Helping Homeless Veterans

On this Veterans Day, we want to thank you for your support of Inner City Law Center's efforts to help homeless veterans move off the street and into housing. On this past Friday, we received word that two of our homeless veteran clients will receive the benefits that they are owed because of their service. Here are their stories:

Roman Ulchenko (not his real name) served in the U.S. Army from 2002 to 2011. He deployed twice to Iraq. During his first tour, Roman routinely went on convoy operations, which were notoriously dangerous due to the constant threat of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

In 2003, Roman's unit engaged an IED. The resulting blast destroyed the convoy vehicles, killed the driver of Roman's transport, and wounded several others, including Roman. His company commander recalls that Roman remained calm despite the potential for panic and, in spite of his own injuries, lent aid to a fallen comrade. The Army awarded Roman a Purple Heart for this combat trauma.

However, the significant physical injuries inflicted on Roman that day paled in comparison to the insidious and personality-altering effects of the PTSD he suffered. Roman, who was once described by his commanders as "a sterling example of military bearing," began to crumble under the devastating weight of his PTSD symptoms. He was constantly anxious about the threat of another IED, he couldn't sleep due to constant vivid nightmares, and he turned to alcohol to alleviate his unrelenting fear and survivor's guilt. His fiancée ended their engagement. Roman became further depressed and felt hopeless. He attempted suicide. The soldier whose commanders once described as having "unlimited potential" felt overwhelmed and unable to cope. Roman began disobeying orders, going AWOL, and disrespecting his commanding officers. This led to Roman's discharge from the Army with a less than fully honorable discharge status.

After being discharged, Roman continued to struggle with his severely disabling PTSD symptoms. He was unable to work
and became homeless. He moved into the VOA Hollywood homeless shelter for veterans, and in 2011, put in a claim for VA benefits for PTSD, sleep apnea, and shrapnel wounds. After waiting over a year and hearing nothing from the VA, in May 2012, Roman sought help from Inner city Law Center.

ICLC helped Roman prepare a new statement regarding his experiences in Iraq, and also submitted new medical evidence. However, despite, the overwhelming evidence, including a well-documented, obvious history of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, with a Purple Heart to corroborate his combat history, Roman received a denial for all claimed conditions in September 2013.

An appeal of a decision like this would usually take two to three years. But ICLC attorneys reached out to our contacts at the VA, explained the obvious errors in the decision, and asked if there was any way to intervene more quickly. On Friday, the VA changed their decision and agreed that Roman should have been rated 100% disabled for his PTSD, sleep apnea, and shrapnel wounds in light of the severity of his conditions. Roman immediately received over $75,000 in retroactive benefits and will receive $2,916 each month going forward, as well as much greater access to the VA healthcare that he needs because of the wounds that he suffered while fighting for our country.

**Dennis Wright** (not his real name) is a Vietnam combat veteran who served in the Army. His traumatic, horrific and unimaginable combat experiences caused him to experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms that continued to haunt him after he was honorably discharged from service. When he first returned home from Vietnam, he felt out of place, without a purpose, and struggled with the horrible memories of what he had witnessed. Dennis suffered nightly terrors and struggled with anxiety, depression, and his personal relationships. Eventually, Dennis' PTSD and alcoholism led to his becoming homeless and generally feeling like he is "losing [his] mind."

Dennis had submitted claims for VA benefits many times in the past. But he had been told that he did not have PTSD and that he was "just a drunk." Despite this, Dennis persisted in his efforts to have the VA recognize the impact the Vietnam War had had on him. When he reopened his PTSD claim in January of 2012, the VA then told him that they would not process his claim, and they were also withholding the VA pension that he was already receiving, because the VA's system indicated that he was a fleeing felon who had an outstanding warrant. That was when Dennis contacted Inner City Law Center for help.

Our attorneys went to work right away. First we provided proof to the VA that Dennis did not have any outstanding...
warrants. Then we worked with his social worker, psychiatrist, and his ex-wife and children to submit a brief and supporting materials that made it abundantly clear that Dennis' disabilities were due to his service.

On Friday, we received word that Dennis received a 50% disability rating for PTSD and a 10% rating for tinnitus. He immediately received over $30,000 in retroactive benefits and will receive $1,026 each month going forward. Dennis is pleased that the VA has finally acknowledged the impact that the Vietnam War had on him. He is looking forward to moving into his own apartment in San Diego so that he can be closer to his son.

Veterans are twice as likely as other Americans to be homeless. Please consider making a contribution to Inner City Law Center’s Homeless Veterans Project today. Click here to ensure that no veteran who served our country is left behind.

Adam Murray Receives Prestigious Stanton Fellowship

We are proud to announce that Executive Director Adam Murray has been awarded a Stanton Fellowship by the Durfee Foundation.

The Stanton Fellowship provides six fellows with the time to "think deeply about the intractable problems in their sector, and to tease out solutions that will improve life for the people of LA."

As a fellow, Adam will be taking four three-week periods spread out over the next two years to explore "How legal services should focus our limited resources to have the greatest impact on poverty."

About Inner City Law Center

Inner City Law Center is the preeminent housing and homelessness legal-services organization working on behalf of poor people in Southern California. As the only provider of legal services located on Skid Row in downtown Los Angeles, ICLC combats slum housing throughout Los Angeles and develops strategies to end homelessness.

Each year, ICLC's staff of 40 (including 20 attorneys) provides free, high-quality legal representation to thousands of low-income tenants, working-poor families, immigrants, people who are homeless or disabled, and veterans. Driven by the fundamental principle that every person should always be treated with dignity and respect, ICLC works for
long-term, positive, and meaningful change.