and is a warm welcome. It's easy and costs just \$24. Find out the need in your community by checking with the homeless coordinator at your VA hospital or VA home. Let him/her know you are ready to supply the Buddy Basket to all of the veterans in your community who are moving into permanent housing. Plan a meeting where everyone brings something to fill the baskets; you will need to store them until the VA finds a need for them. Or host a fundraiser and direct the money for Buddy Baskets. Once there is a need, you can purchase the items to fill the basket. Attached is a list of items that the Department of Virginia used to fill their baskets. Be sure to include a note about the American Legion Auxiliary and that you are here to help in the future.
- Work with your Legion Family to develop a fundraising plan for homeless veterans: The money you raise might be used for emergency housing at a hotel or motel for a veteran and his or her family for a few days until the VA can find permanent housing. Support emergency shelters with personal care items, clothing (new underwear, socks and T-shirts are always needed) and food, or your Unit can make a cash contribution. Contact churches, civic and business groups, and other veterans service organizations for contributions. Ask for a share of proceeds from community events. Involve media to ensure donors are recognized for their support of America's veterans.

**Committee:**

Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

Submitted by:

Nancy Brown-Park, National VA&R Chairman

Contact Information for Questions:

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Objective:

#2 To raise \$150,000 to fulfill our obligation as a corporate sponsor of the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival (NVCAF).

Step by Step Instructions:

- Check with your Department VA&R Chairman to see what your Unit goal is, and develop a plan to meet that goal.
- Once you have your goal, share it with your Unit and keep them informed about your fundraising progress.
- Here are some ideas to help you develop your plan and achieve your goals. Brainstorm with your Unit to come up with ideas that will work for your members:
 - Order your donation cans from National today! This year, we are introducing donation cans to help your Unit raise funds for NVCAF. A limited number of cans will be available, so check with your Department VA&R Chairman about details on how to order. Decorative wraps for cans will be available from National Headquarters or online for free at www.ALAforVeterans.org. The cans will be decorated with information about NVCAF and pictures from the event. You can place one or more cans in your Post home and make them available at each meeting. Ask banks, local retailers and many more places for spots to display our NVCAF contribution cans. Just use your imagination. It will be a great way for your Unit to reach your fundraising goal for NVCAF. More information will follow; watch for content posted in bulletins and on the website.
 - At each of your Unit meetings, have a penny parade. Set an overall goal of how much you want to raise at each meeting that will help you make that overall goal.
 - A no-bake sale is an easy way to help reach your Unit's fundraising goal. Assign a committee to select a date for your no-bake sale. Your invitation should include information about NVCAF. Have the committee send an invitation to the members of your Unit and Post. After your sale, be sure to let your Unit and Post know how much money was raised for NVCAF.
- Assign a small committee to ask local businesses for in-kind donations for a special NVCAF raffle. With the items collected, you can create special baskets to raffle. Don't forget to ask your friends and family to purchase raffle tickets. Take the February 2011 issue of the *Auxiliary* magazine (includes a great story about the 2010 Festival). Take the attached fact sheet with you to help explain the Festival. When you visit local businesses, be sure your committee is well informed. For additional information about the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, visit www.creativeartsfestival.va.gov/.
- Hold your raffle at a special fundraising dinner for NVCAF. Invite the local business leaders who contributed and community leaders to the event (mayor, police and fire chief, Chamber of Commerce plus the others who are important in your community).
- If you have a veterans hospital or veterans home in your area, check with your hospital or home representative to see if they have local Creative Arts program. Check to see if they

continued



Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation How To (Objective #2) continued

have any medal winners (gold, silver and bronze). If they do, invite the participants to your fundraiser and ask them to bring their art and talent. You might ask if they are willing to donate a piece of art for your fundraiser. Perhaps the performing arts medal winners would provide entertainment. If you don't have access to a Creative Arts artist, you can access a list of artists to see if any are in your area:

<http://www.va.gov/opa/speceven/caf/2010/participant-info.asp>.

