Veteran's Services

1) Turner House Living Center for Veterans, Inc.

825 Simonds Road
Williamstown, MA 01267
(413)458-8234

How the Program Works

BACKGROUND: There are currently 113,000 homeless veterans in the United States. Many are living in shelters and other residential facilities; some are living on the streets or in abandoned cars or buildings. Many of these men and women suffer from physical and mental disabilities and alcohol or substance abuse issues. In 1992 the Williamstown American Legion Post received the gift of a 200 year old house donated by a veteran with the stipulation that it be used for veterans’ housing. A non-profit organization was formed, funds were raised, and renovations began. The house became Turner House (named for the donor) and is dedicated to providing housing and services to homeless veterans.

THE MISSION OF TURNER HOUSE: Turner House provides transitional housing for 9 homeless veterans. Usually, residents come from temporary shelters, detoxification and rehabilitation centers, hospitals, and U. S. Veterans Administration facilities. The program’s purpose is to provide these vets with shelter, food, and other necessities and to assist them to work toward dealing with and overcoming the issues and problems that have caused their homelessness.

THE PROGRAM: Once a resident moves into Turner House, he is assigned a case manager and asked to draw up a list of personal goals. Typical goals include: maintaining sobriety, getting needed medical and dental care, obtaining disability benefits or training and employment, arranging for outpatient counseling, reestablishing contact with family members, finding appropriate leisure time activities, and learning the skills needed for independent living. The case manager works with the resident to draw up a plan to achieve these goals. While the resident does most of the foot work, the case manager counsels and coaches and makes contacts with whatever outside agencies are needed to assist the resident. Case managers work with the Veterans Administration, substance abuse and mental health agencies, doctors, entitlement agencies, training and employment services, and other social service organizations in the community. In house
Therapeutic recovery groups are also held twice weekly to help residents acquire new skills for living healthy sober lives.

Turner House also provides a regular recreation program inside the house and in the community. Residents play cards, watch movies and sports events, and have a pool table, horseshoe pits, and weights and exercise equipment. Outside trips to museums, community activities, swimming, and the like are held frequently.

**DISCHARGE AND AFTERCARE:** Residents may stay at Turner House for up to two years. As a resident becomes ready for independent (or more independent) living, his or her case manager assists in getting a housing subsidy (if needed) and an appropriate apartment, in making sure that the resident has the resources necessary to furnish the apartment, and in putting a strong aftercare program in place. Aftercare services are usually provided in the community, but residents are also strongly encouraged to come back to the facility to visit and for special events.

**FUNDING OF TURNER HOUSE:** Support for Turner House comes from grants from the U. S. Veterans Administration and the Massachusetts Department of Veterans Services, from rents paid by residents (30% of net income is charged for room and board), from other small foundation grants, and from private donations. Funds are always needed, however, and in this regard, the Turner House Board has set up special funds for replacing house furnishings and equipment and for painting and maintenance of the house.

**MANAGEMENT OF TURNER HOUSE:** Turner House is managed and operated by a Director, two Case Managers, a Cook, and a Van Driver. The program is overseen by the 11 member Turner House Board of Directors. If you’d like more information about the program, have someone to refer to us, or wish to help, please call or email us. Turner House's phone is (413)458-8234. Our email address is turnerhousevets@verizon.net. Our Director is David Cullen.

**History and Development**

**BACKGROUND AND HISTORY:** In the fall of 1992 Ferman Turner, a World War II Veteran, donated a 200 year old house to the Williamstown Richard A. Ruether American Legion Post #152 with the stipulation that it be used for veterans’ housing. Members of the American Legion Post formed a non-profit organization and began fund raising efforts to renovate and bring the house up to code. The first donation received was $50.00. Many fund raising activities were held, including fairs, a dunk tank, dinners, and raffles. Other substantial gifts were
received including ones from a foundation, a veteran, and the Makepeace Fund. A
gift of $9,600 from the Williamstown Community Chest was used to raise the
building up and build a new foundation underneath.

