Inside Swords

Advancing Our Support for Aging Veterans

Strengthening the Veteran Community in East Bay

Make an Impact of a Lifetime
Dear supporters and colleagues,

I hope this message finds you well as we enter the final months of 2023. This edition of Inside Swords highlights Swords to Plowshares’ work to advance and strengthen our services to meet the changing needs of our community’s most underserved veterans. This year started off strong for us. We opened our newest housing site, the Maceo May Apartments, as well as the Veterans Community Center, and we rededicated the Jon W. Paulson Veterans Community. These projects have invigorated our mission to prevent and end homelessness among veterans. I am excited for you to learn more about our advocacy for veterans.

The urgent needs of aging veterans are finally garnering the attention of state and federal decision makers, and we are fortunate to be at the forefront of state-level and local initiatives. In partnership with CalVet, we are leading a statewide pilot program – the first of its kind – to prevent recidivism or premature exits to nursing care among formerly homeless senior veterans. In Oakland, we combat isolation by offering supportive services and community connection to aging and unhoused veterans. Regular support groups and social gatherings foster connection among the aging veterans we serve and facilitate pathways to housing, income, and other stabilizing services. We cannot do this important work without the dedication of our staff and the support of individuals and organizations who passionately stand by our work.

As Veterans Day approaches, we amplify the ways in which individuals can meaningfully donate to our organization. I encourage you to consider how you can contribute to sustaining our mission as we push toward a more equitable and dignified future for all veterans.

With gratitude,

MICHAEL BLECKER, Executive Director Vietnam Combat Infantry U.S. Army 1967-1970
Advancing Our Support for Aging Veterans

Swords to Plowshares is among six experienced veteran housing providers in California participating in the Veterans Support to Self-Reliance (VSSR) Pilot program. This three-year pilot, designed by Swords, funded by Governor Newsom, and administered by CalVet, heightens supportive services for a particularly vulnerable segment of the veteran population – veteran seniors who live within permanent supportive housing (PSH) communities supported by VA’s subsidized housing program.

Under this program, Swords designs and provides targeted services that specifically address the needs of aging veterans who have previously struggled with maintaining their health and stable housing.

Residents are encouraged to apply to VSSR at their housing site.

Jasmine Dildy, Program Manager for Residential Services at Swords to Plowshares comments, “Having these extra and beefed-up services through VSSR has been like a breeze of fresh air. It’s pretty awesome how it gives residents the chance to plug into all the cool stuff happening at the Veterans Community Center. And you know what’s really heartening? Seeing those older veterans hit up the grocery store without having to worry about scrambling for transportation.”

One resource that has already impacted the day-to-day routines of veterans enrolled in VSSR is our new transportation service. Swords has begun offering two distinct transportation options that facilitate veterans’ access to health care centers, grocery shopping, and Swords’ Veterans Community Center, among other locations. This resource gives veterans a reliable avenue for mobility, increasing their independence and wellbeing by removing the stress of navigating to necessary health appointments. Additionally, it connects aging veterans with their community. By hiring additional supportive staff, we can expand services to include transportation to community-building activities that reduce social isolation such as park outings, movie days, art classes, and ferry trips around the Bay. Swords strives to be a crucial part of a community-based support system for senior veterans.

The VSSR pilot aims to:

1. **Demonstrate** that enhanced and targeted supportive services enable senior veterans who have experienced chronic homelessness to age in place and maintain and/or improve quality of life.

2. **Prevent** the premature necessity for skilled nursing care; maintain personal and unit hygiene; address disruptive behavior; alleviate feelings of isolation; manage escalating mental health needs; reduce the risk of overdose; and prevent instances of premature death and suicide.

3. **Improve** health and wellness through geriatric social work services, individual and group counseling, peer support and community engagement, and health care navigation.

Swords Outreach Team assists a veteran to an appointment.

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It is imperative for our organization to connect with veterans and community partners on the ground, building relationships and spreading awareness of our services. Check out our album filled with highlights of Swords staff and veterans we serve in action!
Client Story

Strengthening the Veteran Community in East Bay

"It’s a family," says Shirley Brown, beaming after a support group session at our Drop-in Center in Oakland. Shirley, a 70-year-old Army veteran (1977-1981), was one of the first veterans to participate in a support and recovery group organized by East Bay Outreach Coordinator, Dennis Johnson. More than 30 years after her military service, Shirley finally connected with veteran services when she was faced with the realities of homelessness. In 2021, she moved into Monarch Homes, an affordable housing site for seniors in Oakland. There, she was introduced to Swords and encouraged to attend our support and recovery meeting.