- Don't forget to include your Legion Family in your event. The American Legion and Sons of the American Legion are a great help, and getting them involved helps build a strong Family relationship.
- Remember to promote your event. Send information to your local newspaper, write a letter to the editor, and invite local reporters and news stations to your event.
- A great and simple way to raise funds for NVCAF is to incorporate it into your poppy program. Check with your Department VA&R Chairman or Poppy Chairman for your department's approved dates to distribute poppies (i.e., Memorial Day, Veterans Day, etc.). Select a small group of volunteers who are willing to distribute poppies one day just for the NVCAF. Select a good spot—Target, Walmart, local market, liquor store or anywhere in your community that has lots of traffic. Be sure to get approval from the location before you go so your hard work will be successful. Bring materials with you that reference NVCAF and what it does for participants.
- Does your local veterans hospital or veterans home have a Creative Arts Festival? If not, it's a great opportunity for your Unit members to work with your local VA hospital or home to get one started. Attached instructions *How to Facilitate a Local Veterans Creative Arts Festival* will help you get started. Work with your hospital representative to see how you can get this project started. If you don't know who your representative is, check with your Department VA&R Chairman. This year, a grant fund has been set up to help your local VA hospital or VA home with its Creative Arts Festival and/or workshop. The fund is also available for hospitals that want to start a new local Creative Arts Festival or Creative Arts Workshop. You can find the application for the mini-grant www.ALAFforVeterans.org.
- Once you get your local Creative Arts Festival started, or if you have one in your area, why not host a mini Creative Arts Festival at your post home or at a facility at your hospital/home? Your Unit can supply art supplies, volunteers and refreshments. Be sure to work with the recreational therapist at your local hospital/home, and don't forget that you can use poppy funds for this event.
- Don't forget to promote your local Creative Arts Festival to all veterans in your area (i.e., letter to the editor, flyers in local posts, your VA hospital/home—just to name a few).
- Did you know that awards are presented to Departments, Units and individuals that donate money to NVCAF? Awards are presented for Bronze (\$1,000 to \$1,999), Silver (\$2,000 to \$4,999), and Gold (\$5,000 and above) by close of books 2012. Wouldn't it be exciting for your Unit to receive this amazing award that will be presented during the 2012 National Convention in Indianapolis?
- As Unit Chairman, you can create a special awards program for your members' participation in the Creative Arts program. Your awards program might include awards for different levels of contributions or the most creative fundraiser.
- The National Veterans Creative Arts Festival is a week of learning, exploring fellowship and celebration of the healing power of the arts. Each dollar you raise helps a veteran in his or her quest for healing. Be creative in your fundraising, and please pass on your success and struggles to your Department VA&R Chairman with a CC to your Division Chairman.

**Committee:****Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation****Submitted by:**

Nancy Brown-Park, National VA&R Chairman

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Objective:

#3 To increase participation in Ride 2 Recovery (R2R) events. To encourage fundraising and volunteer participation for all scheduled events.

Q: What is it? A: Ride 2 Recovery benefits the mental and physical rehabilitation of our country's wounded veterans and features cycling as the core activity.

Events include Ride 2 Recovery Challenges' multi-day events that cover 350 to 450 miles. A challenge pushes the participants to their limit, both physically and mentally. Cyclefests are a series of fund-raising cycling events held in cities and towns across the country. The event is a ride with routes designed for everyone from occasional riders to the experienced cyclist. Whether a participant rides 10 miles or 100 miles, the route is supported from start to finish with rest stops, food to fuel the journey and fans to cheer on the riders. Spinning Nation: Participating health clubs nationwide donate their indoor cycling studios for two one-hour cycling classes and riders from towns across the country collect donations from friends, family and Legion Family members to sponsor their ride.

