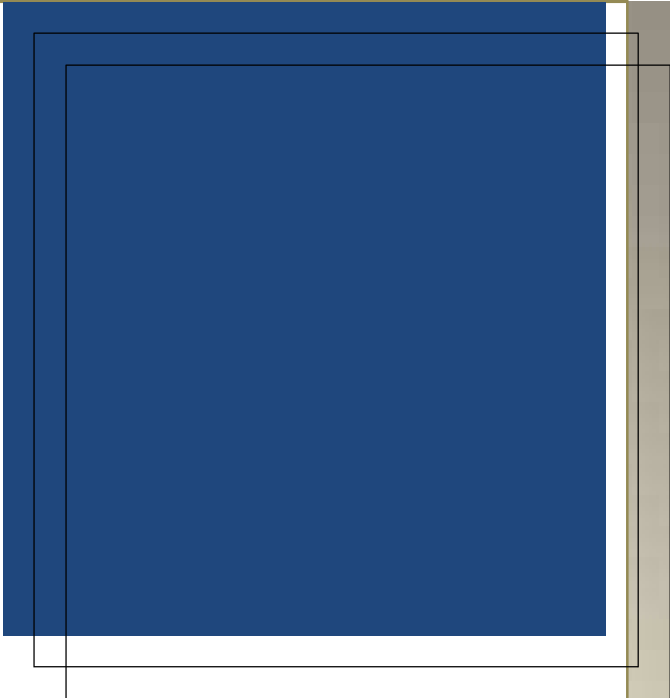


Equal Justice Works  
ID #16ND180953



# Equal Justice Works AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects

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The Corporation for National and  
Community Service ~ Grant Number  
10NDHDC004

An Evaluation  
By John A. Tull & Associates  
February 2013

# **EQUAL JUSTICE WORKS AMERICORPS VETERANS FELLOWS LEGAL PROJECTS EVALUATION**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This is a Report on the evaluation of Equal Justice Works' AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Fellows Projects under the Corporation for National and Community Service Grant Number 10NDHDC004<sup>1</sup> (hereafter, AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects or Projects). The evaluation was conducted by John Tull of John A. Tull & Associates in accordance with a proposal submitted to Equal Justice Works. The evaluation covers the work of AmeriCorps members from July 1, 2010 to November 15, 2012 with some statistical analysis of work done for the Grant Year October 1, 2011 to September 30, 2012.

This evaluation was undertaken with three objectives:

- To assess the outcomes being achieved for the veterans served by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects;
- To review the approach and methods used by each Project to provide services to veterans;
- To recommend means by which the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects can keep and report data to Equal Justice Works that demonstrate the degree to which they are accomplishing intended intermediate and end-outcomes.

The evaluation was conducted from late August to late November, 2012 encompassing three stages. First, evaluator interviewed the staff of Equal Justice Works regarding operation and administration of the program and reviewed available data regarding each of the Projects. During October, the Evaluator conducted site visits at all of the Projects to review how each operates and to identify with the management and Fellows what they perceive to be the intended and actual outcomes achieved for the veterans whom they serve.

Following the site visits, each AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project was asked to conduct a review of its cases to supplement available information regarding the outcomes of the Projects' work. An on-line survey was also conducted of non-legal organizations that serve veterans in each of the Project's area of operation seeking their opinions about the impact of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects on the lives of veterans and on the network of organizations that serve them.

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<sup>1</sup> During the time of this evaluation, Equal Justice Works had two grants from CNCS. In the 2010-2011 program year, the veterans work was performed under grant 10NDHDC004. For administrative reasons, the veterans members were transferred to grant 09NDHDC002 for program year 2011-2012, and transferred back to 10NDHDC004 for the 2012-2013 program year.

## CONTEXT FOR THE WORK – THE CHALLENGES FACING VETERANS

A great deal of attention has been paid in recent years to the challenges facing returning service-men and women, including those who served their country in times of peace. Male veterans are twice as likely as the general American population to be homeless and female veterans are three times as likely.<sup>2</sup> Estimates of the percentage of homeless persons who are veterans range from 14%<sup>3</sup> to 23%<sup>4</sup>. Many veterans find themselves homeless because of a lack of income due to limited education and skills that are not easily transferable from military to civilian life. Many have combat-related physical and mental health issues and disabilities which often lead to substance abuse problems.

Studies of the nature of homelessness among veterans portray a population with high rates of mental, physical, social, economic and legal issues. What is not always conveyed by such statistics is the complex web of interrelated problems that combine to hold the veteran in place in an at-risk situation. Lack of easily marketable job skills (especially in a weak economy) leads to a lack of income which makes obtaining housing difficult or impossible. Mental and physical disabilities, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) also inhibit the ability to obtain employment and are themselves exacerbated by the stress of unemployment and lack of housing. Such instability can lead to or intensify abuse of alcohol or drugs, which in turn make finding and retaining employment nearly impossible. The resulting personal and social isolation often separates veterans from family, friends and other potentially supportive social networks which further inhibit escape from the debilitating pattern.

## THE NECESSITY FOR LEGAL ADVOCACY

*Legal impediments to employment, housing and services.* This evaluation found that the web of problems and challenges facing at-risk and homeless veteran is itself often locked in place by a single legal problem or a combination of such problems that are interrelated and self-reinforcing. Thus, for example, veterans who are jobless or underemployed find it impossible to meet their **child support obligations**, particularly when the level of their payments may have been set when they received a military salary, including combat pay. Failure to pay child support and the arrearages, which can accumulate to a high level, can lead to arrest and incarceration. Moreover, the unresolved arrearages can result in the failure to pass a background check and forfeiture of a driver's license, both of which become further, and sometimes insurmountable, impediments to employment.

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<sup>2</sup> **Prevalence and Risk of Homelessness among U.S. Veterans: A Multisite Investigation** (National Center on Homelessness among Veterans, US Department Of Veterans Affairs, August 2011), page 4.  
[http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/Prevalence\\_Study.pdf](http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/Prevalence_Study.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Loc. Cit. See also, **The 2011 Point-in-Time Estimates of Homelessness** (US Dept. of Housing & Urban Development, December 2011)  
[http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/PIT-HIC\\_SupplementalAHARReport.pdf](http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/PIT-HIC_SupplementalAHARReport.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/veterans.html>.

In similar vein, a veteran who is homeless and struggling with addiction is likely, particularly in urban areas, to have frequent encounters with law enforcement resulting in **tickets**, ranging from jaywalking to public intoxication. Failure to appear and an inability to pay fines that are levied can lead to an accumulation of large **penalties** as well as **arrest warrants**. In some jurisdictions, **unpaid fines** are turned over to a collection agency which tacks on large attorney’s fees and other penalties, rendering it nearly impossible for the veterans to get out from under the debt. In some jurisdictions, the existence of outstanding fines and penalties as well as arrest warrants operate as a **bar to obtaining a driver’s license** or getting public employment or housing and other needed services. More drastically, the existence of an outstanding warrant, even if minor and from long in the past, may result in a veteran losing veterans benefits as a “fleeing felon.”

Other encounters with law enforcement in the criminal justice system can have cascading consequences in preventing employment or access to housing. Many veterans who suffer from PTSD, mental illness or drug or alcohol addiction may have committed a criminal act, including acting violently toward a spouse or family member, resulting in a criminal charge or, at the very least, a restraining order. Older veterans, over the course of the years, may have been convicted of multiple misdemeanors or even felonies.<sup>5</sup> The **record of a criminal conviction**, particularly a felony, can serve as an impenetrable barrier to employment or housing, unless the conviction is able to be expunged or otherwise set aside.

Inappropriate conduct that stems from PTSD or mental illness can have other consequences as well. Some veterans who suffer from PTSD or incipient mental illness may – as a result of the condition – have engaged in inappropriate behavior while still in the military and may, therefore, have received in Other Than Honorable discharge with the consequent, potential loss of eligibility for veterans’ income or health benefits. Thus, a **discharge upgrade** may be necessary for the veteran to get supportive income and, perhaps more importantly, access to health care to treat the PTSD or mental condition.<sup>6</sup>

The central importance of many of these legal impediments to homeless and at-risk veterans escaping their situation was confirmed by the most recent study conducted by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) regarding the needs of homeless veterans and the level of services available to respond to the needs. The CHALENG (Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Group for Veterans) surveyed nearly 20,000 individuals of whom 68% (13,132) were “consumers” of veterans’ services. Other participants in the survey were managers and staff of VA and other community-based veteran serving organizations.

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<sup>5</sup> According to the VA, approximately half of all those treated in VA specialized homeless programs have been convicted of felony or misdemeanor offenses that resulted either in incarceration or probation. The 17th Annual Progress Report: Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Group (CHALENG) for Veterans Physical Year 2010; Services for Homeless Veterans Assessment and Coordination (July 5, 2011) [hereafter, CHALENG Report], page 15.

<sup>6</sup> A veteran with a Dishonorable Discharge is not eligible for service with AmeriCorps funds and are not served through these Projects. Very few veterans receive a true “dishonorable discharge,” which can only be given through a conviction at a General Court Martial.

Among other things, the study catalogued a range of veterans' needs and the degree to which those needs are being met. The second, fourth, eighth and thirteenth highest levels of unmet need were respectively: 1) **legal assistance for child support issues**, 2) **legal assistance for outstanding warrants/fines**, 3) **legal assistance to help restore a driver's license**, and 4) **discharge upgrades**.<sup>7</sup>

*Legal assistance to obtain income.* In addition to the need for legal advocacy to address the legal impediments identified above, veterans also often need legal assistance to obtain income for which they may be eligible from the Veterans Administration (VA benefits), the Social Security Administration (SSI/SSD) or the state welfare system. A high percentage of veterans who suffer from physical and mental disabilities are unable to work at a level where they can support themselves. **Veterans Disability Benefits** should be available to provide income for such individuals who have received an Honorable or General Discharge from the military. Those who are not able to prove that their disability is connected to their military service because of poor records, or who received an Other Than Honorable Discharge, while presumably not eligible for Veterans Benefits, might qualify for **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)** or **Social Security Disability (SSD)**.

The CHALENG study found that among the unmet needs, welfare payments ranked fifth, SSI/SSD ranked twelfth and VA disability/pension ranked twentieth. Each of these income programs involves its own application process and rules which can be challenging to navigate. Veterans with complex cases and incomplete records can benefit from an attorney's careful review in submitting an initial application. Further, appeals from a denial of benefits in each case can require the engagement of an attorney for the veterans to prevail. This is particularly true of the Veterans Administration and the Social Security Administration in relation to applications for benefits that are based upon a disability, whether service-connected or not.

Advocacy before the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) can be particularly challenging. Throughout this evaluation, the VA was described as a "*broken system*." Action on application for benefits can take one half to two years to process and appeals languish as long as four years. In a case brought in the State of California challenging the delays and arbitrariness of the process, a Judge of the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals described the system in the following remarkably harsh terms:

*"We have reached ... [an] unfortunate point with respect to veterans who are suffering from the hidden or not hidden wounds of war. The VA's unchecked incompetence has gone on long enough; no more veterans should be compelled to agonize or perish while the government fails to perform its obligations. Having chosen to honor and provide for our veterans by guaranteeing them mental health care and other critical benefits to which they are entitled, the govern-*

<sup>7</sup> CHALENG Report, Pages 11-13.

*ment may not deprive them of that support through unchallengeable and interminable delays.”<sup>8</sup>*

One advocate interviewed in the course of the evaluation noted that “*The VA is just a nightmare to deal with. It is impossible for a homeless veteran to know how the system works and to navigate it. It can take a dedicated advocate several years to learn where to go to even find the status of a claim, since the VA often does not even acknowledge that it has been filed.*”

To respond to the challenge for veterans of navigating the process of applying for benefits and appealing denials, there is a network of Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) that exists to provide claimants with representation before the VA.<sup>9</sup> The fact that in rating unmet needs of homeless veterans, “VA disability/pension” was twentieth as opposed to the much higher rating for welfare (5<sup>th</sup>) and social security benefits (12<sup>th</sup>) would appear to reflect the existence of this network.

Unfortunately, however, the VSO network does not meet important parts of the demand for assistance with veterans’ claims. There was universal agreement among persons interviewed in the course of this evaluation that there is a wide discrepancy among the VSOs in the quality and commitment of their work. Moreover, they were uniformly reported as shying away from complicated veterans’ claims. This in part appears to stem from the fact that their funding comes from the number of claims they process, so there is a disincentive to take on complicated cases which will require the commitment of a significant amount of time and resources.

Many claims of homeless and at-risk veterans also involve a complicated interface between facts and the law that requires a sophisticated level of legal skills. There can be, for instance, very challenging questions of fact and proof when seeking a disability rating for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder that was caused by violent sexual assaults during the veteran’s time of service. Many such assaults are not reported when they occur because of fear of retaliation and mistrust of the command structure, so that gathering appropriate secondary evidence can be challenging and time-consuming, since witnesses may be scattered far and wide and reluctant to support the claim.

***Other legal assistance.*** This evaluation found that there are other less obvious ways in which legal assistance may be an important ingredient for at-risk or homeless veterans to become self-sufficient. In the areas described above there is a direct correlation between the legal problem and access to income, employment, housing and other needed services.

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<sup>8</sup> *Veterans for Common Sense vs. Shinseki*, Decision of the Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, May 10, 2011, reversed on jurisdictional grounds, May 7, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Under federal law, the Department of Veterans Affairs recognizes national organizations, state organizations created and funded by a State government and regional or local organizations that have a primary purpose of serving veterans and meet certain other conditions.

Many other legal problems, based on the circumstance of the veteran, can also become a direct or indirect impediment to finding or maintaining stability. Projects reported, for instance, assisting female veterans who were victims of domestic violence and who needed help obtaining a restraining order and a divorce in order to establish stability and safety for themselves and their children. One Project's advocates found themselves called upon to assist with probates and estates for older veterans to assure continued income and access to healthcare for their surviving spouses. Evictions, particularly from public housing, can have serious long-term consequences for veterans and their families.

