

## **BRIEF HISTORY**

The staff at the Lincoln VA SUDP saw a very important need in the treatment of veterans with addictions. Their professional experience in dealing with veterans and soldiers caused them to see the need for more than just treatment for substance abuse. There is a saying in the recovery community that one must want to be sober for oneself. But that would mean that the person would have to feel some sense of worth. However, the alcoholic/addict not only has to face the feelings of guilt and shame from the wreckage of the past, but also the mountain of problems caused by the addiction; financial devastation, family relationships in ruin, legal problems, mental issues, homelessness, medical and physical issues just to name a few. Many veterans had been in substance abuse treatment programs before. Not only are the problems overwhelming, knowing where to get help poses more problems.

The staff recognized that in order for veterans to want to be sober they must have hope. So they created the Promise House and the Promise Program. Their belief was that if they could help veterans and soldiers find solutions to their problems, not just treatment, that as they begin to see their problems diminish then possibly they could begin to feel some hope and with hope comes continued sobriety.

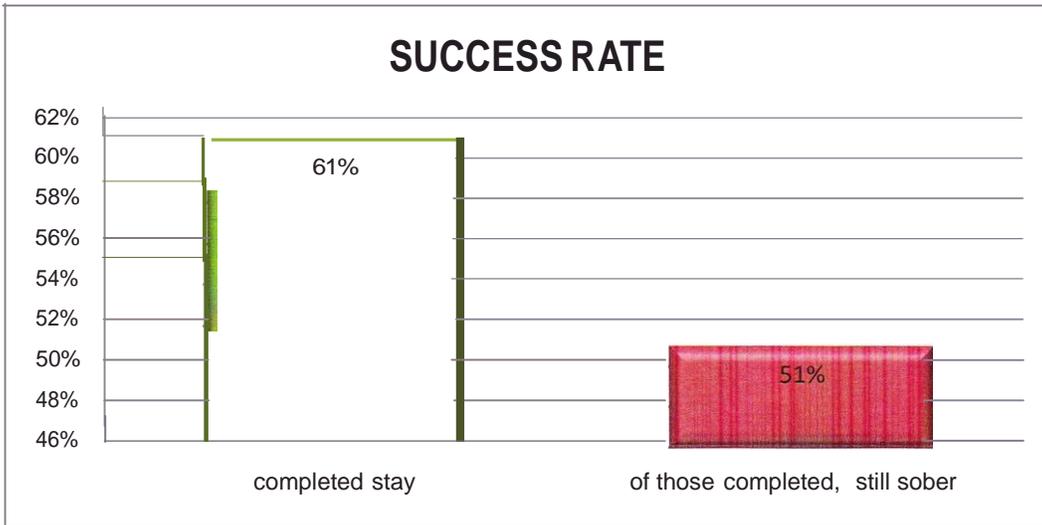
In April 2008, the Lincoln VA Substance Use Disorders Program (SUDP) was awarded funds for a pilot program for supportive housing through the Innovations Program of the VA. The Promise House, as it became known, opened on July 21, 2008, with the first placement. At \$27 a day, the monies covered the cost of housing 6 veterans for a minimum of 90 days for a year. Along with housing, the Promise Program was created to focus on the various needs and deficits in the veteran's life due to substance abuse. The goal of the proposal was to demonstrate the need for structured living in Lincoln and also to demonstrate that improving the quality of a living for the veteran can have a positive effect on continue sobriety.

To continue operations, the program received funding in the amount of \$10,000 from the Department of Health and Human Services and \$18000 from the VA in September 30, 2009. They were given 2 additional beds to fill, for a total of 8. The daily cost was decreased to \$13.50, and the staff helped the residents find the means to provide their own food, which came through various sources such as food banks, food stamps, etc. In May of 2010, the Department of Health and Human Services gave the program a onetime funding in the amount of \$35, 000.