Step by Step Instructions:

- There are many ways your Unit can get involved; here are a few that will help get your Unit started:
 - Check event information on the Ride 2 Recovery website to see what events are coming to your area: www.ride2recovery.com.
 - If there is a ride in your area, posters are available on the National website (www.ALForVeterans.org) which you can download and post everywhere in your community. See how many members of your community you can get to wave flags and cheer on the riders! Why not have contests in your state to see who has the most community members show up on the day the ride comes through your community?
 - Share the information with your Unit, Post and Squadron and decide how you want to get involved. Together, develop a fundraising goal and how you plan to raise the funds. Your plan can include, but is not limited to, raising money for a wounded warrior's bicycle, helmet, clothing, room and board or transportation for a rider to and from the event. For reference as you plan, an upright bicycle with no special adaptations costs \$1,500, and handcycles run \$5,000 or more depending on the adaptations. Helmets are \$50, cycle clothes \$150 and cycle shoes \$150. The average cost for room and board is \$1,500-\$2,000 per rider per ride, and transportation to and from runs is about \$500. This cost is over and above the in-kind meal and rest stop donation from the Legion Family. Riders are responsible for their own transportation to and from the ride, but many need help with the cost.
 - For a Challenge, your campaign may also include raising money to supply a breakfast, lunch or dinner, or supply items for a rest stop for the riders coming through your community during a R2R Challenge. For a Cyclefest, you might consider raising money for a rest stop or lunch stop. The money you spend to feed the riders is considered an in-kind donation, though you can still offset expenses by seeking sponsors and donated food. Be sure to report your net (gross income minus expenses) cost of the event to your Department VA&R Chairman.

continued

*Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation How To (Objective #3) continued*

Recognize donors/sponsors with a tent card on each table during the event and a thank-you in your monthly bulletin, Unit website and a special citation of recognition. Ride 2 Recovery and your state R2R coordinator will work with you on these events.

Here are some fundraising ideas:

- “Dollars Making a Difference” is a good program where everyone can make a difference at a Unit, Post or Squadron meeting by donating \$1 each time you meet. The Unit chairman can also make a fun, colorful R2R-decorated can and keep it out for donation during the year. Don't forget to include your Legion Family in this project.
- Get your Juniors involved: A car and bicycle wash would be a great project for Juniors. If you don't have a Junior group, make it a Legion Family fundraiser. Develop a plan to include the cost of the wash, advertising, posters, a juice stand and even baked goodies to sell. Don't forget that your fundraising plan can be for just a helmet, clothes, or a bicycle.
- Contact local bike shops or riding groups to see if they are willing to get involved in your fundraising activities. If they are willing to brainstorm together a great fundraising plan to raise enough money to sponsor a rider, purchase a bike or helmet. Your activity could be anything from a 10-mile ride where each rider gets sponsors to a community dinner held at your post home or a community center. Consider asking the local bike shop to sponsor the event. Once you have a plan, date and cost, ask local business for donations for a silent auction or raffle. Be sure to give everyone who donates recognition.
- The local riding group may be willing to let your Unit set up a rest stop at a point of the local ride so you can accept donations. The donations might be larger if you have a specific item you are raising the money for (bike, helmet, transportation, etc.). Have a picture and the cost on poster board so riders can see what they are donating the money for. Have information about what the R2R does for wounded warriors on poster board so it easy to see.

Other things your Legion family can do to increase participation and awareness in the Ride 2 Recovery:

- Check with your Department VA&R chairman to see if a ride is coming through your area. You can also check www.ride2recovery.com.
- Organize a school visit—riders start and finish their Challenge days near many schools. Have a Unit member contact the school for support. School students can make thank-you signs, write thank-you letters and line the streets when the riders come by.
- Organize community members to cheer on the riders as they pass through your town. Check ride routes at www.ride2recovery.com to see where and when riders will be passing through your town. Organize your Unit, friends, family, community leadership and residents to come cheer and to bring signs that show support for the riders and their appreciation for their service to our country. Your Unit members can use decorated cans for donations for community members who would like to make a donation.
- Contact your local media to spread the word about the R2R events in your community. Ride routes can be placed in your local newspaper to let community members know where and when the riders will be passing through your town. For helpful information about news releases and a guide template, visit the Auxiliary's website at www.ALAforVeterans.org.
- The Unit VA&R Chairman will receive more information throughout the year about the R2R events; watch for exciting opportunities to get involved. You can also visit www.ride2recovery.com.