### **WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHER VETERAN SERVING ORGANIZATIONS**

The complex circumstances within which many homeless or at-risk veterans find themselves and the frequent mix of physical, psychological, financial, social and legal problem that need to be addressed make achievement of long-term outcomes of stabilization and self-sufficiency a significant challenge. Leaving just one aspect of an at-risk veteran's needs unaddressed can undermine the resolution of the other issues preventing the individual from achieving self-sufficiency. Thus, for example, a veteran who overcomes drug addiction with successful treatment and who successfully completes job training may find obtaining employment impossible because of a prior felony conviction or an outstanding bench warrant. Conversely, successful expungement of a criminal record and quashing of accumulated bench warrants will not open the way for a veteran to obtain employment, if the individual remains addicted to drugs or alcohol or has untreated mental illness. In addition, there are times when resolution of a legal problem, such as setting aside an existing warrant or obtaining dismissal or expungement of a criminal charge, depends directly on the veteran's being able to demonstrate active participation in a treatment plan.

Because of this, the need for partnerships and cooperation among the agencies supporting veterans is paramount and the outreach component of each AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project is core to its success. Its purpose is not mere publicity about the availability of services for veterans and veterans' serving organizations. Its objective is to establish effective working relationships, so that services provided can be coordinated and support for the veteran maximized.

### **INTENDED OUTCOMES**

The primary focus of this evaluation is on whether intended outcomes were achieved for the veterans served by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects. It is important, therefore, to be clear regarding the outcomes that were intended, as well as those that occurred although they may not have been intended. The first of the outcomes are *end-outcomes*<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "End-outcomes" is the term used in AmeriCorps' Regulations to denominate what are sometimes also referred to as "long-term outcomes." 45 CFR 2522.520 which sets out "special terms" used in the **Regulations Governing the Operation of AmeriCorps Participants, Programs and Applicants** defines "end-outcomes" in this way: "(f) *End-outcomes specify a change that has occurred in communities or in the*

identified by Equal Justice Works and generally confirmed by the host sites during the evaluation visits:

- The assistance offered leads to the stabilization of the living situations of veterans and their families (self-sufficiency), and
- The assistance results in veterans having success in procuring permanent income through employment or government-benefits, living in stable and safe housing, and having access to medical care and supportive services, that they might otherwise be denied.

The end-outcomes are based on and supported by three sets of *intermediate-outcomes*:<sup>11</sup>

- The legal assistance removes legal impediments to veterans obtaining housing, employment and needed services, whether they obtain them or not; and,
- The legal assistance results in veterans and their families obtaining various government benefits, including VA, SSI and medical benefits;<sup>12</sup>
- The AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project establishes effective relationships and partnerships with other veteran serving organizations, characterized by cross referrals and in some cases conducting intake or providing assistance on-site with the organizations.

**Data sources.** Four data sources were used to assess the accomplishment of these outcomes by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects:

- First, the evaluator reviewed the information reported to Equal Justice Works by the Projects in their midyear and annual Reports.
- Second, each of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects was asked to supplement the data reported to Equal Justice Works by conducting a review of its cases to identify those which successfully removed a legal impediment to obtaining employment, benefits, housing, healthcare or other needed services, even if the individual had not yet been able to obtain such opportunities or benefits. They were also asked to identify cases where their records showed that the veteran, as a direct or indirect result of the assistance given, had actually obtained employment, benefits, housing, healthcare or other needed services, or where there were other reported changes in the individual's life that portended increased self-sufficiency. Examples of such changes might include reunification with family, commitment to a treatment program, employment training, sobriety, and so forth.

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*lives of community beneficiaries or members that is significant and lasting. These are actual benefits or changes for participants during or after a program."*

<sup>11</sup> "Intermediate-outcomes" are defined in AmeriCorps' regulations as "a change that has occurred in communities or in the lives of community beneficiaries or members, but is not necessarily a lasting benefit for them. They are observable and measurable indications of whether or not a program is making progress and are logically connected to end outcomes." 45 CFR 2522.520(d).

<sup>12</sup> As discussed below at page 20, this is both an intermediate- and end-outcome. Establishing a veteran's eligibility for VA disability payments involves a legal success akin to removing other legal impediments, but also results in a long-term source of income and may also establish previously denied eligibility for health benefits. It does not guarantee self-sufficiency, however, if other factors prevent the veteran from obtaining housing or needed treatment.



- Third, an online survey was conducted of veteran serving organizations with which the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects had directly or indirectly worked regarding their perception of the success of the Project in accomplishing the outcomes stated above.

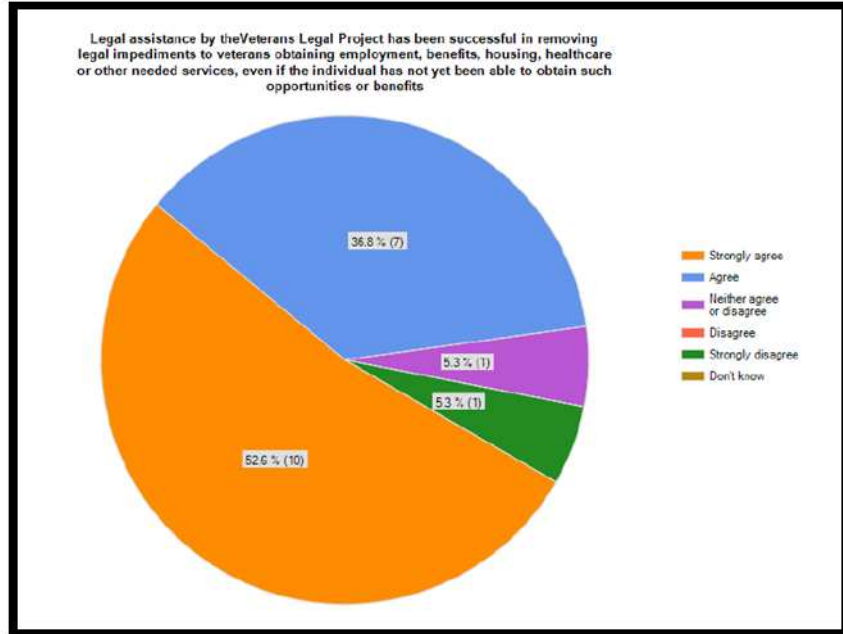
Fourth, the evaluator examined supplemental data made available by several of the Projects as well as data provided by one veteran serving organization.<sup>13</sup>

## ACHIEVEMENT OF INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES

### REMOVING LEGAL IMPEDIMENTS TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY

The first intermediate-outcome examined by this assessment is the degree to which the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects succeeded in removing various legal impediments which are known to keep veterans from escaping homelessness and obtaining self-sufficiency, even though the ultimate outcome might not yet be known. To assess this, the evaluator reviewed information gathered during the on-site visits, results from the online survey, results of the case review conducted by each Project and data submitted to Equal Justice Works by each of the host sites.

**Survey results.** The on-line survey conducted of partner, veterans' serving organizations asked a series of questions about their perception of the intermediate-outcome of removing legal impediments for clients of the Projects. Respondents were asked whether the Veterans Law Project in their area of service "... has been successful in removing legal impediments to veterans obtaining employment, benefits, housing, healthcare or other needed services, even if the individual has not yet been able to obtain such opportunities or benefits."<sup>14</sup> The re-



<sup>13</sup> See the discussion beginning at page 26.

<sup>14</sup> The question gave a list of such impediments stating: "Legal impediments may include 1) child-support arrearages, 2) a misdemeanor or felony conviction that is eligible for expungement, 3) a pending criminal charge that may be subject to treatment by a Veterans Treatment Court or otherwise diverted, 4) outstand-

spondents resoundingly affirmed the positive impact of the work of the Projects with 89.4% strongly agreeing (52.6%) or agreeing (36.8%) with the statement. One person neither agreed or disagreed and another strongly disagreed.

The comments of the respondents regarding these survey questions add texture to their strong affirmation of the importance of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects overcoming legal impediments to veterans obtaining employment, housing and other services.

- *“Please hear that the demand is much larger than available resources. This service is monumental for Veterans to be able to resolve legal issues allowing them the opportunity to obtain safe and affordable housing.”*
- *“Just look at the data report showing 18-months of casework on various child support cases for veterans. The amount of past due debt that has been eliminated through one form of action or another, and the number of orders that have been modified to reflect the vet's true/current income level has been really good.”*
- *“In some cases, felonies have been reduced to misdemeanors, making veterans eligible for housing and employment opportunities that would have otherwise been closed to them.”*
- *“Without this service, veterans are stuck in a maze that seems to have no way out.”*
- A comment made during the on-site visits by the director of a residential treatment center that works with the Project hosted by the Inner City Law Center reflects the same judgment: *“For our guys, it’s huge. It’s the complexity, whether it’s child support holding them back from getting employment or a restraining order that prevents them from handling a firearm. For someone who is going to be a security guard that’s the difference between \$15 or \$20 an hour and \$10/hour.”*

The case reviews and data submitted to Equal Justice Works provide a more detailed picture of the efforts of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects to remove legal impediments to self-sufficiency. Several specific legal problems were focused on in this evaluation, because they are cited as common impediments to veterans' self-sufficiency and were ranked high among unmet needs in the 2010 CHALENG Report.<sup>15</sup> Those areas of focus were: 1) child support arrearages; 2) fines, penalties and warrants; 3) expungements, post-conviction dismissal or reduction of criminal charges; 4) upgrade discharges; and 5) veterans disability, pension and health benefits.<sup>16</sup>

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*ing tickets, fines and warrants for failure to appear, 5) a less than honorable discharge from military service, 6) a restraining order, 7) and outstanding civil judgment, or 8) any other similar impediment.”*

<sup>15</sup> The 2010 CHALENG Survey is discussed at length beginning at page 3.

<sup>16</sup> Suspension and revocation of drivers licenses were also ranked as a high-end men need in the 2010 CHALENG Survey discussed above beginning at page 3. This assessment did not focus on this issue as a stand-alone legal problem, since the common causes of suspensions and revocations of drivers licenses are child-support arrearages and unpaid fines and penalties. Thus, success in addressing either of these problems, generally opens the door for restoration of the veteran’s driver’s license.

**On-site visits and case reviews.** The on-site visit conducted by the evaluator to each AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project found different approaches to how each serves veterans. Some Projects specifically target one or more specific impediments, generally referring other issues to other sources of help. Other Projects take a broader array of cases, often referred by partner organizations, among which are issues identified as impediments to self-sufficiency.<sup>17</sup> Often at the outset of the Project, a broad range of cases would be taken on referral from various veterans' serving organizations in order to establish credibility and cement a solid working relationship. The following discussion addresses the collective outcomes of all seven of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects in the commonly recurring legal impediments identified above.

***Child support modifications and forgiveness or reduction of arrearages.*** As noted above, the CHALENG survey conducted on behalf of the Department of Veterans Affairs in 2010 identified legal representation related to child support issues as the second-highest unmet need of homeless veterans. The Report offered a detailed analysis of why legal assistance with child support was so important to homeless and at-risk veterans.

*“Currently, many homeless Veterans find that their ability to move into permanent housing is compromised by old fines, debts, and other legal judgments related to the non-payment of child support. VA homeless program staff report that it is not unusual for a homeless Veteran to face the prospect of reincarceration for misdemeanor warrants stemming from child support in arrears. Unresolved child support debts can result in liens against bank accounts, denial of credit, inability to secure a lease, failure in background checks (commonly a part of job applications), forfeiture of driver’s licenses, and ultimately re-arrest. Many of these obligations were incurred while the Veteran was homeless, in a phase of active addiction, or otherwise untreated for a serious mental illness.”<sup>18</sup>*

The Report went on to note the strong correlation between incarceration and unmet child support obligations. *“[T]he typical incarcerated parent owes \$20,000 in child support when released from prison, with payment schedules averaging \$225 to \$300 per month. Minimum wage workers have little hope of making these payments while supporting themselves.”<sup>19</sup>*

One AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project, the Northwest Justice Project in Washington state, targets child support work on behalf of veterans, having been one of the original sites of a collaborative pilot project involving the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Health and Human Services and the American Bar Association in response to the

<sup>17</sup> See the discussion at page 35.

<sup>18</sup> The 17th Annual Progress Report: Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Group (CHALENG) for Veterans Physical Year 2010; Services for Homeless Veterans Assessment and Coordination (July 5, 2011), page 15.

<sup>19</sup> *Loc. Cit.*

CHALENG Report on the level of unmet need in the area. Other Projects have taken on more occasional child support matters.<sup>20</sup>

Anecdotal information from the reports and interviews of advocates working on the Projects confirms the potentially strong correlation between child support representation and increase self-sufficiency for the veteran. According to advocates who do child support work, three factors are key to supporting self-sufficiency for the veterans. The first is reduction of the monthly obligation to a level which the veteran is capable of paying. Second is forgiveness or significant reduction in arrearages. Third, for some, is reinstatement of a driver's license which has been suspended for failure to pay and without which the veteran might not be able to find or keep a job to be able to make payments.

Data reported from the case reviews show a significant monetary impact of the work. The case reviews identified 28 cases in which veterans were assisted with modifications of their child support obligations and with reductions or forgiveness of arrearages. In total \$265,078 of arrearages were forgiven – an average of \$25,508 per client (with a high of \$81,000 in arrearages and the low of \$1694). The average reduction in monthly payments per client was \$299 – from \$369 to \$70 per month. Representation of one veteran led to a reduction in child support payments from \$609 a month to \$10 a month.

***Tickets, fines, penalties and warrants.*** Frequent encounters with law enforcement and tickets for infractions like jaywalking, public intoxication and violations of open container laws are a fact of life for many homeless veterans, particularly in urban areas. The tickets often lead to failure to appear charges with compounding increases in penalties and in some jurisdictions significant additional costs as the unpaid fines and penalties are assigned to collection companies for recovery. Failure to appear can result in the issuance of a misdemeanor warrant with an ongoing potential for arrest that is an additional destabilizing factor in homeless or at-risk veterans' lives. Outstanding tickets and warrants may disqualify the veteran for public sector work, for acceptance into subsidized housing or for any service or opportunity which requires a background check. Advocates in the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects reported that often veterans who were referred to them or sought help on their own with tickets and warrants did so because they were beginning to get their lives straightened out and found their way blocked by the outstanding fines, penalties and warrants.

