

They're giving vets a leg up

by Eddie Young
Amp Publisher

Editor's note: Volunteers of America (VOA) maintains an office on Magnolia Avenue in Knoxville dedicated to the Homeless Veterans Re-integration Project, which assists servicemen and -women in finding gainful employment. Below are excerpts of a conversation with Clyde Vincent, a VOA social worker.

"We are the homeless veterans re-integration project for Knoxville. We cover the city and seven surrounding seven counties. What we do is break down barriers for homeless veterans, getting them back to work. The barriers could be anything from needing transportation, needing work supplies, clothes, work tools, boots. It depends on what kind of job they've got. I mean, we've bought guys suits before, because that's the kind of job they're getting. Like The Amplifier, we bought some of the guys (vendors) aprons, because they needed them in order to do it.

The other thing we do is we refer them for housing, refer them for any counseling they might need. We help them apply for their V.A. benefits.

Here's how it begins. Say a homeless veteran comes to us. Well, we make an agreement with them that if their willing and able to work, we will help them break down the barriers that they need in order to get a job.

Our program is basically like a six-month program, ideally. But in an example, like, if you're in-with us for a couple of months and you find a job. Then once you start working, we follow you for 271 days. The bottom line is that we are funded through the (U.S.) Department of Labor through a grant. And through that grant, we can only concentrate on breaking down barriers to getting people to work. The housing part and the assistance food and all that, we some foundation money that organizations have

donated. And that's money we use to help people with rent deposits, help in paying for their food until they get their first paycheck and stuff like that. Our main goal is work related.

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We have a pretty good track record, but right now we're struggling just a little bit 'cause there's not jobs out there. And what jobs there are out there, there's stiff competition for them, and some of our clients don't have the best backgrounds, 'cause we deal with anybody that's got any felonies, misdemeanors, just got out of jail or prison, don't have a good employment record. We'll take on any of these issues, the biggest thing is that they've gotta be willing and able to work.

Our strong belief here is that we're not gonna duplicate services if there already out there. A perfect example of that is, down the road here, we got Connect Ministries - they do resumes. They do a very good job on resumes, the Salvation Army also does resumes and so, us spending our time doing resumes, we'll refer them there, and we'll do the same with the other organizations. We try to cooperate and get agreements with them so that we can better use what funds we have to help that client and duplicate what another organization can do

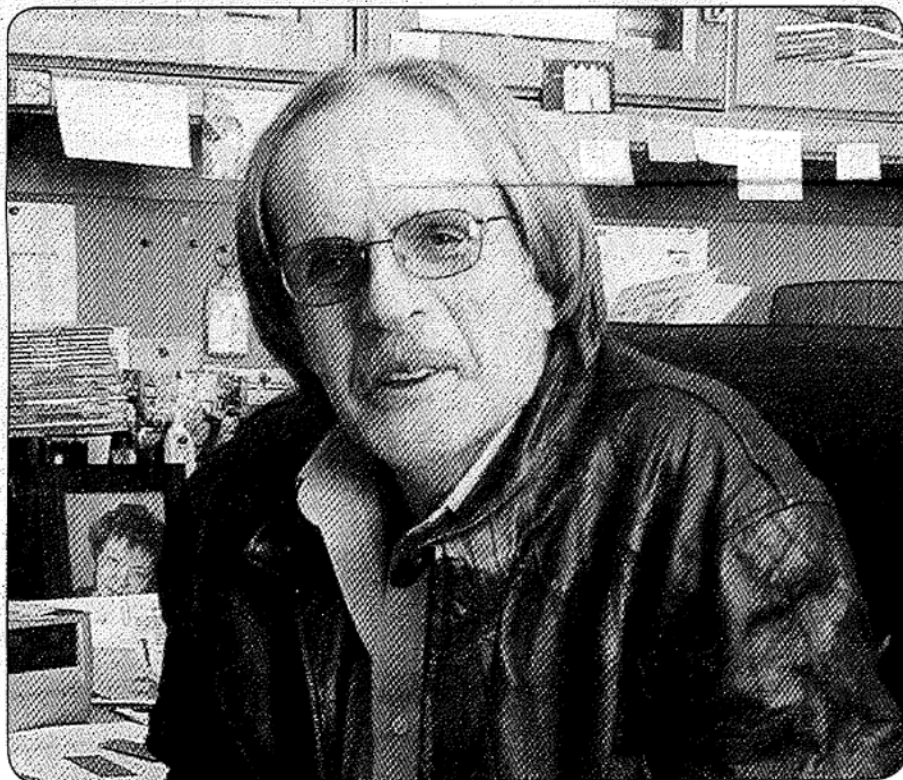


Photo by Eddie Young

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COMING: The Amp will bring success stories from Volunteers of America in a monthly series running the balance of 2011.