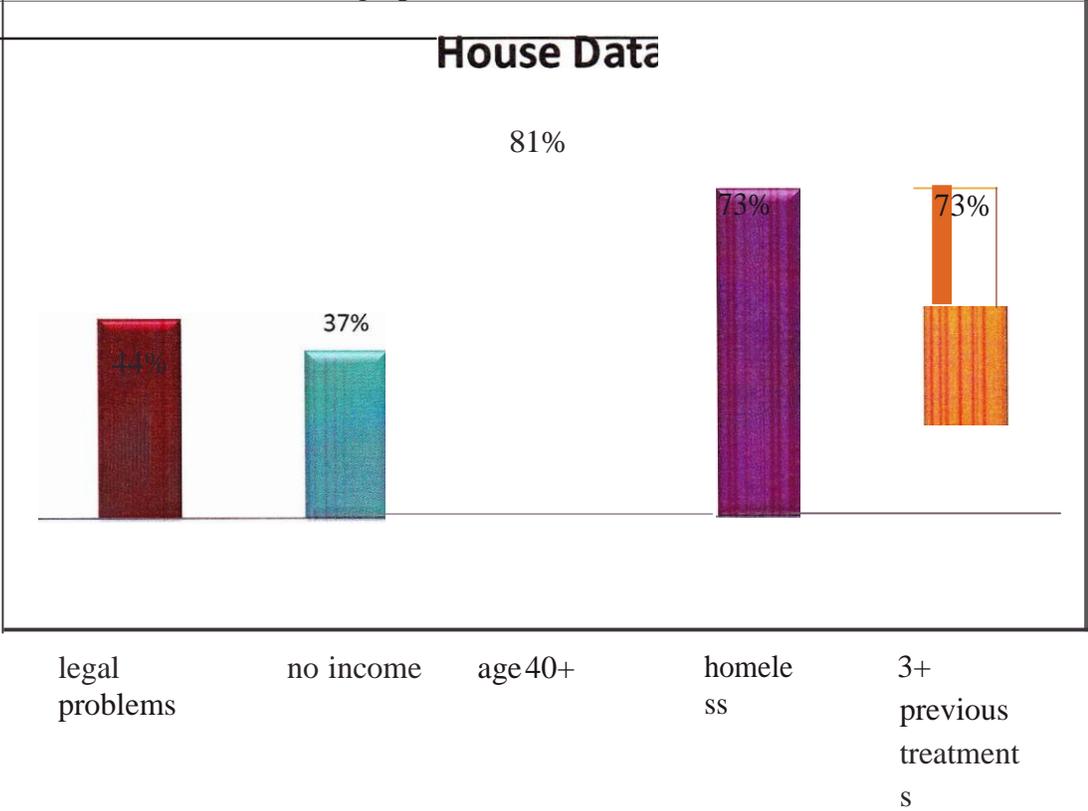
In 2006, the SUDP Alumni Association was formed and members were made up of veterans and soldiers who had completed the program. The association recognized the valiant efforts of the staff and wanted to see these programs continue. This led to the alumni association becoming a nonprofit organization called, Operation Veterans Encouraging Recovery (OVER). It was organized for the purpose of creating physical and emotional comfort for veterans in recovery from the disease of addiction. This included providing housing and rehabilitation services to veterans of the United States Armed Forces, cooperating with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and all other public and private agencies devoted to the cause of improving and advancing the condition of veterans in recovery and to educate the public about disease of addiction.

From 2008 to the present time, there have been over 75 men who have gone through the house and program.

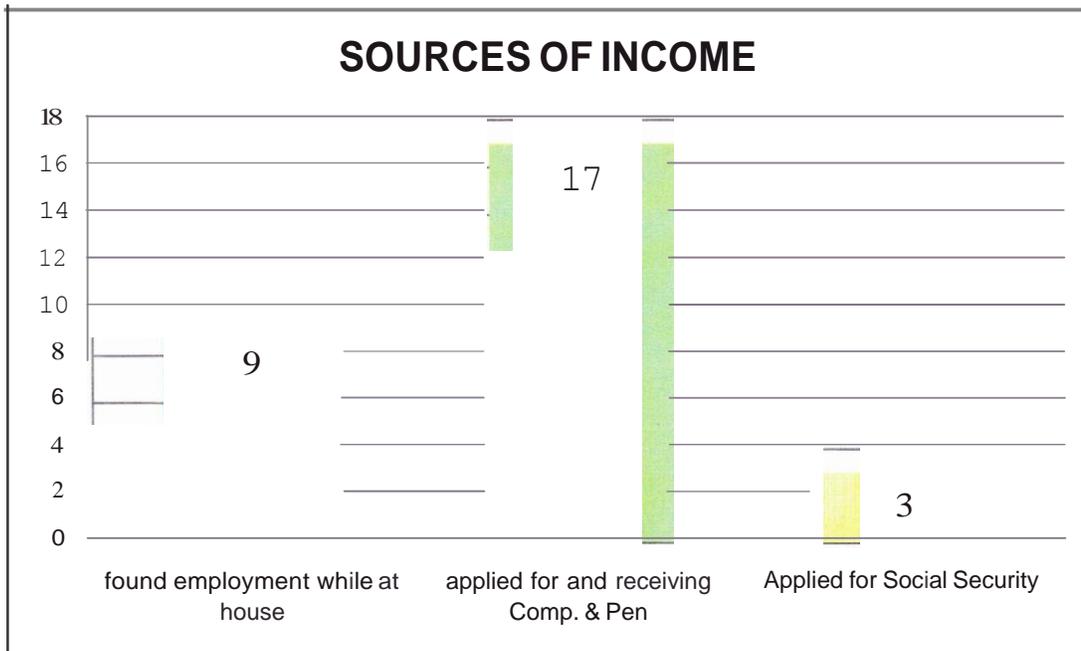
Of those 61% have completed the program and 51% of those are still sober to this date.