Case reviews identified 72 cases in which veterans were represented to have tickets dismissed or fines and penalties reduced and warrants quashed. The total value of the reduction in tickets and penalties was \$73,714. In six cases, the dismissal of the tickets and oth-

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<sup>20</sup> The Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia targeted child-support as the central focus of its veterans' work during the first year of its AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project. If found, however, that in the District of Columbia most of the child support cases arose in other jurisdictions where it did not practice, so it changed the focus of the project to public benefits.

er violations were reported to have resulted in the reinstatement of suspended or revoked drivers' license.<sup>21</sup>

The review of cases by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects produced 19 examples that demonstrate the close correlation between the need to dismiss tickets, to reduce or eliminate fines and penalties and to quash bench warrants and the long-term goal of accomplishing self-sufficiency for veterans. In these cases, veterans were referred to one of the Projects for service or sought them out because they had been successful in a rehabilitation or vocational program, but had found that outstanding tickets and fines and associated warrants were significant impediments to moving forward.

Sometimes legal action is necessary to quash a warrant that has been erroneously issued. In one compelling case handled by the Inner City Law center, a young Iraq veteran became homeless when the Veterans Administration cut him off from his benefits because of an arrest warrant that had been mistakenly issued. Representation by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Fellow was necessary to reinstate the veteran's benefits and to protect against the VA's Debt Management Center seeking to collect and "overpayment" because of the same erroneously issued warrant.

*Expungements, post-conviction dismissal or reduction of criminal charges.* An unfortunate consequence of the high level of PTSD, mental illness and drug or alcohol abuse among veterans is behavior that results in criminal charges. Engagement with the criminal justice system is a significant component of the interplay of factors that can be both a cause and a result of homelessness. The 2010 CHALENG Report observed that almost half of veterans treated in VA specialized homeless programs had been convicted of felonies or misdemeanors that had resulted in prison or jail-time, or probation.<sup>22</sup>

The story of a client of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project housed in the office of the San Diego Public Defender illustrates the pattern. The project assisted a Gulf War veteran who suffered as a result of his military service from Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) and depression. The veteran's condition resulted in a life of homelessness and substance abuse during which time he was charged with a series of minor crimes. Eventually, he engaged in conduct which led to being charged with and convicted of a felony assault with the real prospect of imprisonment.

The veteran was represented by the San Diego Public Defender and, at the sentencing stage, was referred to the Veterans Treatment Review Calendar (VTRC) (part of the growing movement of veterans treatment courts), which is supported by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project. As a result of his participation in the VTRC, the veteran's conviction was reduced to a misdemeanor. Because of the rigorous treatment program in which the

<sup>21</sup> The actual dollar amount of fines and penalties reduced is probably higher, as is the number of drivers licenses reinstated, since not all the Projects has a system for recording and reporting these outcomes. See the recommendations regarding data collection on page 30.

<sup>22</sup> CHALENG Report, Page 15.

veteran had to participate as part of the VTRC program, he succeeded in addressing his addiction problem and is about to complete college. The veteran's prospects for obtaining employment when he began the program with a felony conviction and active addiction was described as "virtually nil." With a college degree and no felonies on his record, the veteran stands a significantly improved chance of obtaining work.

During the past year, 20 veterans received assistance directly related to the expungement<sup>23</sup> of criminal records or reduction of a felony conviction to a misdemeanor. Seven of those were participants in the San Diego Veterans Treatment Review Calendar, who as a result of their participation in the program had their felony conviction reduced to a misdemeanor.

***Discharge upgrades.*** Many of the factors which lead veterans to become embroiled in the criminal justice system begin to affect their lives even before their departure from military service. Advocates working for the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects reported instances of service members who had begun to exhibit symptoms of PTSD or some form of mental illness prior to their departure from service. Their resulting behavior sometimes led to being separated from military service with an Other Than Honorable Discharge. Under current law, to be eligible for veterans health and income benefits, a service member's discharge must be at least a General Discharge under Honorable Conditions or preferably and Honorable Discharge. Some VA offices are reported to interpret the restriction to include any discharge that is "less than honorable."

The result, of course, is a Catch-22 in which the condition that led to the conduct which resulted in an Other Than Honorable Discharge is the same condition for which the veterans cannot get treatment or benefits through the VA because of their discharge level. Depending on the amount of time which has lapsed, there can be difficult problems of proof to establish that the conduct that resulted in the unfavorable discharge level was the result of a service related condition which itself should be the basis for Veterans Disability and Health benefits.

Discharge upgrades are handled by the Department of Defense and each Branch of Service has its own procedures and rules. The AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects have undertaken only a few discharge upgrades during the course of their operation. Advocates, however, recognize the potential significance in opening the door to income and health benefits for veterans that need them and several were considering increasing their involvement in the area. Those which have been filed are still pending.

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<sup>23</sup> Not every state has an "expungement" procedure. In Indiana, in certain delineated circumstances, a criminal record can be ordered by a judge to be "sealed," which means it cannot be disclosed and does not have to be reported on a job application or other similar document. In California, the court has authority to grant a post-conviction dismissal of a criminal charge if the defendant has not served time in the state prison. Persons who are convicted of a felony and incarcerated in state prison, are not eligible for dismissal, but may obtain a Certificate of Rehabilitation and Pardon.. Other states have formal expungement procedures established by statute that delineate the circumstances under which a criminal conviction can be expunged from their record, reducing its impact as a potentially insurmountable impediment to employment and housing.

## OBTAINING INCOME FOR VETERANS

*Veterans Benefits Claims and Appeals.* The most direct – and easily measureable – means for assisting at-risk and homeless veterans to obtain income is through representation to obtain veterans benefits for those who are eligible for them. The outcome is both immediate and long-term, since the benefits, which can be substantial, are assured for as long as the veteran is disabled. Not all of the host programs for the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project selected Veterans Benefits as a focus for their representation. Often, the decision was a practical one – a claim for veterans' benefits can take more than two years to process, well more than the AmeriCorps member's term of service.<sup>24</sup> In addition, some of the host programs felt that the available service from volunteer, pro bono lawyers was adequate to meet the need in their area and that for relatively straightforward cases referrals to Veterans Service Officers that were known to be effective would suffice.

The Projects that did provide representation on veterans' benefits claims compiled a strong record of accomplishment. During 2012, the Projects that handled Veterans Benefits cases recovered \$1,567,130 in retroactive veterans' benefits for their clients.<sup>25</sup> In 25 cases on which the Fellows worked directly and prevailed, clients recovered \$422,130 in benefits and an average of \$2465.25 in monthly payments for the veterans who were represented.

### Summary of Intermediate Outcomes Obtained for Veterans

- 28 veterans were assisted with modifications of their child support obligations.
  - \$265,078 of arrearages were forgiven – an average of \$25,508 per client.
  - The average reduction in monthly payments per client was \$299 – from \$369 to \$70 per month.
- 72 veterans were represented to have tickets dismissed or fines and penalties reduced and warrants quashed.
  - The total value of the reduction in tickets and penalties was \$73,714.
  - In six cases, the dismissal of the tickets and other violations was reported to have resulted in the veteran being eligible for reinstatement of suspended or revoked drivers' license.
- 20 veterans received assistance directly related to the expungement of criminal records or reduction of a felony conviction to a misdemeanor.
- The Projects recovered \$1,567,130 in retroactive veterans' benefits. In 25 cases in which AmeriCorps Veterans Legal fellows represented veterans seeking VA Benefits and prevailed, clients collected a total of \$422,130. The veterans represented were awarded an average of \$2465.25 in monthly payments or \$29,583 a year.

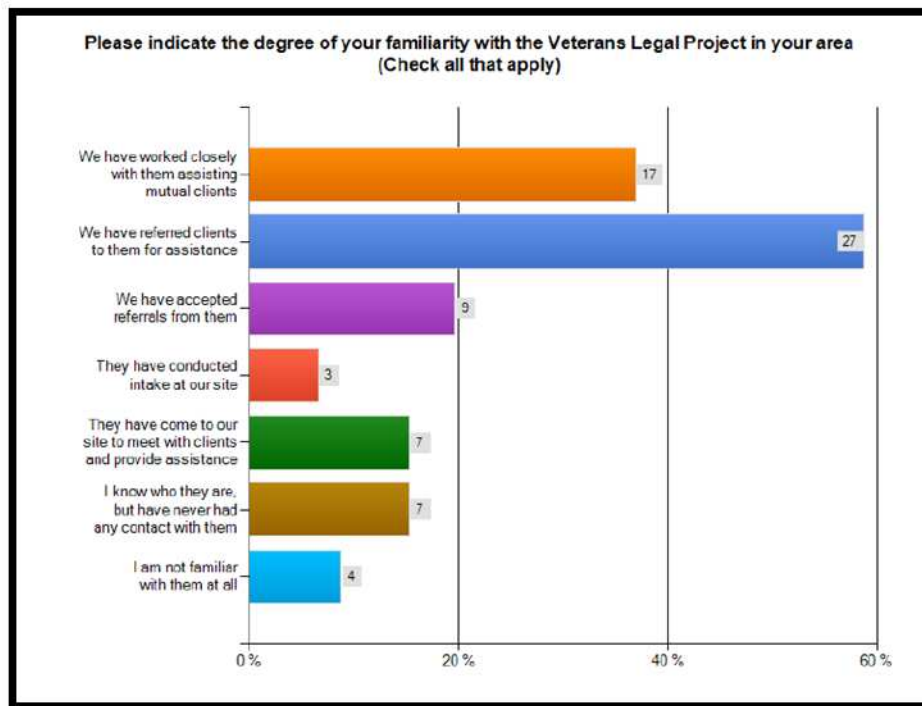
<sup>24</sup> The problems with long delays in the processing of veterans' claims are discussed above at page 4.

<sup>25</sup> This includes \$1,145,000 recovered by the Center for Veterans Advancement, a unit of the host site, Public Counsel. The AmeriCorps Fellows focus their work on advocacy to set aside fines and penalties resulting from traffic and other tickets. See the discussion of this issue above at page 13.

## STRENGTHENING THE NETWORK AND HELPING TO CREATE PARTNERSHIPS TO SERVE VETERANS

There are a large number of organizations that serve veterans, some of them with long and proud histories of work in the field. To measure the degree to which the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects have been successful in strengthening the network and establishing effective partnerships with veterans serving organizations, an on-line survey was conducted of veteran serving agencies that work in the same area as each of the Projects.<sup>26</sup>

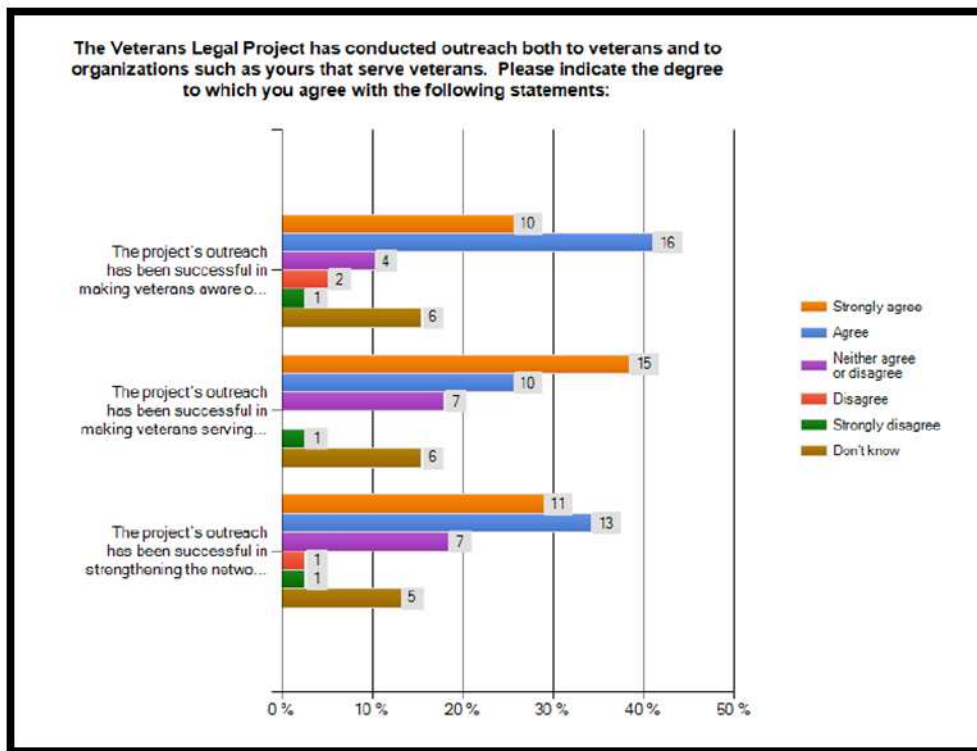
The chart below shows the number and percentage of responses regarding the respondents' degree of familiarity and connection with the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project in their area of service. Almost 60% of the respondents had referred a client to the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project and nearly 20% had had a client referred to them. Nearly 40% responded that they worked closely with the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project assisting mutual clients. AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects had provided assistance on-site at 15.2% of the 46 organizations that responded and had conducted intake at 6.5% of them.



<sup>26</sup> Six of the Projects sent the survey to organizations with which they work relatively closely. The seventh, the Indiana Legal Services Military Assistance Project, which has one Fellow serving the entire, large, rural state of Indiana, distributed the survey to all of the 92 County Veterans Service Officers plus other organizations and individuals serving veterans. The Fellow had devoted a significant amount of time in the early phase of her Project to reaching out to the widely dispersed VSOs and other veteran serving organizations, and, therefore, was interested in the perception of the Project across a wide spectrum of potential respondents. A total of 56 persons responded to the survey, of whom 33 were from Indiana.



