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Family

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TINY HOUSES, BIG IMPACT

Are tiny homes the solution
to veteran homelessness?



By DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ

Communities and social organizations across the country are opening “tiny house communities” to serve the needs of the nearly 40,000 homeless veterans, either as permanent or transitional housing.

Tiny houses typically range from 100 to 400 square feet in size, although some “family-sized” tiny houses run up to 1,000 square feet. Although no firm statistics exist on the numbers of tiny houses being built in

the U.S., the National Association of Home Builders reports that the average size of newly constructed homes has been steadily decreasing since 2007, and various industry estimates indicate that one to four percent of new homes purchased in the U.S. qualify as “tiny homes.” The movement has attracted tremendous media attention and spawned several television series, including *Tiny House Nation*, *Tiny House Hunters*, *Tiny House Builders* and *Tiny House, Big Living*.

“We train our veterans to go to war, but we don’t train them to go home,” explains Chris Stout, co-founder and chief executive of the Veterans Community Project serving the greater Kansas City area. “The unique challenges, including mental health, transitional services and supportive services and the lack thereof, that veterans and military members face in society can all be managed. There is a general misunderstanding of what it takes to thrive after war—it is my opinion that veteran-run projects make the biggest impact on veterans, because we know how to serve them best.”

To this end, the Veterans Community Project has created Veterans Village, a community of transitional tiny homes and onsite services designed to provide housing stability and address the underlying cause of a veteran’s homelessness. In contrast to traditional homeless services, a tiny home provides the veteran with privacy, a sense of security, and the ability to reintegrate at a comfortable pace. Veteran services are facilitated through an onsite community center that provides the veterans with mentoring, case management, counseling, and linkage to other programs and services.

Many tiny house projects have grown out of existing programs to help homeless veterans. “My grandmother, Joanna Webb Murria, cared for veterans in my family. I decided to turn her home of 20 years into a veterans camp for the homeless,” points out Valerie Ballard, executive director of Joanna’s Veterans Camp in Dallas. “Operation Tiny House was created two years ago to serve homeless veterans in need.” The camp currently serves as temporary housing; the tiny houses are being built by North Texas Capacity Builders with support from corporate and community partners.

The tiny houses are designed to provide transitional and permanent housing to homeless veterans.

Ballard says the program hopes to house and employ 50 homeless veterans. “We believe that it is our responsibility to care for our veterans who now need our help,” she says.

Similarly, Celebrate Outreach in St. Petersburg, Fla., is hoping to transform homeless veterans into homeowners through the “Tiny Homes for Homeless Veterans” project. “Our key mission is to enable

the successful transition of a veteran at risk of being homeless to becoming a homeowner, sustaining ownership and becoming a contributing member of the community,” remarks Sabine Von Aulock, project leader and a member of the board of directors. “I believe that society is not prepared to deal with the mental health fallout from veterans’ service

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From the Veterans Community Project in Kansas City, Missouri

experience. Veterans, like most people, like a space of their own but also to be connected to the community.”

Helping homeless veterans involves more than just providing tiny houses; many organizations are offering a range of supportive services. “I saw the need for this program after working for another nonprofit that connected veterans with services,” notes Stout of VCP. “I found that a majority of organizations I was working with made it difficult to get the help veterans needed... I felt the organizations were looking for reasons to say ‘no’ instead of looking for ways to say ‘yes,’ and this would cause many to not get the needed service until too late.

“It was necessary to create a place designed to say ‘yes’ first, because it was our belief that by the time a veteran reaches out for assistance, their back is against the wall,” Stout adds. 

TINY HOUSES BY THE NUMBERS

- Size: Typically 100 to 400 square feet, although can go up to 1,000 square feet
- Cost: \$10,000 to \$40,000
- 78 percent of tiny home owners own their home
- 68 percent of tiny home owners have no mortgage
- 55 percent of tiny home owners are women; 45 percent are men
- 2 out of 5 tiny house owners are aged 50 or older
- Average income of tiny house owners is \$42,038

Source: thetinylife.com

Careers

By DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ

THE ART OF THE FOLLOW-UP

Congratulations! You connected with a company and aced an interview for your dream job! Now what?