**Committee:****Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation****Submitted by:**

Pat Kranzow, National VA&R Committee Member

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Objective:

#4 To increase volunteer services within a VAMC or outpatient clinic by 10 volunteers per Department and to increase volunteers outside a VAMC through Field Service and Home Service by 10 per Department.

Step by Step Instructions:**There are three ways to accumulate hours of service to our veterans:**

1. Engage in HOSPITAL SERVICE by volunteering at VA Medical Centers. The volunteer goes to the facility and supplements the work of Medical Center staff through patient contact and/or non-patient contact assignments. Non-ALA members are welcome to become VAMC volunteers and have their hours counted to the benefit of the Auxiliary. Bring a friend, take the VAMC orientation course and start to reap the personal benefits from serving others. Junior members can earn hours at VAMCs.
2. Engage in FIELD SERVICE volunteer activities. Field Service is anything done directly for a veteran outside of a VAMC or a volunteer's home. This includes hospice, stand downs, state veterans' home, veteran cemeteries or gravesites, transportation, yard work, assistance with tax preparation, etc. You are required to complete a Field Service Orientation course offered by your Department before you begin accumulating volunteer hours. Junior members may earn Field Service hours under supervision of a senior volunteer.
3. Engage in HOME SERVICE volunteer activities. Home Service is work done in your own home for the benefit of homebound, sick or injured service members and veterans. This includes sewing, babysitting while the veteran attends medical appointments, making quilts or afghans, baking cookies, and shopping for active-duty military/veterans and/or their families. The person who benefits from your service cannot be related to you. Junior members can earn Home Service hours.

How can we get our Unit members and community members involved in these three volunteer areas?

- Select a Unit VA&R Chairman and Committee. Have this person or people take the orientation courses for the volunteer work they will be doing. Often these courses are offered at Department Conventions. A knowledgeable Chairman is an excellent way to make your program grow.
- Create an annual member volunteer interest and availability survey. Match surveys with facility needs. Help new volunteers get started. Perhaps the Unit Chairman can drive the new volunteer to the facility.
- Recognize a Unit volunteer of the month; rotate so everyone gets an opportunity. Ask that volunteer to share an experience in person, at a meeting, online, or in your newsletter.
- Post a list (post home, newsletters, etc.) of all VA&R volunteers from the Legion Family and community who serve at your local VA facilities, and members who engage in Field and Home Service.
- Create an annual Unit book of VA memories, hard copy and online. Example: In September, 10 members held a bingo party at ABCVA for 40 patients. Violette Volunteer distributes more than

continued



Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation How To (Objective #4) continued

100 magazines to patients at ABCVA in the clinics and waiting rooms weekly.

- Advertise Unit or Legion Family bingos at VA facilities; use local supermarket bulletin boards, press, etc. Invite community members to participate.
- Advertise events held at post homes for VA patients, such as special holiday celebrations or a dinner for blind center patients. Invite community members to participate with favors, decorations, entertainment, etc.
- Prepare slideshows and/or table displays with volunteers and veterans engaged in a variety of activities. (Caution – do not use images of veterans unless permission has been given.) Offer these resources to schools and community groups for Veterans Day, Memorial Day, and other patriotic and community celebrations. If your post home is open to the public for hall rentals, bingo, etc., add laminated bookmarks or other take-home materials that list VAMC volunteer opportunities.
- For poppy distribution, create handouts (laminated bookmarks -- one side with poppy information and the other side with VAMC volunteer opportunities).
- Publicize dates and times for student volunteer orientation courses at your local VA facilities. Share with high school counselors, Boys State and Girls State attendees as geographically appropriate, Junior members, and SAL members. Put information in Unit/Post newsletter (hard copy or online) and on social networking resources.
- Contact your local Chamber of Commerce and share VAMC volunteer opportunities with them.