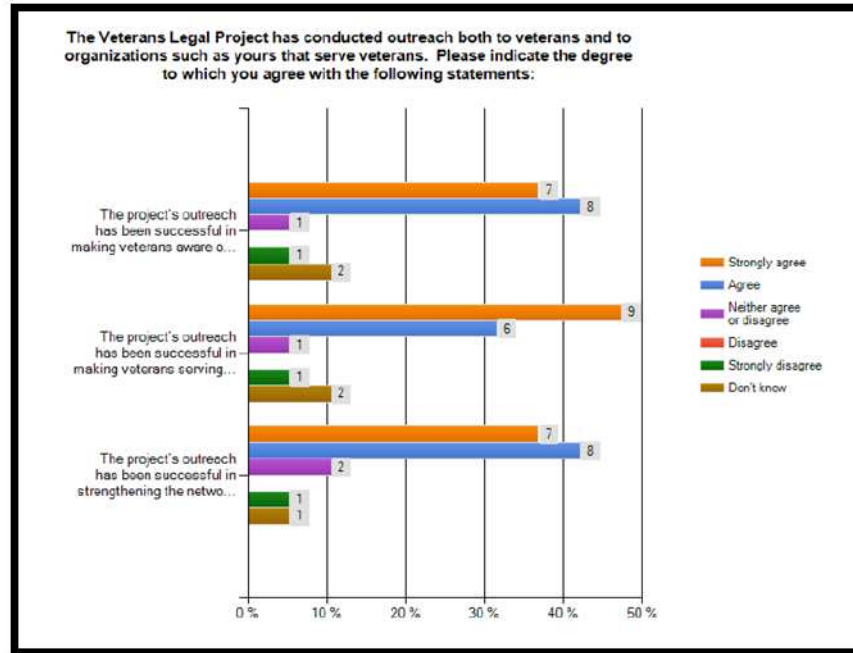
**Impact on the veterans serving network.** The first set of questions in the survey addressed how successful the outreach of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects had been in strengthening veterans’ networks and fostering collaboration among veterans’ serving organizations. Respondents were also asked about the impact of their outreach on the knowledge of both veterans and veteran-serving organizations about legal rights. There was a high degree of concurrence, although not unanimity, about the positive outcome of the Projects’ outreach. Two thirds of the respondents indicated that they “Strongly Agree” (25.6%) or “Agree” (41%) that the Legal Project with which they were familiar “...has been successful in making veterans aware of their legal rights and hav[ing] them take steps to protect or assert those rights.” Slightly less than 8% said they either “Disagree” (5.1%) or “Strongly Disagree” (2.6%) with the statement. Another 15.4% said they “Don’t know.”



Responses were similarly affirmative regarding the degree to which “*The Project’s outreach has been successful in making veterans serving organizations, such as ours, aware of resources available to address legal problems of veterans.*” Of the 39 respondents who answered the question, 64.1% indicated that they either “Strongly Agree” (38.5%) or “Agree” (25.6%) with statement, while 17.9% responded that they “Neither agree or disagree.” One respondent (2.6%) indicated strong disagreement with the statement and 13.2% said that they “Don’t know.”

Finally, there was similar affirmation, though slightly less positive, agreement with the statement that the outreach of the Legal Project’s “...has been successful in strengthening the network of veteran serving organizations and fostering collaboration among them.” A total of 63.1% of the respondents either indicated that they “Strongly agree” (28.9%) or “Agree (34.2%) with a statement, while 18.4% “Neither agree or disagree.” Another 5.2% either “Disagree” (2.6%) or “Strongly Disagree” (2.6%) with the statement and 13.2% said they “Don’t know.”

As shown in the chart to the right, when the responses to the same set of questions were filtered to include only those organizations that had worked directly with one of the Projects, the results show an even higher level of concurrence about positive outcomes, with close to 80% of the respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing with statements.



***Strengthening of the capacity of the host sites as part of the veterans serving network.***

One affirmative outcome of the work done by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects was to increase responsiveness to veterans by the legal aid organizations or public defender’s office that host the Projects. This change manifested in several ways. Indiana Legal Services, Inc. (ILSI), for instance, found that the overall number of veterans it served, in addition to those served directly by the Project, increased significantly after the Project began. ILSI is a statewide program with nine offices and a senior law project. The number of veterans served in 2010, before the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project began was 152; a number which jumped to 468 in 2011 and to 631 in 2012.<sup>27</sup> In two of the program’s larger offices, the number of veterans served nearly doubled from 2011 to 2012 with the Bloomington Office increasing from 79 to 141 and the Indianapolis Office increasing from 69 to 152 veterans served. The overall increase for the program among all its offices was 34.8% from 2011 to 2012 with a 959% increase from 2010. Program leadership attributes the increase to the outreach conducted by the AmeriCorps Fellow, coupled with increased

<sup>27</sup> The increase from 2010 to 2011 may be attributed in part to better counting, because of the greater awareness of the need to keep track of the number of veterans served.

awareness in the veterans community – which has a very active grapevine – of the services available through the program.

Several of the host organizations also reported increased knowledge among the other advocacy staff of the special challenges that many veterans encounter as well as the network of services available to them. Thus, for example, the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Fellow assigned to the Office of the San Diego Public Defender provided training so that the office’s lawyers would be aware of aspects of veterans’ law that are pertinent in representing veterans charged with a crime. ILSI featured a training in veterans law in its daylong statewide staff meeting attended by all of its attorneys and paralegals. Supervisors, managers and colleagues in several other host organizations also commented that the presence of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Fellow had increased their sensitivity to issues facing veterans and the availability of resources to respond.

### **ACCOMPLISHMENT OF END-OUTCOMES BY THE AMERICORPS VETERANS LEGAL PROJECTS**

The importance of accomplishing the intermediate goals described above is their direct and indirect connection with the longer-term outcome of increased self-sufficiency for at-risk and homeless veterans. “Self-sufficiency” is somewhat subjective, but is marked by the more specific end-outcomes of 1) having stable income either from employment or permanent eligibility for a government income program, 2) having stable and long-term housing, 3) having health care for known or likely mental and physical conditions, 4) being free from substance abuse, and 5) for some, being connected with supportive social networks, including family.

Several factors make it challenging to gather evidence-based measurements of the accomplishment of these end-outcomes. Because the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects generally do not maintain ongoing contact with their clients after representation closes, it is a significant challenge for them to measure whether they have accomplished the end-outcome of helping their clients achieve self-sufficiency and have facilitated their obtaining adequate income, employment, housing and other needed services. Achievement of these end-outcomes may follow long after removal of one or more of the legal impediments described above. Moreover, for at-risk veterans, achievement of self-sufficiency often depends on the veteran addressing other factors, such as drug addiction or untreated mental health problems, in addition to removal of the legal impediment. Veterans who are at risk or homeless are also often transient exacerbating the difficulty of follow-up to ascertain their status.

Notwithstanding these inherent difficulties in measuring these end outcomes, this assessment found that it is possible to obtain meaningful data on the subject. In many cases, the partnerships which have been forged between the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project and other veteran serving organizations results from simultaneous – and sometimes coordinated – efforts to assist homeless and at-risk veterans with the whole range of issues they face. Thus, while the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project is addressing a veteran’s legal imped-

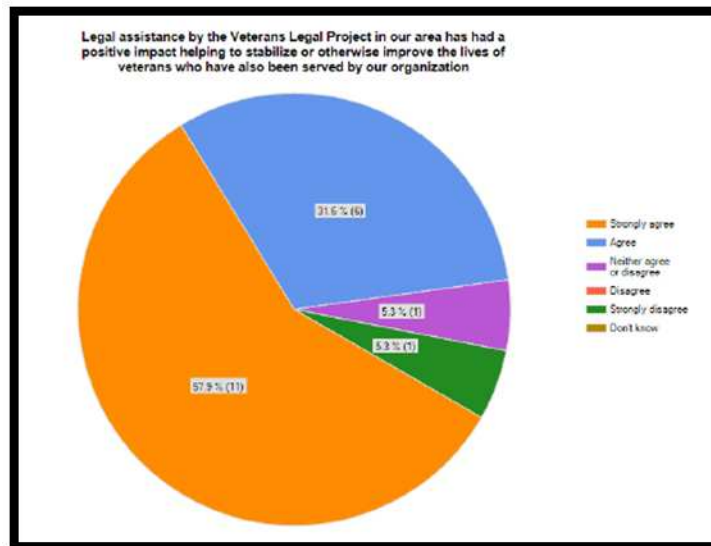
iments, a veteran serving organization might be providing drug treatment and psychological counseling and linking the individual to other social services. Indeed, in some cases what precipitates an at-risk veteran seeking to address a legal problem is success in overcoming drug addiction or untreated mental illness. Because the progress of many veterans who are in treatment programs is carefully monitored, it is possible to obtain primary and secondary data from those programs that indicate the achievement of the end-outcomes sought by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects.<sup>28</sup>

To ascertain the degree to which self-sufficiency and other related end outcomes had been achieved for veterans served by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects, this assessment conducted an online survey of partners that had worked with Projects. In addition, the Projects were asked to review their case files for indicia of long-term changes accomplished for the people whom they served. Some of the Projects provided additional data regarding outcomes that they keep for their own management purposes or for other funders.

## ACHIEVEMENT OF END-OUTCOMES

**Increased self-sufficiency.** It is a somewhat subjective question whether a veteran has increased self-sufficiency or stabilized an at-risk life. Nevertheless, professionals working with a veteran may have a well-informed perception of the degree to which the individual has a greater capacity for self-sufficiency. For that reason, the online survey conducted as part of this assessment asked veteran serving organizations a series of questions regarding their perception of the long-term impact of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects on the lives of veterans who have been served. To assure that the responses were based upon direct knowledge of the work of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project, the responses were filtered to include only the respondents who indicated that they had worked with one of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects.

The first inquiry in the survey was to ask the respondents whether they agreed with the broad statement that “*Legal as-*



<sup>28</sup> Primary data, for instance, would be aggregated data showing each time that a veteran has obtained a job or permanent, long-term housing. Secondary data would be veteran serving agencies' perceptions of the veterans' increased self-sufficiency demonstrated, for example, by their capacity to obtain and keep employment or housing. An example of such data being available through a Grant and Per Diem program can be found below at page 24.

*sistance by the [Veterans Legal Project with which they were familiar] has had a positive impact helping to stabilize or otherwise improve the lives of veterans who have also been served by our organization.”* The responses were extremely positive with 89.5% stating that they either “Strongly Agree” (57.9%) or “Agree” (31.6%) with the statement. One respondent neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, and one other strongly disagreed with it.

The story of a Vietnam War veteran represented by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project in West Virginia demonstrated how the simple removal of several legal impediments can be the final stage for a previously at-risk veteran to achieve self-sufficiency and a stable life. Evidence of the client’s achievement of self-sufficiency was possible, because the legal representation came at the end of the veteran’s successful treatment for addiction at a transitional housing facility. The individual was, in fact, leading recovery meetings because of his success. However, several misdemeanor convictions, an unpaid court judgment and an outstanding bench warrant from the 1980s stood in the way of his “...*taking the next step in becoming self-sufficient, which was to obtain his own house.*” In addition, the outstanding bench warrant threatened the loss of the client’s VA benefits, through operation of the “fleeing felon” provisions of the law.

The AmeriCorps Fellow intervened on behalf of the veteran by assisting with expungement of the misdemeanors and advocating directly with the local Housing Authority regarding the veteran’s eligibility for subsidized housing. The Fellow also succeeded in procuring the assistance of a public defender in another state to dissolve the bench warrant, which allowed reinstatement of the veteran’s benefits. In reporting this case, the host site stated: “*Thanks to the collaboration between Jordan [the AmeriCorps Member], Mr. Landry’s<sup>29</sup> social worker, and Mr. Landry himself, this formerly homeless veteran now lives in subsidized housing with a clear record and steady income, which allows him to focus on maintaining his own recovery while supporting the recovery of fellow veterans.*”

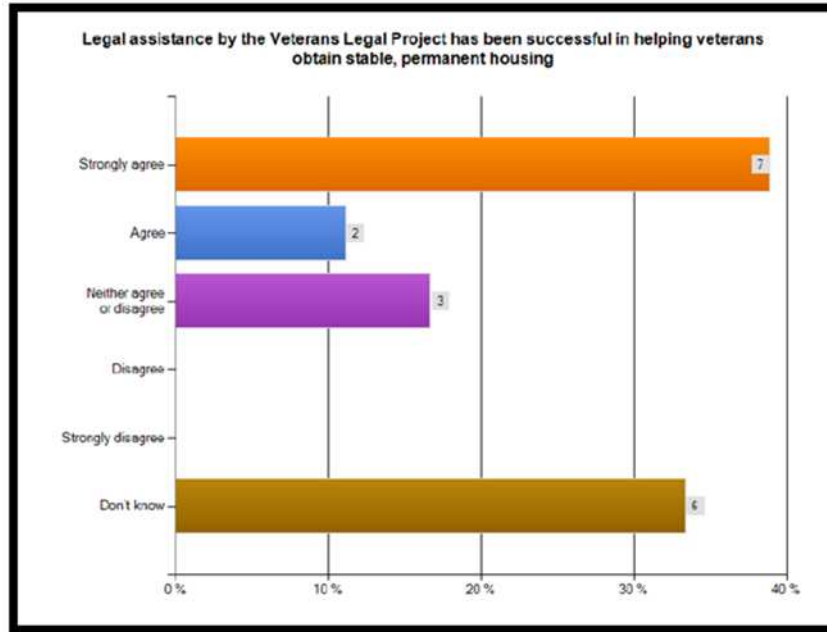
**Permanent, stable housing.** For at-risk and homeless veterans, having permanent, stable housing is key to stabilizing their lives and achieving self-sufficiency. For this reason, it was one of the end-outcomes examined in the course of this evaluation. There were a number of indicators among the data obtained during this assessment that veterans represented by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects succeeded in obtaining stable housing. Data submitted by the host sites indicated that of the 2,504 veterans who were served, 940 received assistance seeking to overcome a barrier to housing and 70 were reported either to have kept or obtained housing.

The data are consistent with the results of the online survey. The first question asked regarding end-outcomes of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects was the degree to which the respondents agreed with the following statement: “*Legal assistance by the [Veterans Legal Project] has been successful in helping veterans obtain stable, permanent housing.*”

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<sup>29</sup> The name provided by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project is fictitious to protect the confidentiality of the client's identity.

Of the respondents, 49% either said they “Strongly agree” (38.9%) or “Agree” (11.1%), while 16.7% responded that they “Neither agree or disagree.” No one disagreed with the statement, but one third said they did not know.