Below is some of the demographic information on our clients:



29 of the veterans who entered the house had no source of income, but through the Promise Program all were helped either through V A employment services or other sources.



To address the above problems, we partnered with various agencies in the city of Lincoln that we thought could help veterans address those problems. In March 2008, we sent out 24 invitations to agencies in the Lincoln area and 20 of them showed up for a luncheon. We told them that we were planning to demonstrate that by not just acknowledging the deficits of our clients due to their addiction, but also assisting them in getting them met; we would improve the outcome of those who are attempting sobriety. At the time the CHALENG report identified that among the 10 highest unmet needs for the homeless veteran, long term permanent housing, dental care, re-entry services for incarcerated veterans, legal assistance, help managing money, glasses and eye care were at the top. We were also planning on addressing employment issues, training and educational needs. The response was overwhelming. And we enlisted more agencies assistance since then. During that 2 year period we made over 576 referrals to 49 different agencies.

The most recent CHALENG report identified that among the 10 most unmet needs for the homeless veteran were: legal assistance for child support issues, long term permanent housing, SSI/SSD processing, legal assistance for outside warrants/fines, job training, job finding, VA disability/pension, credit counseling, and dental care. Through the Promise Program we address those very same areas.

The Promise Program Case Manager sets up all the appointments, makes arrangements for transportation and assists in obtaining and filling out applications and paperwork necessary for the services they are seeking. The examples below show the areas we have helped our veterans address and, for most, get a resolution:

•• Financial Problems

- \* Lincoln Action Program (LAP) has been offering our veterans weekly educational classes concerning budgeting, balancing check books, money management and assistance with taxes.
- \* From 2008-2009, Consumer Credit Counseling gave monthly educational classes and met with individuals to discuss their indebtedness and possible solutions
- \* 2 individuals were assisted in applications for SSD, I for SSI.
- \* 17 veterans were assisted in applying for Compensation and have been assisted by Lancaster County Veteran Services

•• Nutrition:

- \* The VA Nutritionist facilitates monthly classes on nutrition and how it relates to recovery. The nutritionist completed all the assessments for those at the house as well as some individual screenings including glucose and lipid levels. She enrolled 2 in the MOVE program.
- \* In the summer of 2010, the UNL Extension Agency came to the house for 12 sessions and gave cooking classes.
- \* From 2010 to the present time, the veterans are taken to Foodnet, which offers perishable food items for free.
- \* Through Government Commodities, they are assisted in obtaining commodities for at least 5 meals.
- \* The Salvation Army has given 10 of our veterans' food baskets.

•• Employment:

- \* Nebraska Workforce development counseled 4 individuals about finding employment despite felony convictions.
- \* During the period of 2009 to present, State of Nebraska Vocation Rehabilitation and VA Vocational Rehabilitation has given numerous veterans assessments, placements or educational assistance.
- \* Lincoln Action Program has facilitated classes on resume writing, personal development and job seeking skills.
- \* In 2009, Compensated Work Therapy gave one veteran a one year contract with the VA processing of GI bill applications who now is a full time employee.
- \* 2 of veterans received work clothes from the Good Neighbor Center.
- \* Department of Health & Human Services has been providing food stamps to all those who are eligible since 2010.

•• Mental Health:

- \* All of the patients are seen by a SUDP Psychiatrist for their mental health needs.
- \* We collaborate with the Transition Clinic and with mental health seeking assessment and coordinating care.
- \* Four of the veterans entered the Topeka PTSD program and returned for continuing care.

•• Legal Assistance:

- \* Legal Aid of Nebraska, in 2008, assisted one veteran in appealing student loan repayment orders from the Dept. of Education.
  - \* One was assisted in getting help appealing Social Security decision
  - \* Five were helped in dealing with the Child Support Enforcement agency in getting their child support suspended for 1 year so as to get employment and not fall further behind while another was assisted in catching up on back child support.
  - \* One was assisted in obtaining a divorce he had not been able to afford.
  - \* MADD Dads gave 7 veterans community service opportunities and in return they received bicycles.
- Housing:
    - \* Since its inception, HUD/VASH helped place 12 veterans in their own apartments.
    - \* Catholic Social Services helped 2 of them receive furniture for their new home in 2010.
    - \* 4 were helped through Lincoln Electric Systems and Lincoln Water Systems programs to help with their utilities and the Nebraska Telephone Assistance Program with telephone needs.
- Education:
 