Buddy Baskets

Gift Baskets to Welcome Homeless Veterans To Their New Homes

Recipe for a Warm Welcome:

Take 1 Laundry Basket
or Waste Basket

Add:

- 2 Rolls of Paper Towels
- 2 Rolls of Bathroom Tissue
- 1 Bottle of Window Cleaner
- 1 Canister of Scrubbing Cleanser
- 1 Packet of Sponges or wipes
- 1 Pair of Rubber Gloves
- 1 Small Dust pan w/ hand broom
- 1 Package of light bulbs
- 1 set Plate, bowl and cup
- 1 Shower Curtain (plastic w/rings)

And a Key tag

“Frost” with one big bow
and *taa dah* a

Warm Welcome to a Veteran
in their new home!



American Legion Auxiliary

in partnership with

The American Legion,

Sons of the American Legion &

The Legion Riders

Department of Virginia

A Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

Special Project

for more information please contact

Dianne Cabot, ALA, Dept. Chairman

dcabot@yahoo.com 703.965.3652

for collection at **Spring Conference**





Pod: Veteran/Military Support and Advocacy

Committees included: Legislative, National Security, Poppy, and Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation

Submitted by:

Ann Rehbein, Vickie Koutz, Krisann Owens, and Nancy Brown-Park

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Food Pantry

The National Membership Calendar is a very important part of our programs. We have created this How To sheet using a monthly membership calendar to help you serve our veterans and help grow your membership. This How To sheet makes recommendations for each month to help you be successful with your food pantry.

These are just suggestions to help you along the way; if your Unit has ideas that will work better in your community, that's great.

Your Unit can start a food pantry or create food bags to assist veterans, military and their families who are below the poverty level and struggling because a member is activated. Small Units could work with other nonprofit organizations in your area and also create a relationship with your local media to request donations.

Our pod team is here to help you along the way, and we look forward to working with your Unit.

At Unit meetings, you may talk about your vision and options. Create a plan for your community.

September

- Honor their service with responsibility - membership month.
- VJ Day – Patriot Day (9/11) – Constitution/September 17
- Contact a local food pantry or make plans to set up one or help a faith-based organization.
 - Set goals.
 - What would your vision be of a food pantry?
 - Where do you get donations?
- Contact a soup kitchen to see what you can do to help throughout the year.
- Find a homeless shelter with a veteran population, and contract to provide a week's worth of food.
- Feeding every homeless person or veteran—what would that look like?

At your Unit meeting, talk about vision and options, and create plan for your community.

October

- October has two holidays: Navy Day and Halloween.
- October is the month to Honor Service through education (Education Month).
- Partner with a local high school and/or college group to see if they will join with your Unit to start and maintain a food pantry. If they can't supply the food, maybe they can supply the manpower to keep it open.
- You can also work with a faith-based organization and do this together.
- Your collection center can be your own Legion Post.
- To help promote the food pantry, approach your local newspaper and write an editorial about the homeless; this will include your community.
- Send a letter to the mayor and city council of your city and to your local Veteran Service Officer in the Veterans Affairs office in your county, to let them know about the food pantry. These folks can

continued



Pod: Veteran/Military Support and Advocacy continued

help you get the word out to retired veterans as well as active-duty military and their families to utilize the pantry. This may prompt financial support from people in your community, and you may also gain more members by showing them what we do.

- Contact a local grocery store and see if they will let you have a box to collect canned goods and other packaged foods (e.g., beef jerky, nutrition bars, etc.).
 - When the box starts to get full, take a shopping bag and fill it full of goodies.
 - Have this ready to give away when a family comes to visit your food pantry.
- If someone wants to give monetarily, go buy the articles you think a family could use to prepare their meals.

November

- Holidays: Veterans Day and Thanksgiving Day.
- November is Food Shelf month.
- If you concentrate on military families utilizing the food shelf, the national government will double what you do.
- Contact a local grocery store and see if they will let you have a box to collect canned goods and other packaged foods (e.g., beef jerky, nutrition bars, etc.).
 - When the box starts to get full, take a shopping bag and fill it full of goodies.
 - Have this ready to give away when a family comes to visit your food pantry.
- If someone wants to give monetarily, go buy the articles you think a family could use to prepare their meals.
- Host a community dinner (such as Veterans Day) to feed the hungry. If you have anything left over, donate to a local soup kitchen.
- Create food baskets for Thanksgiving to give out to needy veterans.