Public Counsel’s Center for Veterans Advancement which hosts an AmeriCorps Fellow received a powerful affirmation of its impact on obtaining housing for veterans. A Salvation Army residential treatment center called The Haven, at which the AmeriCorps Fellow provides services on a regular basis, had been asked by the CVA to affirm by letter what it has spontaneously said in the course of a meeting of veterans organizations. That letter read in part:

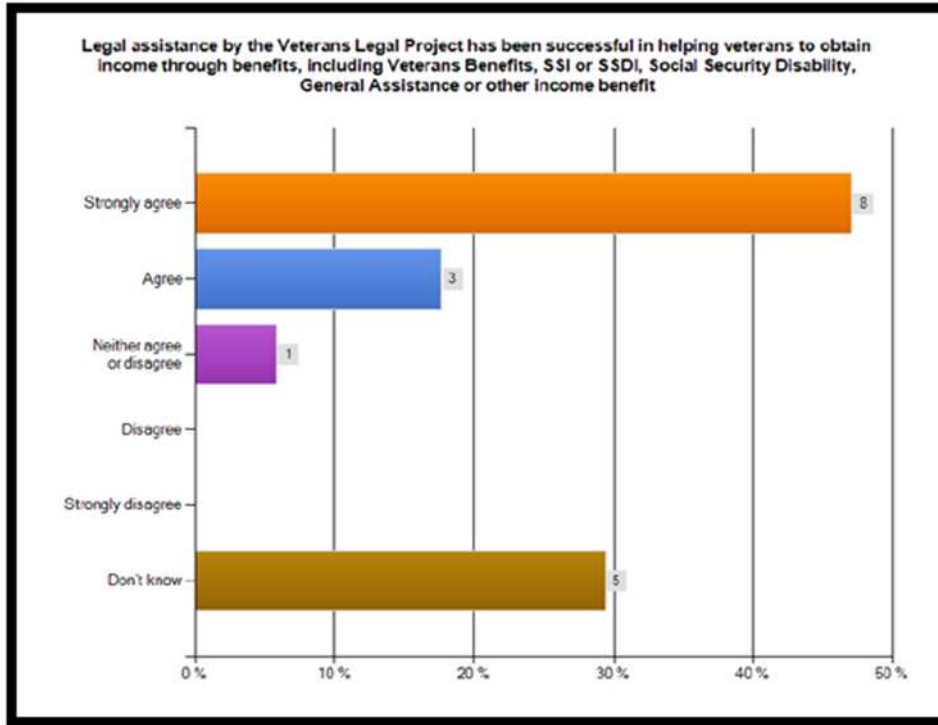
*“This letter is to thank Public Counsel for placing your Equal Justice Works Fellow, Nancy Wheeler, on site to provide free legal services to our homeless veterans here at The Haven on the grounds of the West L.A. Veterans Administration. Because of her invaluable services clearing legal barriers to the efforts our clients are making to secure housing and reenter the workforce, our case managers have been able to house the veterans we serve more swiftly than before the legal clinic was established resulting in a dramatic reduction in residential services costs to the Salvation Army each month. This does not include additional social services related hard costs savings we realize as well which are more difficult to quantify. **At this time we estimate that your EJW is enabling us to quicken to move to permanent housing by one month, which is about \$2,000 per veteran in savings. With the expansion of your legal clinic’s hours, we expect these savings to grow dramatically in the coming year.**”*  
 [Emphasis in the original] Letter from Janice Tsao, Executive Director of The Salvation Army Haven (Los Angeles, CA) to Paul Freese, Vice President of Public Counsel, dated October 17, 2012.

The case histories provided by each project also show a wide range of legal interventions that directly led to the veterans obtaining or keeping their housing. In the story recounted above, the veteran was able to obtain housing because of expungement of prior criminal convictions and dismissal of related civil judgments. A female, disabled, Vietnam War veteran, represented by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project in Indiana was in jeopardy of losing her recently gained eligibility for a Veterans Affairs Supported Housing subsidy (VASH) because of the violence of her husband which was damaging the apartment. With the assistance of the AmeriCorps Fellow, the veteran obtained a divorce from the husband that protected her from the loss of eligibility. Another veteran in West Virginia was able to obtain his own apartment based on the availability of a \$38,404 back payment and monthly disability payments of \$1327 from the VA. In one unusual case in Indiana, review of multiple legal documents in the course of helping a disabled veteran uncovered the fact that the client had inherited a home which he had not known about and in which he now resides.

**Income.** A second essential ingredient of self-sufficiency is having a stable source of income that is adequate to meet the veterans’ needs. Many at-risk and homeless veterans are disabled and so may be eligible for disability benefits from the Veterans Administration, if they can prove that their disability is service related; or from the Social Security Administration, if it is not. Other veterans often find it difficult to obtain employment that provides an adequate income, sometimes because the skills obtained in the military do not translate into civilian jobs and sometimes because of substance abuse and other behavioral problems. This evaluation examined the degree to which work of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects led directly or indirectly the veterans served obtaining income either through government benefits or employment.

***Income benefits.*** The high degree of success of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects in obtaining veterans benefits for its clients is discussed above at page 14. Success in obtaining government benefits is both an intermediate- and an end-outcome. The intermediate-outcome is the obtaining of retroactive benefits which provide a one time, but potentially significant amount of money to take steps toward self-sufficiency. The AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects that represented veterans seeking VA Benefits recovered an average of \$31,290 per veteran in retroactive payments for their clients. Monthly benefits in most cases serve as a permanent source of income and, therefore, qualify as an end-outcome. In one Project that concentrates on representation regarding veterans benefits, an average of \$2465 in monthly benefits was obtained for the veterans it represented.

The success of the Projects in obtaining income through benefits was affirmed in the results of the online survey. Respondents were asked to state their level of agreement with the following statement: “*Legal assistance by [the Veterans Legal Project] has been successful in helping veterans to obtain income through benefits, including Veterans Benefits, SSI or SSDI, Social Security Disability, General Assistance or other income benefit.*” 64.7% of the respondents either strongly agreed (47.1%) or agreed (17.6%) with a statement. Only one person (5.9%) was neutral on the question (“Neither agree or disagree”) and no one disagreed with it. Again, however, close to one third (29.4%) said they did not know.



One comment to the survey noted the positive impact of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project on the overall process of obtaining veterans benefits, the problems with which has been discussed elsewhere in this report.<sup>30</sup> “Veterans are having their claims reviewed at a faster rate, their disability ratings determined and their access to healthcare and benefits greatly improved.”

The case review by the Inner City Law Center recounted one dramatic example of the importance of establishing eligibility for Veterans Benefits to stabilize the life of a homeless veteran. Their client was a young, homeless female veteran who had served in the Iraq war and had been involved in combat during she had suffered a brain injury. In addition, she had been the victim of a sexual assault. When she left the military, she was denied disability benefits with the result that she did not receive either mental health treatment for PTSD or medical treatment for her brain injury. As a consequence, she had ended up homeless and addicted. Intervention by the Homeless Veterans Project resulted in her receiving a 100% disability rating by the VA with a monthly award of \$2673 in benefits. She is now living in her own apartment and receiving regular medical and mental health treatment.

**Employment.** As discussed above, veterans encounter many legal impediments to obtaining employment in order to establish and maintain self-sufficiency. Many of the veterans who sought assistance from the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects did so because of a decision – after successful drug, alcohol or mental health treatment – to seek employment

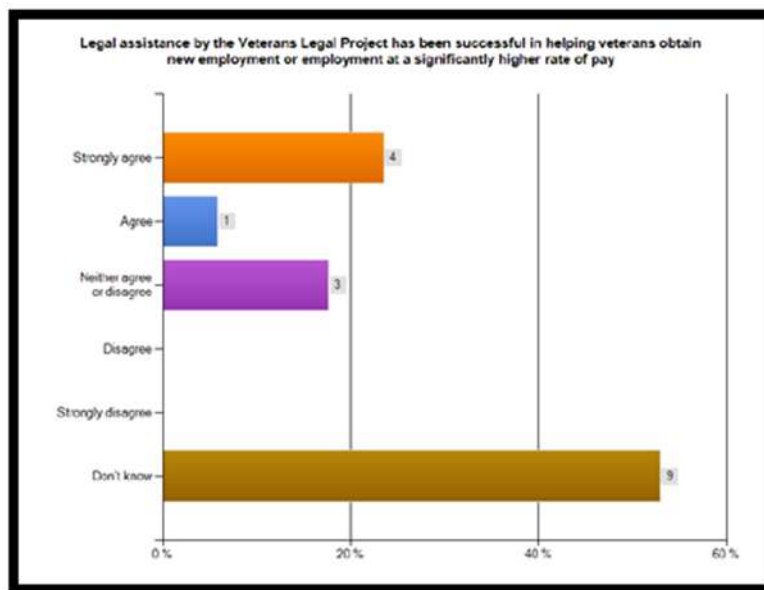
<sup>30</sup> See the discussion beginning at page 4.



only to find that one or more of the legal impediments discussed throughout this report stood in their way. While removing those impediments may be necessary for a veteran to get a job, however, their removal does not guarantee that a job will be forthcoming or that the veteran will be able to keep it. During times of economic downturn and high unemployment generally, it may be extremely difficult for at-risk veterans to obtain employment irrespective of their personal circumstance. For some veterans, other conditions in their life, such as addiction, may forestall the possibility of employment. It is also uncertain when a veteran does obtain employment whether that employment will continue.

The online survey of the Projects' partners reflected the challenges associated with veterans finding and keeping employment. More than half of the respondents (52.9%) said they did not know whether: *“Legal assistance by the [Veterans Legal Project] has been successful in helping veterans obtain new employment or employment at a significantly higher rate of pay.”* Only 29.4% of the respondents indicated they “Strongly agree” (23.5%) or “Agree” (5.9%) with the statement: No respondents, however, disagreed.

In spite of the greater difficulty ascertaining whether the end-outcome of obtaining income through employment had been accomplished, there was anecdotal evidence of positive impacts in the case reviews conducted by the Projects.



Fourteen veterans were identified and reports submitted by each of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects as having obtained employment. Case reviews by the Projects led to descriptions of ten clients who because of representation by one of the Projects were able to obtain employment or to pursue education with a vocational goal in mind. Of the ten, seven were assisted addressing a criminal matter either expunging a conviction or dismissing outstanding tickets and related warrants. Two were represented in VA matters, which provided income and access to healthcare services that opened the door to employment possibilities. One was represented in a bankruptcy, which because of the particular circumstances of the case, permitted the client to continue vocational rehab training, which in turn led to a job as a social worker.

It is more difficult to measure the increase in income obtained for clients in other areas of representation than benefits, where the amount obtained is determined by law and once obtained is more or less guaranteed. One host program, Public Counsel's Center for Veterans

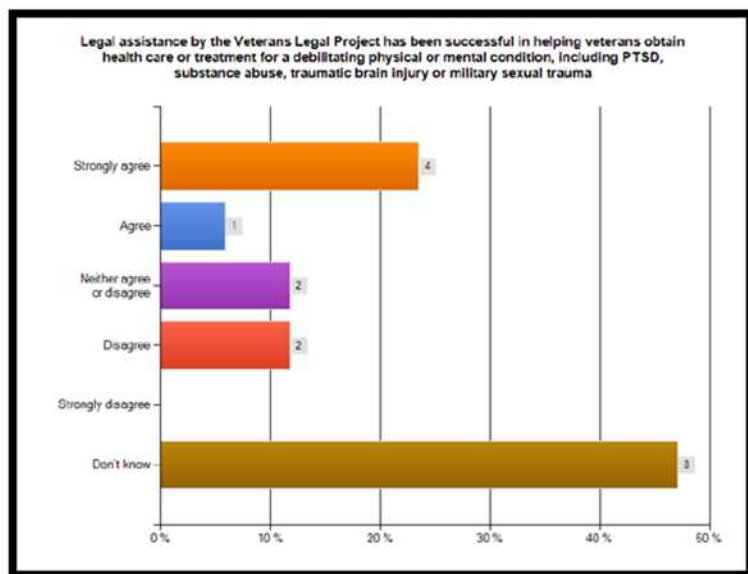
Advancement (CVA), however, maintains records of changes in monthly income for all its clients. For the program year 2012, the CVA, found that the 320 veterans it had represented more than doubled their average monthly income from \$1,074 to \$2,431 (226%).

**Access to healthcare and other needed services.** For some veterans who suffer from mental and physical disabilities as a result of their service, access to healthcare and other treatment services is essential to their establishing self-sufficiency. Discharge upgrades are frequently pursued because of the veteran’s need to establish eligibility for VA healthcare to address service related mental and physical disabilities.

An example of the particular importance of assistance by a lawyer occurred with the San Diego Public Defender, a host site for an AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project. The project represented a Marine, who had been deployed twice in Iraq and once to Afghanistan. The soldier, whose Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) were sufficiently grave that he was being processed for medical discharge. While the medical discharge was pending, however, he was charged in state court with domestic violence, following which he was hospitalized in the psychiatric unit of the Naval Hospital.

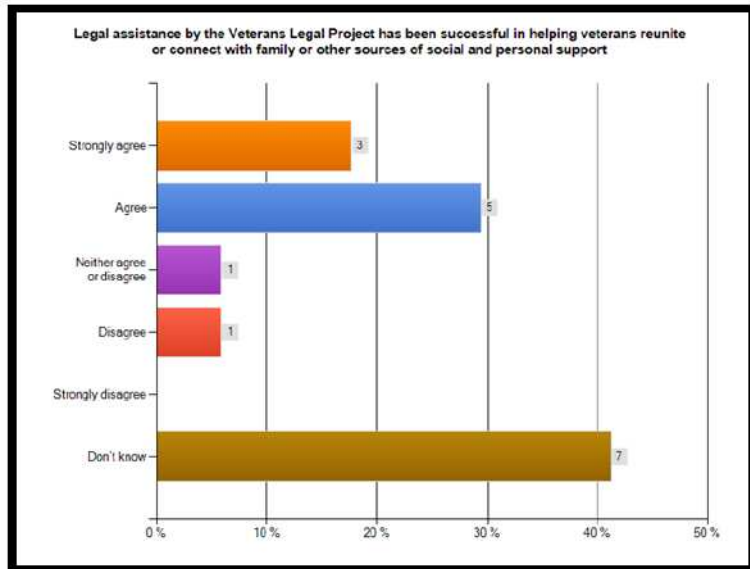
If convicted of the domestic violence charge at the time of his pending separation from the military, the soldier would under federal law have automatically been subjected to a discharge level from the military that would disqualify him for eligibility for health or income benefits. Knowledge of the impact of military law on the veteran’s eligibility for treatment and for income needed to support himself and his family led to the judge and prosecutor to agree to defer sentencing until after the discharge was processed. They also agreed to withhold incarceration so long as the Marine continued with his treatment program.

