



The Vashon Veterans Retreat Center: Serving Those who have Served for Us

Date: 3/1/20

Organization: Vashon Veterans Retreat Center

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Project Title: Vashon Veterans Service Office and Medical Benefits Support Project

THE NEED – According to the US census data, 627 of the 8,889 adults living on Vashon Island (7%) are military veterans including 510 who are 65 or older and 50 individuals who are currently disabled. In addition, most service-related disabilities are major with most having a disability rating of 70% or higher. Last, 56 have an income below the regional poverty level. Although regional support services exist in Seattle and Tacoma, many of the veterans we serve are either financially challenged or physically impaired making access to these services challenging or impossible. As anyone who has worked on VA health benefit claims can tell you, it is a slow and arduous process often taking multiple office visits over months or years. Many veterans simply give up and face their health problems on their own, sometimes with no other insurance. We have developed a local veterans service office to address this inequity.

ORGANIZATION – Beginning in early 2018, the Vashon Veterans Retreat Center (VVRC), a 501(c)(3) non-profit, transformed the old Granny's Attic space at Sunrise Ridge into a veteran's retreat facility to help improve access to healthcare for our island veterans. Thanks to many volunteers, donations and grants from King County and Rotary International we have made improvements to our buildings valued at more than \$140,000. Our primary focus is our service officer program which connects Vashon veterans to the health services and other benefits available from the Veterans Administration and is available on a **walk-in basis Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 1 – 4 or by making an appointment by phone or on our website, vashonvets.org.**

We are in the process of building a multifaceted retreat program that will expand to offer veteran crisis housing in the Haywire House named in honor of islander and US **Army First Lieutenant Robert "Haywire" Bennedson** who was **killed in action (Afghanistan, 2010)**. This small home is located at the Sunrise Ridge entrance and we have made great progress on construction with the goal of ultimately offering temporary housing to 2 – 3 veterans at any given time.

PROGRESS - To date, we have aided veterans in securing nearly \$80,000 in medical disability compensation, death benefits, medical care debit forbearance and survivor pensions.

A PERSONAL STORY – One our clients was a US Army Ranger serving in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. During his service, he sustained a substantial but undiagnosed traumatic brain injury (TBI). Like many of those who serve, he denied any injury that would prevent him from serving with his team and these denials were maintained for years following service. Since his discharge roughly 8 years ago, he has suffered from TBI and post-traumatic stress disorder greatly diminishing his ability to work and has experienced homelessness while caring for his two children. His brain injury left him with episodes of unconsciousness, one of which occurred

while he was operating a table saw. As he fell, he cut off the fingers of one of his hands however, he continued to deny his ailments for fear of losing his children. It took us months to build his trust and to help him file his disability claim, but he received a disability benefit award in early 2019 and today he and his family are stable and safe. With our assistance, this hero has taken control of his life and is receiving the medical care he and his family needs.

THE ASK – Over the next six months, we would like to strategically improve and expand our services with the following additions. First, we need a part-time Service Officer Manager. This position is key to coordinating the complex interactions between our volunteers, service officers, the Veterans Administration and the Department of Defense. In addition, given the claims backlog at the regional VA office in Seattle, we would like to send two service officers to advanced training to make them eligible to directly submit claims to the VA system. This is a key step in improving our ability to serve the community and decrease the wait time for **our heroes to obtain access to healthcare benefits**. Last, we are seeking support to help us complete the **Haywire House for Veterans in Crisis**. We are seeking \$24,404 in support of these efforts. See the following table for the six month budget period. We greatly appreciate the support you have provided us in the past and your time and consideration regarding this request.

Vashon Veterans Retreat Center Spring/Summer 2020 – 6-month budget			
Service	Description of use	Costs	Support Requested
Volunteer Service Officer	Reviews cases based on needs and service records, identifies benefit eligibility and serves as a consultant to support benefit applications	None	None
Volunteer Professional Grant Writer	Identifies potential funding instruments and provides support for making applications	None	None
Service Office Manager	Coordinate volunteer service officer efforts, aid applicants in the process of completing documentation for medical benefit applications	Contractor - Seeking support for an 0.4 FTE equivalent over 6 months	\$9,152
Professional Service Officer Training	Will enable direct application of benefits from the Vashon Service office to the Veterans Administration	\$3,000	\$3,000
Monthly Operational costs of the Service Officer Center	Combined cost of maintaining our service officer program \$1,042 per month (insurance, utilities, internet, webhosting and taxes)	\$6,252	\$6,252
Materials for the Haywire House	Will provide building materials for completion of the crisis housing project . We are seeking grants from other organizations to share the costs and volunteers are providing the majority of the labor	Estimated \$34,000	\$6,000

\$24,404