After completing a job interview, it is critically important that you follow up properly to ensure that you remain in the running for the position. Major career search boards and recruiters agree that a crucial first step is to write a thank-you note to the interviewer as soon as possible after the interview—the same day, or within 24 hours. If you interviewed with multiple people at the same company, you should write a separate and distinct thank you to each person who spoke with you.

The follow-up thank-you note should be personal and specific, and include the following components:

- An expression of sincere appreciation for the interviewer's time in meeting with you
- A reinforcement of your qualifications and how they make you a great fit for the position
- A straightforward statement of your interest in the job
- Any important details or points that you did not make during the interview
- A query about the next steps
- Your contact information, including full name, email address and phone number.

Continuing to follow up after the initial thank-you message also is important. During the interview, you should always ask the interviewer the company's timetable for filling the position and let that timetable dictate how soon—and how often—you follow up after your initial thank-you note.

The interviewer may need to interview other qualified candidates, which might take a few weeks; therefore, you should aim for sending a simple query as to the status of the company's job search two to three weeks after the interview.

That being said, however, if the company is looking to hire someone quickly, don't wait too long to follow up—you want to make sure that you are "in the mix" when the company makes a final decision. 

Education

By DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ

MOM OR DAD GOING Back to School?

What You Need To Know

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, college and graduate students aged 25 or older accounted for approximately 40 percent of total enrollment in 2009, a figure that has been rising steadily and is expected to reach 43 percent by 2020. Many military reservists, veterans and spouses take advantage of the scholarship and financial benefits offered by the GI Bill to return to school; other older individuals may be seeking better job opportunities, retraining after a career shift or searching for personal development and growth.

Since many of these same individuals are married and have children, it means huge adjustments in family priorities and schedules. This means that spouses and children may have to take on a larger share of household chores, as well as accommodate some budget-tightening. Here are some suggestions for adapting to the changing family dynamics:

Maintain Communication

Make sure that everyone in the family knows everyone else's schedule and responsibilities. Be responsive to the needs of other family members for work, school, studying and household tasks.

Share Equally

Divide and conquer those household chores by making a "chores chart" and giving everyone something that they can do. Even young children can and do enjoy contributing and helping their parents out. Here are some age-appropriate chores for children, according to webmd.com:

Ages 2 to 3:

- Put toys away
- Wipe up spills
- Put clothes in hamper
- Dust
- Pile books and magazines
- Fill pet's food dish

Ages 4 to 5:

- Any of the above chores, plus:
- Make their bed
- Pull weeds, if you have a garden
- Empty wastebaskets
- Water flowers
- Bring in mail or newspaper
- Unload utensils from dishwasher



- Clear table
- Wash plastic dishes at sink
- Use hand-held vacuum to pick up crumbs
- Fix bowl of cereal

Ages 6 to 7:

- Any of the above chores, plus:
- Sweep floors
- Help make and pack lunch
- Set and clear table
- Sort laundry
- Weed and rake leaves
- Keep bedroom tidy

Ages 8 to 9:

- Any of the above chores; plus:
- Vacuum
- Load dishwasher
- Sew buttons
- Put away groceries
- Make own breakfast
- Help make dinner
- Peel vegetables
- Make own snacks
- Cook simple foods, such as toast
- Wash table after meals
- Mop floor
- Put away own laundry
- Take pet for a walk

Ages 10 and older:

- Any of the above chores, plus:
- Fold laundry
- Unload dishwasher
- Do laundry
- Babysit younger siblings (with adult in the home)
- Wash windows
- Clean bathroom
- Wash car
- Cook simple meal with supervision
- Clean kitchen
- Change their bed sheets

Build in Family Time

All work and no play makes *everyone* unhappy! Try to schedule fun family activities on a regular basis. For families on a tight budget, this can include at-home movie nights, board game nights, or even joint homework sessions with the kids. 