Responses of the Projects’ partners to the online survey regarding healthcare and other treatment indicated a high level of uncertainty regarding the statement that: “*Legal assistance by the [Veterans Legal Project] has been successful in helping veterans obtain health care or treatment for a debilitating physical or mental condition, including PTSD, substance abuse, traumatic brain injury or military sexual trauma.*” Only 29.4% of the respondents strongly agreed (23.5%) or agreed (5.9%) with the statement, while 23.6% either disagreed (11.8%) or said they “Neither agree or disagree” (11.8%).



**Family reunification.** For some veterans, another element of stabilization and achievement of self-sufficiency is reunification with their family, which can provide an important support mechanism to support them. While such an outcome is not necessary, or even in some circumstances possible, where it is a factor, it can be critical to the successful transition of the veteran to a stable life. The results of the online survey indicated a belief in the success of such efforts among those familiar with such outcomes, although more than 40% said they did not know. Nearly half (47%) of the respondents, however, indicated they “Strongly agree” (17.6%) or “Agree” (29.4%) with the statement: “*Legal assistance by the [Veterans Legal Project] has been successful in helping veterans reunite or connect with family or other sources of social and personal support.*” One respondent neither agreed or disagreed, and another expressed disagreement with the statement.

A story recounted by the Inner City Law Center reflects how at times removal of a simple legal impediment can have dramatic effects for a veteran who is separated from family. The Project represented a homeless veteran with multiple disabilities who was living in his car and had sought ICLC’s help after he was convicted of a minor traffic offense. The veteran had resolved to return to his family to get the support that he needs. He was, however, unable to drive to where they were because the outstanding ticket, which the veteran had no money to pay, prevented him from registering his vehicle. The AmeriCorps Fellow, advocating on behalf of the veteran, succeeded in having the ticket dismissed, because of the humanitarian factors involved, so that the veteran was able to register his car and travel to reunite with his family.



The San Diego Public Defender’s AmeriCorps Fellow assisted clients of that organization in five child visitation cases which resulted in the veterans being able to see and maintaining a relationship with their children.

**End-outcome data available from Grant and Per Diem programs**

The Inner City Law Center works closely with five residential treatment programs for veterans that it periodically visits to do intake and to provide services for the programs’ participants. One such project, the Volunteers of America’s Hollywood Veterans Center, is a Grant and Per Diem program that keeps outcome data for the veterans which it serves. The Director of the program agreed to provide data regarding outcomes achieved for its clients

who were also served by the ICLC AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project. The Veteran Center keeps outcome data related to three goals it pursues for the veterans with whom it works: 1) Residential Stability, 2) Increased Skill Level and/or Income of Participants, 3) Greater Self-Determination of Participants.

Under Residential Stability, the immediately relevant, potential outcomes were whether the veterans served were: a) Placed in permanent housing within 12 months, b) Retained housing three months after discharge, c) Retained housing six months after discharge, and d) Retained housing 12 months after discharge. Under Increased Skill Level and/or Income, specific outcomes were: a) Entered job training, b) Placed in job, c) Job retainment 3 months after discharge, d) Job retainment 6 months after discharge, d) Job retainment 12 months after discharge. Under the goal of Greater Self-Determination, specific, relevant outcomes recorded are: a) Linked to strong social support system, b) Reunited with family.

In total, 35 veterans were assisted jointly by ICLC's AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project and the Volunteers of America's Hollywood Veterans who Center. The results are instructive.

- Of the 35 veterans served, 19 were placed in permanent housing within 12 months; 12 of those retained housing for three months after discharge.
- 20 of those served enter job training and 12 of those were placed in a job. Of those 12, 3 stayed in the job for 6 months, 3 lost the job within 3 months and placement of the others had been too short at the time of reporting to measure the veterans' employment longevity.
- All 35 of the veterans assisted were linked to a strong social support system and 16 were reunited with their families.

The data provided from the Volunteers of America show that a significant portion of the veterans served by its Center and represented by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project accomplished positive outcomes in obtaining housing, employment and connections with family and other support networks. It also showed the difficulty of serving this population, since a significant percentage did not obtain housing or employment and the duration of employment was relatively low.

The VOA's Hollywood Veterans Center did not provide data that show comparable results for its veterans who did not receive assistance from the ICLC. The Center offered to set up the system so that in the future such comparisons can be made. The potentiality for joint data collection regarding outcomes is discussed in this report at page 32.

### Summary of End-Outcomes Obtained for Veterans

- 491 veterans had a barrier to housing removed and 104 veterans obtained housing
- 10 veterans obtained employment or vocational education
- 5 reestablished a relationship with their children.

#### *Online survey of veteran serving organizations ~ results:*

- 89.5% said AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects had a positive impact helping to stabilize or otherwise improve the lives of veterans who have been served.
- 64.7% said *AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects has been successful in helping veterans to obtain income through benefits*
- 49% said *AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects has been successful in helping veterans obtain stable, permanent housing*
- One host site for an AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects found that the 320 veterans it had represented more than doubled their average monthly income from \$1,074 to \$2,431 (226%)
- 47% said AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects had been successful in helping veterans reunite with their families or other sources of social or personal support

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## RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING DATA COLLECTION

Monitoring and evaluation of the work done for veterans by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects should be based on consistently gathered and reported data that indicate the degree to which both intermediate and end-outcomes have been achieved for the persons served. To that end, the following recommendations are offered regarding the data collection systems of Equal Justice Works and the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects.

***Caveat.*** A strong caveat is in order in any discussion of current or future methods for obtaining data that indicate relative success in helping at-risk and homeless veterans accomplish self-sufficiency. The at-risk and homeless individuals served by these programs are by definition very challenged and no program assisting them can expect to achieve success with everyone served. Not every at-risk or homeless veteran is receiving services from a residential treatment or other veteran serving program and the risk of failure for those veterans achieving self-sufficiency is particularly high. Moreover, for homeless and at-risk veterans who are not in a treatment program, it is likely to be more difficult to obtain data regarding their success or failure, since many are transient.

The mission of several of the organizations hosting an AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project has long been to provide assistance to the most hard-core homeless population, including veterans. The difficulties encountered by this population make the successes of those Projects all the more meaningful for their clients who do succeed. It should be clear that measuring what has been accomplished is not intended as encouragement to represent clients only in situations where success is likely and to avoid those where it is not. Indeed, measurement of whether desired end outcomes have been accomplished is important because it can serve as a tool for management of those organizations to learn which strategies are most likely to succeed and which are not and to make adjustments as necessary. It should not be an incentive to divert services from those in greatest need.

***Areas of focus for data collection.*** There are four areas where data collection and reporting can increase Equal Justice Work's capacity to measure the degree to which intended intermediate and end-outcomes have been achieved by AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects' clients: 1) at intake, 2) at closing (or for cases open for an extended period at other milestone moments), 3) in follow-up with partner organizations, where possible, and 4) in follow-up with the client, where possible.

***Data obtained at intake.*** Data needs to be collected regarding the veterans who are served starting with their first point of contact with the Project. Some data collected are demographic, in part to allow monitoring of whether there are different levels of utilization and of success for different populations. Do women veterans, for example, experience the same intermediate and end-outcomes as men, given the issues they have encountered in the military, such as rape and sexual trauma? Are there different success rates based on age and the era in which the veteran served? And most importantly, do any differences have implications for how services should be delivered to different populations?

Initial contact is also the time to determine and record the objective of the veteran seeking assistance. Is the individual seeking help to remove a legal impediment, for instance, to obtaining employment, getting a job or getting medical treatment? Such an intended objective may not always be clear to the client or to the Project, but where it is, recording it at the outset will facilitate record-keeping regarding whether the outcome is achieved.

Each of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects operates within a larger legal aid or public defender organization. As a result, generally not every veteran served by the host organization is served by its AmeriCorps component. Several host organizations reported that their sponsorship of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project had increased their overall representation of veterans by all components of their organization.<sup>31</sup> To measure such effects, the host organizations should capture demographic data regarding all veterans served by the organization, not just those served by the Project. Information pertaining to the achievement of intermediate and end-outcomes need only be collected for veterans served by the Project. The host organization may wish to gather such data for all veterans for its own management purposes, but should be able to isolate the results accomplished by the Project.

**Recommendation:** The following information should be gathered and reported to Equal Justice Works for each person who receives legal assistance from each host organization. The information should be reported separately for each AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project.<sup>32</sup>

- Gender
- Race/ethnicity
- Age
- Is the person a veteran? For those, who are
  - Homeless or at risk of becoming homeless?
  - Disabled?
  - Era of service (Pre-Vietnam, Vietnam, 1980s, Gulf War I, mid to late 90s, Gulf War II and/or Afghanistan)?
- The nature of the legal problem and the client's objectives
  - The broad substantive area in which the problem arises<sup>33</sup>
  - The legal remedy sought
  - The intermediate or end-outcome sought in asking for help from legal aid, if applicable (seeking employment, obtaining income, getting or keeping housing,

<sup>31</sup> See the discussion at page 17.

<sup>32</sup> The information reported for each AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project administered by One Justice should be reported separately, so that the data attributed to each is easily identified. Similarly, if a host organization has more than one AmeriCorps Project, the data for the Veterans Legal Project should be reported separately and not aggregated with the data for other projects.

<sup>33</sup> Because each of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project operates within a larger host organization, each of which keep data regarding the substantive areas within which their cases fall, Equal Justice Works should request data regarding substantive areas consistent with the categorization already established by the host entity.

- obtaining medical service, family reunification or other objective connected to self-sufficiency)<sup>34</sup>
- Veterans serving organizations, if any, that are providing other assistance to the veteran
- How the veteran heard about the Project including, if referred and by whom?

**Data obtained at case closing.** The first stage at which large amounts of data can be gathered to demonstrate the degree to which intermediate or end-outcomes have been accomplished is at the closing of the case. There will be some end-outcome data available at case closing, particularly if, as reported by several of the Projects, the client was referred for legal assistance because of being on the brink of a “self-sufficiency breakthrough,” barred only by a legal problem such as a criminal conviction or unpaid child support. Much of the data will demonstrate only intermediate outcomes, since it will often be too early to see long-term results.

Some of the data that should be collected at this juncture will relate to the disposition of the legal matter and the level of service provided, irrespective of the possible outcome achieved. This information will be helpful in allowing both management and Equal Justice Works to examine the degree to which there are significant differences in the Projects’ success achieving intermediate and end-outcomes based on the level of service provided, such as offering only legal advice regarding how to proceed on one’s own as opposed to providing full representation.

**Recommendation.** At case closing, the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects should collect and report data for those cases handled by the Project that includes the following:

- The highest level of service provided
  - Litigation,
  - Administrative hearing,
  - Negotiated settlement with litigation or administrative hearing,
  - Negotiated settlement without litigation or administrative hearing,
  - Transactional assistance,
  - Limited intervention,
  - Advice only,
  - Legal information with no attorney-client relationship formed.
 These should track the closing codes by type of case that the sites currently use, as much as possible.
- Legal remedy achieved, such as expungement of a criminal conviction, modification of a child support order or other legal remedy.

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<sup>34</sup> The focus of this information should be on the reason for which the individual sought legal aid, not the specific remedy sought. Thus, for instance, a veteran might seek a remedy of the expungement of a criminal record, but the reason for seeking that remedy is to qualify for employment or obtain housing. Not every applicant will have a reason beyond achieving a specific legal remedy.

- Ancillary benefits that support the achievement of self-sufficiency, such as restoration of a driver’s license, qualifying for educational benefits for qualifying for special licensing.
- Monetary benefit gained (**Veterans Benefits or Social Security** ~ monthly and retro-active; **child support** ~arrearages reduced or forgiven and reduction in monthly payments; **tickets/fines/penalties** ~amount dismissed, forgiven or reduced; **Other income obtained or payments avoided**.)
- Housing saved or obtained as a result of the representation, even if it was not a housing case.
- Employment obtained or protected, even if not an employment case.
- Access to healthcare obtained or protected.
- Reunification with family.
- Other results that support or result in self-sufficiency.

*Data obtained through follow-up with partners.* One factor that this assessment encountered is that, even though veterans serving organizations keep detailed data for the persons whom they serve, including outcome data, they do not trace whether the legal work performed by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects contributes to the accomplishment of those outcomes. This was shown in the online survey of partner organizations sorted for those that indicated that they “worked closely with” one of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects or that the Projects had conducted intake or provided service at their site. A high percentage of those organizations indicated that, in spite of the close relationship, they did not know whether the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects’ assistance to clients had accomplished the end-outcomes being measured for this assessment:<sup>35</sup> The percentage of respondents who were familiar with an AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects in their area, but who did not know about various outcomes were as follows:

- One third indicated they did not know if the legal assistance provided had been successful in helping veterans obtain stable, permanent housing.
- 29.4% did not know whether they had been successful in obtaining Veterans or Social Security Benefits.
- 52.9% did not know whether the legal assistance has been successful in helping veterans obtain new employment or employment at a significantly higher rate of pay.
- 47.1% did not know whether the legal assistance has been successful in helping veterans obtain needed health care or treatment.
- 41.8% did not know whether the legal assistance has been successful in helping veterans reunite or connect with family or other sources of social and personal support.

