

Farm for Veterans Allows them to Conquer Addiction and Grow

Amanda Borozinski

The man sits in a greenhouse, a small spade in his right hand, carefully filling hundreds of pots with soil. Five years ago, Thomas J. Coffe had a gun in his right hand and opiates coursing through his veins in the deserts of Kuwait.

“I developed an opium dependency over there (in Kuwait). I kept telling myself I was going to leave it there,” Coffe said. “But then I came home and did Oxycodone and got back into morphine.” Coffe, 28, also came home with a severe lung injury that made breathing very difficult.

At Veterans’ Victory Farm in New Hampshire he has found a “safe place to start over.” Since it opened in 2003, the 85-acre farm has been helping veterans overcome drug and alcohol addiction.

And it’s not just the work – weeding, feeding pigs, making dinner, and clearing brush – that

helps Coffe. It’s also the 12 other male veterans he lives with. “Around me are these guys – vets – who have been where I’ve been and can tell me how to get to where I want to go,” he said.

Leslie Lightfoot, a veteran herself, founded the Veterans’ Victory Farm, plus five other

veterans homes in Massachusetts, Puerto Rico, and New Hampshire. In 1993, Lightfoot used her own money to buy a small home in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, where she started the first and only hospice care facility for veterans in the country. “I guess I feel compelled to help veterans because I am one and so are my two daughters,” Lightfoot said.

Living in a home sharing chores and meals builds camaraderie and creates natural situations for counseling, Lightfoot said. In the home and farm setting, therapy sessions can occur naturally while a veteran is doing vacuuming, collecting eggs, or cleaning a horse stall, she added. Coffe agrees: After being at Veterans’ Victory Farm for a few months, he invited his parents to come see him – “drug free for the first time in years.”



One of the veterans works in the greenhouse, filling pots with soil.

Veterans Struggle with Addiction and Homelessness

19 percent of current war veterans who have received care from the Veterans’ Administration have been diagnosed with substance abuse or dependence.

23 percent of the homeless population are veterans.

What do you think of the “Zero Tolerance for Veterans’ Homelessness Act”? Visit www.govtrack.us and search for **S. 1547**. Find out where your congressperson stands on the issue. Write him or her a letter expressing your opinion about the bill.

Sources: <www.drugpolicy.org/library/veterans2009.cfm>, <www.endhomelessness.org>.

Source: Reprinted and adapted with permission from *The Keene Sentinel*, April 2, 2009, © 2009 Copyright. For more information, see <www.veteranhomestead.org>