



Hats off to Homeless Veterans Department President's Project 2010-2011

On any given night across our Nation over 154,000 Veterans are homeless. Over one third of all homeless are Veterans. Most have at least a high school education and some have college degrees. It is not just the enlisted man or woman. Those Soldiers have put their lives on the line to protect our freedom. Many lives were drastically changed from the jungles, monsoon rains, napalm and Agent Orange of Vietnam. They fought and were declared a band of brothers, but many suffered emotional scars that you and I cannot see. Our Soldiers - both men and women - who have endured the heat and burning sands of Iraq and Afghanistan for the sake of democracy are the newest additions to the homeless veterans' population. Yes, my friends, even our most current warriors are experiencing homelessness.

Mental illness, drug and alcohol addictions are the number one cause of homelessness. Have you ever seen a homeless person? Were you afraid to say anything and simply looked the other way? Were you hoping they wouldn't approach you for some change, a cigarette or something to eat? That is a normal reaction. My grandsons' senior trip was to Washington D.C. Before they left, as any grandmother would do, I told them to have a great time and stay safe. I also told them to not talk to any homeless people lying on benches or panhandling on the street. As I was speaking, I knew in my heart that many of those ragged, dirty, incoherent homeless were Veterans who, through my affiliation with the American Legion Auxiliary, I should be helping, not condemning. Like many of you, being a mother and grandmother, my first concern was the safety and well being of my grandsons.

Every homeless Veteran is someone's son or daughter. Perhaps that Veteran is a sister, brother, uncle or aunt, wife or husband. Someone somewhere at one time did and perhaps still does hold them dear to their heart, and possibly doesn't even know where they are and if they are safe. Many families have endured troubled waters in their lives and there but for the grace of God go I.

Every District and most Counties have a homeless shelter in their area. Many of you know where they are and what they do. Many of you donate many volunteer hours at these shelters, working in the kitchen or helping in other ways. We need to be more active in our Field Service program, helping our Veterans in the communities in which we live. They are there and you may not even know it.

All monies donated to the "Hats off to Homeless Veterans" project will be returned to a shelter in your area. Include with your donations the name and address of the shelter you designate. The Department Secretary/Treasurer will direct your funds to support the homeless initiative at home, in your own community. If you do not wish to designate a shelter, your contributions to the project will still be welcomed and put to good use. Undesignated funds will be directed to Zion House, a shelter serving homeless women veterans from all areas in New York. Uniting together in "Service not Self," I am confident that we can make a difference in the lives of our homeless Veterans right here in the Department of New York. Let's build a bridge and reach out to help that someone's son or daughter.