This stated lack of knowledge about outcomes accomplished as a result of the legal work of the Projects is significant because more than three quarters of the responding organizations (77.8%) indicated that they do keep records of outcomes accomplished on behalf of the veteran’s they serve. Of those, however, 62.5% indicated that they would not be will-

<sup>35</sup> Those that did know, for the most part, reported that the end-outcomes had been achieved. See the discussion beginning at page 19.



ing to share those outcomes. Comments suggested that some respondents felt that such sharing would violate confidentiality requirements regarding the veterans they serve.

There are two ways in which confidentiality issues can be addressed. The first would be for both the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project and the partner organization to obtain a waiver from the veterans served so that each organization can share information and coordinate services. For purposes of gathering broad data regarding outcomes, there is, in fact, no reason why the identity of the veteran needs to be disclosed, since only aggregated or anonymous data is necessary. Respondents were not asked what factors would encourage or discourage their sharing outcome data for veterans whom they serve jointly with an AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project, so it is possible that those who indicated their unwillingness to share did so in the context of the assessment, because of the time required to fulfill such a request.

The data that was made available to this assessment by the Volunteers of America Hollywood Veterans Center showing end-outcomes for veterans also served by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project at the Inner City Law Center is highly instructive of what would be possible if data is shared between the Projects and their partner organizations that keep outcome data. The Hollywood Veterans Center, which is a Grant and Per Diem program,<sup>36</sup> keeps end-outcome data regarding its veterans 1) obtaining and retaining housing, 2) obtaining and retaining employment and 3) establishing a link to a strong social support system, including being reunited with family.

Because the Hollywood Veterans Center also keeps track of all of its clients who also receive assistance from the AmeriCorps Veterans Law Project, it was able to isolate the outcomes for all of the veterans who were jointly served.<sup>37</sup> According to its director, it would not be difficult to enter a field in the database to generate a report of each veteran jointly served by the Center and the Project. As a result, comparative data could easily be obtained, showing the results for veterans jointly served and those who did not receive assistance from the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project.

**Recommendation.** The fact that for some Projects there are a number of veterans who are jointly served by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects and other veteran serving organizations which already keep outcome data offers an opportunity to obtain highly useful information regarding end-outcomes for veterans served. With that in mind, therefore, it is recommended that Equal Justice Works seek to create a system – to be instituted in the 2014 grant year – for keeping and sharing information with partner organizations that already keep outcome data. Equal Justice Works should use its national connections with the Department of Veterans Affairs and with Volunteers of America, for instance, to help

<sup>36</sup> Grant and Per Diem Programs are funded by the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide residential and other supportive services to homeless veterans with the goal of their achieving “residential stability,” increasing “their skill levels and/or income” and obtaining “greater self-determination.”  
<http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/GPD.asp>

<sup>37</sup> The outcomes accomplished for the veterans served by both the Inner City Law Center and the Hollywood Veterans Organization are discussed at page 26.

create common understandings of how such a system could work without adding significant burdens on any of the partners. In addition, it should require – and support – its Projects to work closely in their local communities with volunteers serving organizations to create such systems which would provide useful outcome data both for the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects and for their partners.

**Follow-up with clients.** Because some veterans served by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects will simultaneously be served by other veteran serving organizations, including residential treatment centers, it will be possible for the Projects to follow-up directly with those clients. Often, because homeless populations are by definition transient, it is difficult or impossible to follow-up directly with the person served to find out the long-term outcomes of the legal assistance they were provided. Many residential treatment programs, however, involve two years of treatment, so that finding and communicating with former clients is quite possible.

There are two ways in which the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects can follow-up with person served to determine if they have succeeded in achieving self-sufficiency. The first means would be a follow-up survey sent to all clients for whom the project has contact information 9 to 12 months following the close of their case. The survey should ask a few simple questions regarding the former clients' current situation, including employment, housing and other factors related to their having increased their self-sufficiency.

A second approach would be to identify a small representative sample of clients who had received representation in order to conduct an interview regarding their current situation and the impact of the legal work done on their behalf. Law student interns or volunteers could be used to conduct the interviews, in order not to take the time away from the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects Fellows and other staff. While random sample interviews do not generate aggregate data regarding outcomes, they do offer the opportunity for an engaged exchange which can generate insights into what makes a project successful and detailed stories that provide insight into factors that contribute to or impede successful long-term outcomes.

**Recommendation.** Equal Justice Works should encourage, but not require, the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects to follow-up with veterans whom they have served and whom they can easily locate in order to ask them directly about the degree to which long-term, end-outcomes of self-sufficiency have been accomplished. Equal Justice Works should support the effort by designing model surveys and interviews for adaptation and use by the Projects.

## **APPROACHES TO REPRESENTATION OF VETERANS BY THE AMERICORPS VETERANS LEGAL PROJECTS**

Each of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects was placed in a larger legal aid or public defender organization. The seven sites that were subject of this evaluation are:

- Indiana Legal Services Inc., Military Advocacy Project
- Inner City Law Center Homeless Veterans Project (Los Angeles)
- Legal Aid of West Virginia
- Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia
- Northwest Justice Project (Washington State)
- Public Counsel (Los Angeles)
- San Diego Public Defender

One of the objectives of this evaluation was to review each Project's approach to providing services to veterans to draw lessons from their operation and to provide a basis for recommendations, as appropriate. The culture and operations of each host organization differ significantly and the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project were new, so Equal Justice Works gave wide latitude to each host as to how the Fellows were incorporated into its work, how it delivered service to veterans and on which specific veterans' populations and issues the Project focused.

The evaluator conducted an on-site visit to the Projects to observe their operations and to interview the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Fellows, their supervisors and the leadership of the host program, as well as others with knowledge of the Project. The visits also afforded an opportunity to talk with the managers and Fellows at each site about their perception of the intermediate and end-outcomes intended for the veterans served.

The evaluator also reviewed the periodic reports that the Projects submitted to Equal Justice Works as well as various other reports and information provided by them. All of the projects were extremely cooperative throughout the course of the evaluation in offering information and responding to requests for additional data or clarification.

The review conducted of each Project was not intended or designed to be an assessment of the overall operation and the quality of the Project's' host organization. It was, nevertheless, apparent to the evaluator – based on his wide experience evaluating legal aid organizations – that each host program is highly attentive to producing high quality legal work for the people whom they serve. All of the AmeriCorps Fellow, as a result, are closely supervised and receive solid support for their professional development. The evaluator was also impressed with the commitment and quality of all of the AmeriCorps Fellows working in each of the Projects.

## Design choices facing the Projects

All of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects face a fundamental dilemma and set of choices. Many factors play into the hard choices they face, but one underlying dynamic that affects all the options is that the potential demand for services far outstrips the services available to respond. This resource imbalance directly affects choices in three broad areas: 1) *the substantive focus of the project*; 2) *the veterans' subpopulations that are targeted, if any*; and 3) *the deployment of the AmeriCorps Fellows in relation to other resources available in the host organization*. A chart showing the choices made by each of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects can be found below at page 41.

***Substantive focus of the Projects.*** All of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects reported that a high percentage of the veterans whom they serve have multiple legal problems, often entangled with a mix of psychological, physical and social issues.<sup>38</sup> The most common legal issues facing at-risk veterans – child support, pending and past criminal offenses, VA claims and appeals and discharge upgrades – are discussed at length earlier in this report.<sup>39</sup> In addition to these recurring legal issues, other legal problems, such as domestic violence, divorce, evictions as well as estate and probate matters for older veterans, often have implications for the stability and self-sufficiency of the veterans or their families.<sup>40</sup> Each Project has had to make a fundamental choice. On the one hand, it could focus on one or two of the commonly recurring legal problems discussed throughout this report and to refer other issues to other sources of help. Or, on the other hand, it could offer assistance across a spectrum of veterans' potential legal problems in order to be as available as possible to all veterans seeking assistance.

Several factors impact on the choices made regarding substantive focus. First, the AmeriCorps Fellows are generally new attorneys, so decisions about the focus of their legal work need to take into account their current and future professional development. A question facing virtually any legal aid law firm with regard to its new lawyers is whether to have them specialize, so they develop expertise quickly in a discrete area, or to expose them to a variety of legal issues. The latter choice requires a system of support and supervision that can teach the new lawyer how to proceed across an array of substantive areas and potential remedies. The choice is complicated in the context of veterans, because the veterans so often come with multiple legal problems that need to be addressed.

A second factor that affects the choice regarding substantive focus is the availability of other resources in the host organization to address issues that are not addressed. All of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects are placed in a larger organization that provides civil or criminal legal assistance to low-income persons. In each case, therefore, resources are

<sup>38</sup> As discussed in this report starting at page 2, failure to address one problem can defeat veterans' efforts to establish stability and self-sufficiency in their lives.

<sup>39</sup> See the discussions beginning at page 2 and page 10.

<sup>40</sup> See the discussion beginning at page 5.

available to represent veterans with substantive issues that fit within the eligibility requirements, priorities and case acceptance policies of the host organization.

A third factor that is pertinent to determining substantive focus is the availability of resources outside the organization to address veterans' issues. All of the projects have conducted outreach to the private bar to increase the capacity for pro bono services. In addition, the Projects report different levels of capacity among veteran serving organizations to assist with veterans claims.

Some of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects that just started their operation when the AmeriCorps Fellows became available opted to provide services across a broad spectrum of issues, because they wanted to establish relationships with veteran serving organizations to which they had reached out. In order to create positive and trusting relations with those organizations, the Project did not want to deny service to a veteran referred by one of the organizations.

***What subpopulations of veterans are targeted, if any?*** Within each generation of veterans are those who reintegrated into civilian society without difficulty and those who did not, some of whom are homeless or at risk of homelessness. A threshold question for all the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects is whether to focus principally or exclusively on homeless or at-risk veterans or to accept cases more broadly, expecting that among those represented will be some at-risk veterans. Two of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects exclusively target at-risk and homeless veterans and three others emphasize service to those populations, but provide assistance to low-income veterans regardless of their circumstance. Two of the Projects do not target homeless or at-risk veterans, although they do serve many who are referred or otherwise seek their services.

The veterans' population is very diverse, even among those who are low income and eligible for services by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Fellows. There are multiple generations of veterans who come from different eras: the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the relatively conflict-free 1980s, the first Gulf War from August 1990 to February 1991, the "peaceful" interim period, followed by the second Iraq war and the still ongoing war in Afghanistan.

The circumstances of veterans from across that span of decades – and wars – differ significantly, as well as the legal issues they encounter. Older veterans from the Vietnam era, for instance, may have issues related to end-of-life planning and VA Survivors Benefits. Moreover, the political turmoil accompanying that war and the difficulty many veterans of that era encountered reentering civilian life resulted in many at-risk and homeless veterans who have decades of struggle with substance abuse and encounters with the criminal justice system.<sup>41</sup> Veterans of the more recent Iraq and Afghanistan wars who suffer from PTSD and related challenges, on the other hand, often have not yet made it into the net-

<sup>41</sup> The National Coalition for the Homeless estimates that 47% of homeless veterans are from the Vietnam era. <http://www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/veterans.html>

work of veteran serving organizations, because they are still working their way through other support systems.

The veteran population is also obviously made up of men and women. The AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects report that there are different challenges associated with outreach to and representation of female and male veterans. The experience of the projects is that outreach to female veterans can be a challenge because they are more reluctant to seek services than men and tend to avoid shelters. Many remain silent about Military Sexual Trauma that may have led to Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. Consequently, many female veterans who need services, including legal aid, do not get those services because of their isolation.

There can also be significant differences in the circumstances of veterans in rural and urban settings. Veterans in rural areas may be more isolated from available services and there are generally fewer organizations available to serve them. Three of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects operate in statewide organizations that serve large rural populations (Indiana, Washington State and West Virginia). Their network of service and intake provides a gateway for veterans from rural areas who might otherwise have difficulty getting into the network of available services.

***Deployment of AmeriCorps Fellows.*** A question that is closely related to the substantive and population focus of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects is how the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Fellows are deployed within the organization and how they interface with other resources available within it: 1) to conduct outreach to the veterans serving network and 2) to provide assistance to veterans.

**Outreach.** As discussed above, outreach to the veterans serving network is essential to the success of the Projects' efforts to increase self-sufficiency for the veterans served.<sup>42</sup> There are several aspects of outreach and the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Fellows play different roles with regard to each depending on the organization to which they are assigned. The first phase of outreach is establishing initial contact with various veteran serving organizations and other potential partner organizations. With some of the projects, this introductory and exploratory phase was handled by the host program's leadership and in some the responsibility fell to the AmeriCorps Fellow. In three cases, the host organization was already an active part of the network focused on veterans' issues.

The second aspect of outreach is sustaining solid relationships with partner organizations and being attentive to new opportunities that may arise with existing and new collaborations. The seven Projects differ in how they divide responsibility for this phase of outreach.

This assessment confirmed that all of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects have been successful in their outreach efforts and have established strong relationships with partner

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<sup>42</sup> See the discussion above at page 5.

organizations. As reported earlier in this Evaluation, the online survey of partner organizations that related to the outreach efforts of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects elicited very positive responses. Nearly 2/3 of the respondents stated they either “Strongly Agree” (38.5%) or “Agree” (25.6%) with statement, “*The Project’s outreach has been successful in making veterans serving organizations, such as ours, aware of resources available to address legal problems of veterans.*” The on-site assessment conducted by the evaluator of each of the Projects confirmed that in each there is a high level of commitment to continued outreach and, particularly, to the maintenance of positive, supportive relationships with partner veterans’ serving organizations.<sup>43</sup>

**Provision of service.** How the AmeriCorps Fellows provide service directly to veterans also differs significantly among the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects.

*Intake and Initial Contact.* The AmeriCorps Fellows play different roles in relation to the intake process and initial contact with veterans seeking assistance or being referred by a partner organization. In some cases, all veterans are referred to the AmeriCorps Fellows for initial contact and diagnosis of their problem. In other Projects – particularly, in very large organizations with multiple offices, the AmeriCorps Fellows serve as a resource for others engaged in initial intake and case acceptance, but do not see or interact with every veteran who seeks legal aid from the organization. The approaches are summarized in the chart below at page 41.

Several factors are at play in relation to the choice of how to deploy the AmeriCorps Fellows. The AmeriCorps Fellows have special training and understanding regarding challenges facing veterans and the services available to them. There is value, therefore, in having the AmeriCorps Fellows be involved in initial contact with veterans who seek assistance or are referred to the organization. On the other hand, such an approach is not always practicable since there may be a large number of veterans with a variety of avenues to access the program, including regular intake.

