

Inland Empire nonprofits receive \$1.9M to assist homeless veterans

By Joe Nelson, The Sun
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For the second year in a row, three Inland Empire nonprofits have received a total of \$1.9 million in federal funding from the Department of Veterans Affairs to assist low-income and homeless veterans.

Through its Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program, the federal agency on Monday announced the award of \$300 million in grants to 301 community agencies in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, for programs and services benefitting 115,000 low-income and homeless veterans.

Knowledge, Education for Your Success (KEYS) in San Bernardino, the Lighthouse Treatment Center in Moreno Valley and the U.S. Veterans Initiative at the March Air Reserve Base in Riverside County received \$619,134, \$565,284, and \$744,804, respectively.

KEYS anticipates receiving another grant of \$1.5 million from Veterans Affairs in the next couple of weeks and plans to combine the two grants to assist 300 of San Bernardino County's roughly 2,000 low-income or homeless veterans, KEYS Executive Director Maureen O'Keefe Hodge said Tuesday.

"We believe that with the funds we're going to make a huge impact in our county," O'Keefe Hodge said, adding that 60 percent of the funds will be used to assist veterans living on the street and the remaining 40 percent will be used for preventative services. "Our goal is to end homelessness for veterans."

With its \$606,994 grant last year, KEYS was able to serve 150 low income or homeless veterans. This year, KEYS plans to serve the same number with its SSVF grant plus an additional 150 with the other \$1.5 million the nonprofit is soon expecting from Veterans Affairs, O'Keefe Hodge said.

KEYS works with the county Housing Authority, Community Action Partnership and local churches and law enforcement agencies to track and assist homeless veterans and their families. The organization recently helped place a family of five found living in a tent in the High Desert and a family of 8, with two dogs, living on the street, O'Keefe Hodge said.

More recently, KEYS established a "Welcome Home" program in which volunteers raise money to help furnish recently acquired homes for veterans and their families. They even hold housewarming parties for the veterans.

"It's really sweet," O'Keefe Hodge said.

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