In September 1994 the U. S. Veterans Administration provided a grant of
$207,000 for which Turner House had to provide partial matching funds and/or
labor in the amount of $111,000. The McCann Technical High School did much
of the electrical work, and many veterans and businesses donated materials and
labor to complete the reconstruction. Board members, town residents, businesses,
veterans organizations, and Post #152 of the Williamstown American Legion put
forth a tremendous effort to complete the project.

The house was dedicated as a transitional residence for homeless veterans on
July 15, 1996 after 21 months of construction/rehabilitation. Managed by a
volunteer board, Turner House began working toward providing a structured
atmosphere and meaningful program for the residents. Many good hearted and
generous volunteers helped to complete renovations, to drive veterans to
appointments, to shop and pick up donated food, and to provide a presence in the
house. Later in 1996, Turner House received an ongoing per diem grant from the
U. S. Veterans Administration. These funds enabled the program to hire a part-
time Cook and a part-time Evening Counselor. In 1999 additional funding was
received from the Massachusetts Department of Veterans Services to hire a part-
time Program Manager and a part-time Case Manager, thus rounding out the
program’s staffing pattern.

Over the past 15 years Turner House has continued to develop. The
program now has a full-time Director, Case Management Staff, a Cook, and a Van
Driver. Each resident has individual goals that he or she is working toward so that
transitioning to independence can be achieved. The overall goal of the program is
to help homeless veterans identify and resolve the causes of their homelessness.
Turner House provides shelter, food, a homey atmosphere, and staff to assist
residents to reach their goals. Medical, mental health, and substance abuse care is
provided through local Veterans Administration outpatient clinics and in the
community. Staff assists residents in obtaining employment, education, and any
needed disability benefits. A big focus of the program is supporting residents in
maintaining abstinence from alcohol and drugs, and attendance at local AA
meetings plays a big part in this effort. Substance abuse issues are the biggest
contributing factors to homelessness in the veterans who come to Turner House.
Residents can stay in the program for up to two years. Most need at least 18
months in the house to make a substantial recovery and to begin to feel
comfortable about maintaining it. When they become ready to graduate from the program, staff helps residents to obtain housing, any needed housing subsidies, fuel assistance, and food stamps. A food pantry service is also offered to graduates as well as any needed case management, and participation in various holiday events at the house.

Turner House is full most of the time. Since opening, the program has served 145 veterans. Ninety percent of those who have completed the program have maintained their independent housing and their abstinence from alcohol and drugs.

The house itself is run as efficiently as possible as a group living situation. The building includes 9 bedrooms, two of which are handicapped accessible. There’s a modern kitchen, a living room, a recreation room, and a full deck across the back. The house sits on one-half acre of land providing space for a vegetable garden and recreational activities. The Cook buys all the food and supplies and prepares 5 evening meals each week. Residents prepare their own breakfasts and lunches and weekend meals. Regular maintenance is done to keep the facility up, fire drills are held, and funds are set aside for replacement of furniture, fixtures, and for needed painting and repairs. The residents do all the household chores and grounds maintenance and participate in a spring and fall general house cleaning.

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

E. Harlin Smith, President
David C. Larabee, Vice President
Henry Pierpan, Treasurer
Pauline McNicol, Clerk
David Deming
Lawrence Ell
Frederick Farrell
Stephen N. Pagnotta,
Herbert Palmer
Frank Uible

2) VETERANS OUTREACH CENTER, INC.

152 North Street 413-499-0256
P.O. Box 1474
Pittsfield, MA 01202
Hours: Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.- 4 p.m.
(24 hour answering service)

Assistance to veterans and their families with personal or interpersonal stress. Counseling, crisis intervention, information & referral, technical assistance with VA claims, emergency food pantry, and van transportation for all Western Massachusetts. Transportation must be arranged two weeks in advance.