In 2009, through State Vocational Rehabilitation and Southeast Community College, 3 veterans received full ride scholarships:

    - \* 1 for small appliance repairs
    - \* 1 for culinary arts
    - \* 1 for veterinary technician
- Medical/Physical:
 

Case Manager assists in coordinating medical appointments when necessary:

    - \* Lancaster County Health assisted 3 veterans in getting teeth extractions at sliding scale fee. \* Clinic with a Heart gave free dental care to 2 veterans in 2009 for extractions and for fillings.
    - \* 22 Veterans were taken to Matt Talbot's kitchen on 3 occasions from 2008 to present time to attend a free foot clinic receiving pedicures and food massages from Wesleyan University Nursing Students as part of their training and in return, all received a new pair of shoes from Payless Shoe Store.

Numbers tell just part of the story, personal achievements say more. Below are just 3 great examples of the benefits the recovery house has offered to those who get the opportunity to enter the program.

Our first story is about a veteran who was 57 when he came to the program. He had been in the VA system starting in 1999. Medical records noted concerns about his "no shows" which amounted to approximately 90%. In 2002, he was diagnosed with diabetes and began receiving diabetic training and nutrition classes. After entering the program in 2008, his Diabetic Case Management appointments went from 14 to 3. His mental health appointments indicated compliance during the remainder of his

time. He died of cardiac arrest in 2009 having maintained his sobriety.

Our next veteran was 46 years old when he came into the program. He began receiving services at the VA in November 2001, after he suffered an alcohol related injury. In the 8 years that followed he had 7 orthopedic appointments, 2 surgeries, and one physical therapy appointment, all for alcohol related injuries. In 2008, Social Work received a call from Adult Protective Services with concerns of his welfare.

In December 2008, he entered the Grand Island VA residential substance use disorders program, and came to Promise House in February 2009. Since entering the program, he has remained sober. He now has 6 years of sobriety. He's reunited with his son and through HUD/VASH, has his own apartment for the first time since 2002.

Our final story is about a veteran who was 52 when he came to the Omaha VA after a second serious suicide attempt in 2009. He had lost everything that was important to him--his career as a tattoo artist, (he's a fantastic artist) and his 2 year old daughter. He remained depressed for some time, even after entering the house. He had no income, and no hope. While in the program, he was assisted in applying for NSC disability, and because he was with the program for some time, he began to build up trust. One day he opened up to what had been bothering him. After signing release of information forms, his primary therapist contacted folks that had his equipment and found out that they had been looking for him and that they were all in recovery and were anxious to be a support system. At the same time, he began to search for his daughter. He received disability and on his own volition, with the help of the Promise House Case Manager, he contacted Child Support services to make arrangements to pay his back child support and began the process of being reunited with his young daughter. Today, he is 5 years sober, has a strong support system, and has been awarded full custody of his daughter.

These are just a small example of what can and does happen to a veteran when they enter the program. We want to continue what the Lincoln VA SUDP began, but through lack of funding are no longer able to sustain. We are looking to receive funding for a larger facility that could house up to 40 veterans and soldiers. The funding will cover the expenses of the house and various needs of the resident.

The last few years we have seen more and more young soldiers applying for services through the VA. We have no doubt that the need for a facility like the Promise House and Promise Program will continue to grow as well.

We are hoping you and your agency will find us to be worthy of your services in helping us begin our endeavor.

Sadly, the Promise House was closed, but graduates of the VA SUDP in Lincoln, Nebraska took it upon themselves to form a non-profit called Operation Veterans Encouraging Recovery or OVER for short. During the last 4 years, OVER had a house donated to them. The house at 625 S. 27<sup>th</sup> Street in Lincoln, Nebraska was in serious disrepair, but the OVER organization raised money through BBQ's, garage sales, and various fundraisers. With the support of the community, the hard work of various individuals, organizations and small businesses, OVER has taken an eye sore in the community and turned it into something veterans and the rest of the community can be proud of. This house can house 4 veterans in recovery comfortably and house up to 6 in an emergency.

This house is owned and operated by OVER. OVER board members vowed that what happened to the Promise House and the veterans it housed will never happen again. When the government funding fell through for the veterans of the Promise House...8 veterans were put out on the street. OVER realizes that

our government cannot meet all the needs of all of its citizens. Not even veterans. The veterans of OVER, being proud and talented, took it upon themselves to insure that the veterans of the OVER House will not only have a place to stay, but that they will become members of OVER and actually own a piece of the recovery house that they live in.

Thank you, to all, for supporting the OVER House !