December

- VA&R Month, Pearl Harbor Day, Christmas.
- Obtain brochures about what the ALA is all about, and display them on a table for a bag of goodies at your Post lounge, grocery stores, etc., following November guidelines for bags. Ask for donations in honor of a servicemember in their family. Donate extra time at food pantry to relieve persons who have travel plans for holidays.

January

January is Honor their Service with Compassion: Compassion is the ultimate and most meaningful embodiment of emotional maturity. It is through compassion that a person achieves the highest peak and deepest reach in their search for self-fulfillment.

The holiday to focus efforts on this month: Run it up the Flagpole and See if Anyone Salutes Day. (Note: This term is used commonly in advertising and marketing. It suggests that you come up with a new idea and see if it works.)

By now you have come up with a plan, collected money and food and feed homeless veterans, active-duty military and their families. January is a very hard time for the homeless and hungry. Now is the time to “run some new ideas up the flagpole” to discover new ways to help the hungry veteran community in your town. Your brainstorming meeting should include your Post and SAL, and why not invite your community, Family Readiness Group and school administrators and local church officials back in for additional help?

One idea that your Unit might consider: Reach out to the Family Readiness Group at the base or National Guard armory in your area for information on who needs help in your community and how you can reach them. Check with your neighbors and local schools for the same information. Personal contact is one of the best ways to find out who needs help. Once you have found the veterans, active-duty military and families that need help, leave them a secret food bag on their doorstep with a small note from your

continued



Pod: Veteran/Military Support and Advocacy continued

unit: "A gift from the American Legion Auxiliary Unit [number]" and a short, uplifting message that offers your help. Bags can also be left at schools and churches for the families they know need help. Remember: These are proud veterans and families, and they deserve our compassion and support.

February

- Holidays: Lincoln and Washington's birthdays and Valentine's Day.

February celebrates many holidays and events including a Salute to Hospitalized Veterans.

This gives us the opportunity to "Honor their service with generosity." Remember that poppy funds can be used for many things as long as they are for veterans.

We know that not every Unit has access to a VA facility, but for those that do, we have a few ideas on how you can promote your food pantry and fundraising efforts.

As many veterans in VA hospitals do not have family to care for them and or an income that would allow comfort, there is an easy way to help them. The food bags from your Unit's food pantry can be altered to fit a veteran leaving the hospital with the necessities he/she may need.

You can do this in three ways. First, when you visit a VA facility and deliver your Valentine cards, usually during Salute to Hospitalized Veterans week, include a note that lets the veteran know your Unit has a food pantry program, and give details on how he/she can obtain a food bag once they he/she is discharged. The cards can be made by local schools. Second, establish a relationship with hospital staff. With this partnership, the staff will be able to identify the veteran who will need something extra when he/she leaves the hospital. Third (this also works for your local VA Community Based Outreach Clinic), let staff there know about your food pantry program, and they can send veterans to you who are in need.

February is Americanism Month. This is a great opportunity to bring awareness to the responsibility of being a good citizen. Americanism is not only about being patriotic; it's also looking out for your neighbor, a veteran.

Be red, white and blue and active in your community. Host an event for your food pantry program so the community knows you are there, and advertise as much as possible. You can celebrate Lincoln and Washington's birthdays with a big patriotic food drive or fundraising campaign for your food pantry. Distribute poppies during your event if your department allows you to. Have the media present to help get the word out. It's not always the newspaper or TV; utilize your local radio station and ask them to do a live feed from your food drive or fundraising event.

Valentine's Day is a great time to have a fundraising event for our veterans in need. Your Unit can host a sweetheart dinner and/or dance to raise funds to feed hungry, homeless veterans with your food bags.

This is also a great time to partner with local schools to possibly work on a Valentine project together. Students can make Valentine cards to be distributed in the food bags all month long.

