

What is a StandDown?

In times of war, exhausted combat units requiring time to rest and recover were removed from the battlefields to a place of relative security and safety. At secure base camp areas, troops were able to take care of personal hygiene, get clean uniforms, enjoy warm meals, receive medical and dental care, mail and receive letters, and enjoy the camaraderie of friends in a safe environment.

Today, StandDown refers to a grassroots, community-based intervention program designed to help the nation's estimated 200,000 homeless veterans "combat" life on the streets. Homeless veterans are brought together in a single location for one to three days and are provided access to the community resources needed to begin addressing their individual problems and rebuilding their lives. In the military, StandDown afforded battle-weary soldiers the opportunity to renew their spirit, health and overall sense of well-being. Today's StandDown affords the same opportunity to all veterans, a brief respite, creating an atmosphere conducive to change and recovery.

What is the history of StandDown?

The concept of StandDown, as related specifically to the homeless veteran crisis, was the brainchild of two Vietnam Veterans, Robert Van Keuren and Dr. Jon Nachison, with the support of Vietnam Veterans of San Diego. The first StandDown was held in San Diego during the summer of 1988. The popularity of the event has steadily grown from the original in 1988 to nearly 100 throughout the nation each year. It is estimated that more than 100,000 homeless veterans have received assistance at StandDowns.

What happens at a StandDown?

Hundreds of homeless veterans are provided with a broad range of necessities including food, clothing, medical, legal and mental health assistance, job counseling and referral, and most importantly, companionship and camaraderie. It is a time for the community to connect with the homeless veteran population and address this crisis that affects each and every town, city and state in this country. The hand up -- not a handout -- philosophy of StandDown is carried out through the work of hundreds of volunteers and organizations throughout the nation.

Why this unique approach?

Many homeless veterans have suffered years of chronic or recurring readjustment issues since ending their military service, issues often inadequately addressed by traditional services to assist veterans. This is due in part to a lack of structured and effective collaboration among agencies, forcing veterans to go from one agency to another in efforts to access the various resources they need.

This lack of efficient support from traditional veteran services has led to homeless veterans' mistrust of the very government agencies and large institutions created to help them. A StandDown brings together various agencies and service providers to provide a

comprehensive system that encourages and assists homeless veterans to overcome their distrust and feelings of isolation with the knowledge that this event promises to address multiple problems at one time and place. It provides a safe environment in which they can connect with people who have shared experiences and cultivate hope that they can rebuild their lives.

Who organizes and delivers these services?

Hundreds of caring volunteers and professionals give of their time and expertise to address the unique needs of homeless veterans. Committees formed specifically to put on the event stage most StandDowns. Veteran service organizations, National Guard and Reserve units, homeless shelter programs, health care providers, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Labor staffs, veteran-helping-veteran programs, and concerned citizens from the community organize and stage the events.

Where are StandDowns held?

StandDowns most often occur over a two- or three-day period, although there are an increasing number of one-day events. Some are held indoors, but the majority are held on football fields, in parks or other wide-open spaces. There is a [list of upcoming StandDowns](#) on this site: <http://www.nchv.org/standdownevents.cfm>

What does it take to stage a StandDown?

There is no specific formula to plan and hold a StandDown. In fact, each community adds its own uniqueness to a StandDown. Some offer basic services, while others offer more by including entertainment and cultural activities to their programs. Some StandDowns are re-created to follow a regimented, military-style program, which is familiar and comforting to the veteran, while others create an atmosphere of empowerment to the extent of electing officers among the homeless veterans.

All it really takes for a community to organize a StandDown is a group of dedicated volunteers committed to helping homeless veterans improve their situation.