Choices about how the AmeriCorps Fellows are used in relation to intake are driven by the configuration of the program and the numbers of veterans seeking services. Three of the host sites are statewide organizations – the Northwest Justice Project in Washington, Legal Aid of West Virginia and Legal Services of Indiana, Inc. – with multiple offices with complex, multilayered intake systems. In contrast, the Inner City Law Center focuses services in the skid row area of Central Los Angeles.

In the case of the San Diego Public Defender (SDPD), representation is provided to veterans in accordance with the policies of that organization for representing persons charged with a crime. As part of the representation, some of those veterans are offered the opportunity by the SDPD and the sentencing court to participate in the Veterans Treatment Review Calendar (VTRC), which is staffed by an AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Fellow.

<sup>43</sup> Outcomes associated with the Projects’ outreach to the veterans serving network is discussed more fully at page 15.

All of the Projects reported that, regardless of the normal intake process in the host organization, many veterans are directly referred or themselves directly contact the AmeriCorps Fellows, because the Fellows are known in the veterans' network. This openness to direct access was often a significant factor in the positive view held of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects among their partner organizations.

During the on-site reviews at each Project, the evaluator found that regardless of the model used, there is, among all of the host organizations, a heightened sensitivity to veterans during intake and initial contact because of the presence of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects and their particular focus on veterans and their needs. Intake staff, for instance, at the Northwest Justice Project reported that they frequently consulted with the AmeriCorps Fellow regarding the veterans applying for service. In addition, they had available the highly regarded manual, **Representing Washington Veterans: Basic Legal and Cultural Concepts**, which was developed by an AmeriCorps Fellow. In several host organizations, this heightened sensitivity was supported and reinforced by trainings conducted by AmeriCorps Fellows on service to veterans.

*Representation.* The AmeriCorps Fellows deployment also differs with regard to the issues on which they, or other advocates in the host organization, provide representation and how different levels of service are provided. In most of the Projects, the AmeriCorps Fellows focus their efforts for full representation in one or two substantive areas or types of legal problems. Other issues that require full representation are referred to other advocates in the host organization or to resources outside the organization, if the issue is outside the organization's priorities. In contrast, Legal Aid of West Virginia's AmeriCorps Fellows handle every case that involves any veteran who lives in the area that the Fellows' office serves.

In all the Projects, the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Fellows assist veterans, regardless of the issue, when the representation that is required is limited to advice and limited intervention, such as a phone call or letter. One feature of veterans' populations that was observed in the course of this evaluation is that some veterans are well-educated and have had experience dealing with bureaucracies and government procedures. Absent severe mental illness or substance abuse, therefore, those veterans may be capable of assisting themselves in some matters with guidance from an AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Fellow regarding the steps that need to be taken and the arguments that should be made.

**Recommendations regarding substantive focus, the veterans' populations served and deployment of AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Project Fellows**

The wide leeway given by Equal Justice Works to the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects in how they focus their work substantively and among the veteran's populations was salutary as the Projects were getting underway. The openness allowed the Projects to respond flexibly to different needs and interests of the veterans' serving organizations and to establish credibility with those organizations and the veterans they serve. The flexibility also facilitated the host organizations' designing and implementing Projects that could quickly



be integrated into the ongoing operations of the host organization and to take advantage of their own resources to support the Projects.

There is a dynamic tension between Equal Justice Works' flexibility regarding the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects' focus and operation, on the one hand, and its intent, on the other, for the projects to accomplish outcomes related to the stabilization of the lives of homeless and at-risk veterans and increasing their self-sufficiency. Certainly, all of the cases taken on by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects were important to the veterans who were served, but some issues more directly served a priority of increasing the self-sufficiency of the client than others. When the demand for service outstrips the resources available to respond as it does for all of these Projects, it is particularly important that choices be made to direct those resources on the overall strategic objective of the Projects.

**Recommendation:** Now that the Projects have begun to mature, Equal Justice Works should make explicit its expectation that the resources made available by the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Fellows will be focused primarily on homeless and at-risk veterans and that their work will specifically target legal impediments to their achieving self-sufficiency. For most of the Projects, targeting these populations and specific legal impediments has already happened, or could be accomplished with minor adjustments in how the Project operates. Two of the projects, however, are more generalist in their approach and adjusting to an emphasis on homeless and at-risk veterans will take some retooling. For the Projects that do not emphasize homeless or at-risk veterans' populations and do not target specific legal impediments to self-sufficiency, Equal Justice Works should request a plan for making the transition to a different emphasis during the coming year.

Although this evaluation recommends that Equal Justice Works be more directive with the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects with regard to the substantive focus of the Project and the population of veterans served, it does not suggest reducing the level of flexibility regarding how the AmeriCorps Fellows are deployed within each Project and host organization. The circumstances of each host organizations are very different and there is no formula for service delivery that will work in every situation. Moreover, each host organization is headed by very competent management that has accomplished a high level of success in the operations of both the Projects and their host organizations.

**Comparative Delivery Designs:  
AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects**

Project	Substantive focus	Population served	Delivery method
Indiana Legal Services, Inc.	<p>Broad substantive focus across a wide spectrum of substantive issues with representation provided by program lawyers and paralegals with the support provided by the AmeriCorps Fellow. Highest volume of service provided in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Divorce</li> <li>• Custody/visitation</li> <li>• Medicaid</li> <li>• Private landlord-tenant</li> <li>• Collections</li> <li>• Advanced directives</li> <li>• Bankruptcy</li> <li>• Support</li> <li>• Foreclosure</li> <li>• SSDI</li> </ul> <p>Veterans Benefits cases are referred to County Veterans Services Officers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All populations are served, but a high percentage of the veterans served are Vietnam War Vets</li> <li>• There is no special emphasis on at-risk or homeless veterans ~ 37 were served during the last program year out of a total of 106 veterans served</li> <li>• Some emphasis on serving women veterans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Fellow focuses on outreach to veterans serving organizations across the state of Indiana.</li> <li>• She takes referrals from veterans' organizations and may offer limited assistance where representation is not required.</li> <li>• Most veterans that are served come in through intake at one of the program's nine offices</li> <li>• Veterans needing representation are referred to the office or unit that serves their geographic location and handles their case, if it is within the program's priorities and case acceptance guidelines.</li> </ul>
Inner City Law Center <sup>44</sup>	<p>Full representation in cases involving:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Veterans Benefits</li> <li>• Tickets, fines and penalties</li> <li>• Discharge upgrades</li> <li>• Expungements</li> </ul> <p>(With reduced resources, the focus may be narrowed to Veterans Benefits)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Project focuses entirely on homeless veterans (209 were served in the last program year), consistent with its long-standing mission of serving the homeless in Los Angeles. The "Gateway to escape homelessness."</li> <li>• Special focus on assisting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outreach is handled by the project coordinator, who as established solid contacts with five residential treatment programs.</li> <li>• Intake and services are provided on-site at the 5 residential treatment programs, 2 of which were established for women</li> <li>• The Fellows heavily focus on representation of clients who are veterans in need of full representation.</li> </ul>

<sup>44</sup> Inner City Law Center is a sub-site of California-based OneJustice (formerly Public Interest Clearinghouse), a hub host site that manages most California AmeriCorps Fellows.

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Project	Substantive focus	Population served	Delivery method
		women, particularly those suffering from Military Sexual Trauma (along with 3 programs for men)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Project's focus is on the most complex cases for the hardest population to serve</li> </ul>
Legal Aid of West Virginia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Broad substantive focus across a wide spectrum of substantive issues with a pattern of interest in probate, family law and eviction matters</li> <li>They do not take Veterans Benefits cases, because of the duration of the cases and resources are available from pro bono lawyers through the National Organization of Veterans Advocates (NOVA).</li> <li>Have not taken cases involving discharge upgrades or tickets, fines and penalties.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There was an underlying emphasis on at-risk or homeless veterans when the project started. In the past program year, 41 homeless veterans were served out of a total of 138 veterans served</li> <li>Currently, the Project is drawing more on the general veterans' population, only a few of whom are homeless or at risk.</li> <li>A high percentage of the veterans served are from the Vietnam War Era</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each Fellow is responsible for outreach in the area their office serves. The host program's leadership also has strong relationships with state-level institutions interested in veterans, including the West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance and the State Bar Association.</li> <li>Intake is conducted principally through a statewide telephonic intake system and veterans who reside in the catchment area of one of the Fellows are referred to that Fellow. Veterans in other areas with no Fellow are referred to the office in their area</li> <li>Much of the service offered is advice and brief service, although one Fellow took a case to the West Virginia Court of Appeals.</li> <li>The host program has a staff social worker who was able to work with a veteran-client to obtain and monitor treatment for substance abuse.</li> </ul>
Legal Aid Society of DC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>After initially focusing on child support, which is a priority of the program, LASDC shifted the focus of the Project to public benefits, including Veterans Benefits.</li> <li>The program represents veterans in a broad range of traditional substantive areas (housing, family law and public benefits).</li> <li>It does not represent veterans in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All veterans populations are served</li> <li>28 homeless veterans were served in the past program year out of a total of 145 veterans served</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cases go through intake with veterans answering a special questionnaire</li> <li>If not taken for full representation, referred to the AmeriCorps Fellow for advice and brief service</li> <li>Intake biweekly at the VA hospital, although most of the cases were out of the DC jurisdiction</li> <li>Most cases receive advice and brief service</li> <li>The Project works with several partners that</li> </ul>

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Project	Substantive focus	Population served	Delivery method
	discharge upgrades or tickets fines and penalties		target homeless veterans, and does biweekly intake at a VA Medical Center
Northwest Justice Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong focus on child support issues, and work with drivers licenses and housing issues.</li> <li>• A whole range of substantive legal issues are addressed by the host program's statewide structure of advocacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All populations are served, with no special emphasis on homeless or at-risk veterans</li> <li>• 32 homeless veterans were served in the last program year out of 415 veterans served overall.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historically, the host program was involved in the veteran's network in Seattle and those relationships have continued. The AmeriCorps Fellow works to sustain those relationships and build new ones. The former AmeriCorps Fellow developed a model Manual on <b>Representing Washington Veterans: Basic Legal and Cultural Concepts</b> for use by the network of organizations serving veterans</li> <li>• Intake is conducted through a statewide hotline and persons identified as veterans are referred to the AmeriCorps Fellow</li> <li>• The Fellow receives a number of calls directly</li> <li>• The Project is heavily supported by the whole NJP structure. The AmeriCorps Fellow specializes in a few areas and cases in other areas are referred to the appropriate officer unit.</li> </ul>
Public Counsel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Project operates as the Center for Veterans Advancement which has five staff members</li> <li>• The focus is on overcoming legal impediments to veterans getting employment, housing, medical care and other needed services.</li> <li>• Heavy emphasis on tickets, fines and penalties</li> <li>• Provide representation in Veterans Benefits and child support cases involving obligations to the state (no private party arrearages)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All population served, with a heavy emphasis on at-risk and homeless veterans</li> <li>• 320 homeless veterans were served out of a total of 347 veterans served</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A dedicated, well supported Project, started with private funding. Deep support in the organization for veterans work in ways that complement and are consistent with the work of the Fellows. Independent of the Project, the Director of the CVA is active in the National Organization of Veterans Advocates (NOVA), a national organization to engage pro bono lawyers in Veterans Appeals. The Vice-President of Public Counsel, the host organization, is active supporting the creation of Veterans Courts throughout California and elsewhere.</li> </ul>

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Project	Substantive focus	Population served	Delivery method
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intake and services are provided at a Residential Treatment Center at the VA.</li> <li>• Fellows are actively engaged in court and full representation of clients</li> <li>• Have Incorporated social work students</li> </ul>
San Diego Public Defender <sup>45</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct support for a “Veterans Court” (Veterans Treatment Review Calendar – VTRC) that offers (requires) a rigorous post-conviction, post-sentencing treatment plan for veterans convicted of a crime.</li> <li>• In support of both veterans who are accepted into the VTRC and those charged with a crime or not, address issues of child support, veterans benefits, discharge upgrades and family law (domestic violence, child support and visitation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At-risk veterans who have been charged with a serious crime and are represented by the San Diego public defender</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Works closely with law school clinics from the Thomas Jefferson Law School to provide “wrap-around civil legal services” to overcome impediments to self-sufficiency and with the VA’s Veterans Village to provide substance abuse treatment and other needed services to veterans convicted of serious crimes.</li> <li>• Also provide legal assistance and support to charged and convicted veterans who do not participate in the VTRC, but are represented by the SDPD.</li> </ul>

<sup>45</sup> San Diego Public Defender is a sub-site of California-based OneJustice (formerly Public Interest Clearinghouse), a hub host site that manages most California AmeriCorps Fellows.

## CONCLUSION

This evaluation found that the Equal Justice Works' AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects have accomplished a remarkable record of success in the few short years that they have been operating. Three factors have contributed to that success. First, is the strong commitment on the part of the leadership and management of each of the host organizations for the Projects and the unwavering commitment of the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Fellows in each of the sites. Their dedication, commitment and professionalism have been indispensable components of what has been accomplished.

The second factor is that the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects have provided an essential ingredient to the national effort to address the crisis of homelessness among American veterans. A powerful and committed network of services has been marshaled to respond to the call of the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Eric K. Shinseki, to end homelessness among veterans by 2015. What this evaluation confirmed is that for many veterans, escape from homelessness will be all but impossible without the intervention of a lawyer to help them overcome legal impediments that prevent escape from the cycle that locks them into a life on the street. These Projects have provided that legal intervention with proficiency and dedication with demonstrable results increasing the self-sufficiency of their clients

The third factor has been the focus of Equal Justice Works on supporting each of the Projects and monitoring their efforts with close attention to the intermediate and end-outcomes to which they are committed. This evaluation found that those outcomes are being accomplished. A more detailed and compelling record of that success can be accomplished in future years, however, with closer attention to the collection of data by both the AmeriCorps Veterans Legal Projects and their many partners in the veterans' serving network.