Students can also volunteer in the food pantry and at your food drives or fundraisers as they need community service hours before they can graduate. They can also assist in organizing the food pantry itself. Cases of canned goods are heavy, and help with those in particular would be nice.

March

- March has one holiday: St. Patrick's Day.

March is where we "Honor their service with honesty." By now, you know what the issues are in your communities, and you can readily assist veterans in need in the areas you've identified. You have the tools.

Get the word out with editorials in your local newspaper, or work with your local radio program regarding issues that concern veterans. You've been working with the community on your food pantry and fundraising events, so this should be easy. You have the pulse of the community and know where the need is.

continued



Pod: Veteran/Military Support and Advocacy continued

Host a town hall meeting with your county Veteran Service Officer. Invite the director of your state's Veterans Affairs office. Also invite your local government officials, including county commissioners and state and federal legislators to attend. Bring to the surface all that your local veterans are facing in daily living, especially the homeless and hungry veterans. This would be a forum to do that.

It's also time to reach out legislatively. You've identified real issues that affect your community and the veterans who reside there. Contacting your congressman or senator by mail, email or phone is where you need to take these real issues. Stay on the subject, and keep in constant contact with their offices so they will reply to you. It's their job to listen and act, and we can make that happen by being persistent.

You can usually find your congressmen and senators' contact information in the phone book, or it may be published in your local paper. If you have Internet access, these folks are easily located online as well. In today's world, an email is acceptable, but a handwritten letter is more noticeable. Be honest and respectful when you are writing to your legislators.

Remember: Your personal political views should not be stated within the letters if you are writing the letter as a member of the American Legion Auxiliary. We are non-partisan as an organization. Keep to the facts and the issue you are writing about.

St. Patrick's Day is a time where hosting a meal at your post for veterans and their families, as well as homeless and hungry veterans who like corned beef and cabbage, would be fun. It's simple to make and fairly affordable for a large crowd.

You can also include a food drive with the event and recruit volunteers to man the food pantry. Food brings folks out—especially if a good cause is attached to it.

On a lighter side, did you know there is a "Hug a GI" day in March? Well there is, so if you are inclined to, hug your favorite GI as often as possible.

April

April is Honor their Service with Humility: "We come nearest to the great when we are great in humility." –Rabindranath Tagore. Humility is a quality of being courteously respectful of others. Rather than "me first," humility allows us to say, "No—you first, my friend."

April is Children & Youth Month and the perfect time to meet with administrators at the schools in your community to develop a plan to help feed hungry veteran and military children in their schools. Your Unit could leave food bags or provide a monthly lunch pass for the children in need. Buying lunch passes helps children feel included and not left out.

Our humility allows us to give and not expect to receive anything in return.

May

May is Honor their Services with Determination: "Most of the important things in the world have been accomplished by people who have kept on trying when there seemed to be no hope at all." –Dale Carnegie. Be determined, and believe our goals are achievable. Never say "never."

The holiday to focus efforts on this month is Memorial Day: We celebrate the Poppy Program this month by distributing poppies and taking donations for the small, red flower. This should be your Unit's month to raise money by distributing poppies in your community. The money you raise this month will help you feed hungry veterans, active-duty military and their families all year long.

Be determined in your efforts. Your Unit will raise more poppy funds if you reach out into your community for donations.

One idea might be to set up a table at a local establishment with lots of foot traffic. Your table should include information about the American Legion Auxiliary and the Poppy Program. In a Unit meeting before your Unit offers poppies, have your Poppy chairman do a mini-workshop on the poppy and its history so you can answer questions about the program.

continued



Pod: Veteran/Military Support and Advocacy continued

Your table could also include a food bag as an example of one way your Poppy funds are used. Be sure to have available the average cost to fill the bag and envelopes available for anyone who might like to make a donation for your food drive.

Remember: You need to be determined to make a difference for hungry veterans, active-duty military and their families.

June

June is report month! Now it's time to write your narratives and report all of the wonderful things your Unit did throughout the Auxiliary year.