In these sessions, veterans are encouraged to support one another through their recovery journey and find camaraderie with peers who also live with invisible wounds of war and their military experience. Shirley, who struggled with addiction for much of her life, has described her participation as enlightening. “I’m becoming involved and informed,” Shirley explains, “If I had known this [services Swords provides] existed, I would have stayed in touch with the veterans I served with.”

It’s encouraging here. I’m a part of something.

Shirley and her peers have built a supportive community where all veterans, regardless of race, gender, age, branch or era of service, can come together and provide each other care by listening, sharing a cup of coffee, and offering a hand to hold. Beyond the support and recovery meetings, the group also bonds at various social gatherings, such as going to A’s games. Shirley, a lifelong resident of Oakland, attended her first Oakland Athletics game this August with Swords. Shirley is grateful for the light she has found among her peers as she has gotten older.
A Glimpse at East Bay Services

1. East Bay Outreach teams regularly visit urban encampments to connect with veterans.
2. Our staff collects contact and basic information of veterans to meet them again. Depending on needs assessment, they will drive veterans from the street to our Oakland office to provide immediate assistance.
3. We partner with a variety of organizations so we can offer a diverse range of care to veterans we serve, including equine therapy.
4. Veterans enjoy spending time at MBS Training Stables in Castro Valley.
5. The Oakland service center hosted a Wellness Week in July to connect veterans with helpful resources including haircuts, VA consultations, and art workshops.
6. Volunteers hold up the sign for Swords’ annual boot shining competition at Stand Down on The Delta.
Appreciating Our Partners

We are fortunate to have a community of individual allies and supportive organizations that share a wide range of resources with us. Their impact ensures the sustainability of our programs and services.

Bank of America
We had fun with an efficient group of volunteers who cooked and served breakfast to veterans at the Jon W. Paulson Veterans Community.

Twilio
We are always in need of essential items to offer veterans that frequent our service centers. We appreciate Twilio for donating 100 hygiene kits this fall.

SF Rotary District 5150
Swords housing sites also benefit from in-kind donations—thanks to SF Rotary, veterans at Maceo May Apartments received meal kits to enjoy any time.

Oakland A’s
In September, we were honored to be the Nonprofit of the Game while the A’s played the Kansas City Royals. East Bay veterans enjoyed their time at the Coliseum!

Bob Woodruff Foundation

We are proud to partner with the Bob Woodruff Foundation to expand critical services to veterans experiencing homelessness at our newly opened Veterans Community Center (VCC) in San Francisco.

Their generous grant supports the VCC, which provides an inviting new space, expanded hours, communal meals, support groups, social activities, connection to emergency housing and wraparound care.

The Bob Woodruff Foundation’s unwavering support ensures that veterans at the VCC receive the crucial assistance they deserve to thrive post-service.

James Boatman, VCC Program Manager

The Bob Woodruff Foundation raises awareness of the tough challenges veterans and military families face, and we are grateful they have our back in our mission to end veteran homelessness in the Bay Area. To learn more about their work, visit their website: www.bobwoodrufffoundation.org/
Make an Impact of a Lifetime

Be remembered for your support of Bay Area veterans and join our Veterans Legacy Circle!

A legacy gift can serve both your personal financial and estate planning goals while sustaining Swords to Plowshares’ lasting impact in the lives of Bay Area veterans.

**Hear from a Veterans Legacy Circle Member**

*Swords to Plowshares rose to the occasion in the 1970s when veterans faced widespread neglect, to become the preeminent veterans’ resource organization it is today. It has been my great honor to be involved with Swords since the 1980s, and I cannot think of a more worthy organization for planned giving. It allows me to take part in the ongoing effort to serve the casualties of war while striving for a peaceful future.*

Carol Wilder  
Professor, The New School  
Swords to Plowshares Advisory Board Member

**Here are some of the simple ways to create the legacy you wish to leave:**

A gift in your will or trust  
Making a gift in your will or living trust allows you continued access to your wealth. Your gift may be a specific dollar amount, a percentage of your estate, or the remainder after all other provisions are specified.

Beneficiary Designation  
One of the simplest ways to make a legacy gift to Swords to Plowshares is to add Swords to Plowshares as the beneficiary of your investment account, retirement account, donor advised fund, or life insurance, so that your assets at the end of your lifetime will give hope and dignity to veterans in need.

Qualified Charitable Distribution from your IRA  
If you are 70 ½ or older, you can make a gift to Swords to Plowshares directly from your IRA without having to pay income taxes on the money.

For inquiries, scan the QR code to visit our website or contact soo.kim@stp-sf.org
Thank you for standing with us and investing in our mission.