

NJ 2-1-1 Provides Hope for Veterans

Written by [NJ 2-1-1 Partnership](#)

Published: 20 November 2014

Teaming With the Community Hope, Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program

East Hanover, NJ – As we commemorate Veterans Day this month and pay tribute to all those who have served our country, many veterans in our state are in desperate need of services. Finding access to these resources is the biggest challenge, but [NJ 2-1-1](#), the free, user-friendly information and referral service that connects people-in-need with critical health and human service resources, is here to assist.

Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) is one of these resources. Funded by the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs and administered through many organizations in our state, SSVF provides eligible veterans and their families with essential services in an effort to help them achieve self-sufficiency. The focus of the program is housing but many other supportive services are provided. Since 2011 NJ 2-1-1 has served as the single point of entry for Community Hope (dba) Hope for Veterans, one of the organizations that administer the SSVF program in parts of New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Help starts when a veteran dials 211 at any time of the day or night throughout the year. Call specialists have been trained to screen veterans for the SSVF program. If veterans satisfy the eligibility requirements then their information is transmitted to a SSVF case worker at Community Hope – Hope for Veterans who contacts the veteran to see how they can help. If the person calling NJ 2-1-1 does not meet the eligibility requirements then the 2-1-1 call specialist looks for other community resources that can help.

“Veterans calling our helpline are much like our regular callers,” explains Luisa Fieno, NJ 2-1-1’s addictions hotline and special initiatives manager. She continues, “They are experiencing a personal crisis and often say that they never expected to be in the position of needing this much help. We assure them that they are not alone and that we will do everything we can to put them in touch with organizations, programs and services that can provide the assistance they need to get back on their feet again.” In the case of a veteran who is a homeless or in danger of becoming homeless, that program may very well be SSVF.

Through SSVF, Community Hope – Hope for Veterans provides rapid re-housing and other essential services to veterans struggling with homelessness in 13 New Jersey counties and seven Eastern Pennsylvania counties. The non-profit organization, which is the largest organization in New Jersey serving homeless veterans, has been serving veterans in NJ since 2004. “We are honored at NJ 2-1-1 to be working with Community Hope – Hope for Veterans through their SSVF program,” said Tom Mergola, NJ 2-1-1’s director of operations and a veteran himself. “The organization has a very robust program and is very connected in the field. The services provided by them through the SSVF program keep our veterans in homes, help them overcome poverty and ensure that they are

provided with the health services needed for their conditions. These veterans served us. Now it is time to serve them.”

Last fiscal year (October 2013-September 2014), 1,772 called NJ 2-1-1 looking for help through this special initiative. Of these callers, 609 were homeless veterans and 1,003 were veterans who were in imminent danger of becoming homeless – facing eviction, foreclosure, etc.

Veterans must meet the following criteria to receive assistance through the SSVF program:

- They must be low-income, single veterans or veteran families (not active duty) who are currently residing in permanent housing and at risk of becoming homeless; or
- Currently homeless or recently exited permanent housing and scheduled or able to become a resident of permanent housing within 90 days. For example, a veteran living in a shelter, on the street or in temporary housing with an apartment identified.

Once accepted to the SSVF program, the veteran and his family are assigned a case worker who will help them identify and get the services they need. These services may include such things as housing counseling/housing search, securing utilities, mediation with property owners, financial budgeting, employment assistance and navigation of eligible benefits and services.

Temporary financial assistance services are also available through SSVF and may include temporary assistance with rent, utility payments, security payments, moving costs, childcare and transportation expenses.

When NJ 2-1-1 receives a call from veterans outside of the area serviced by Community Hope-Hope for Veterans they refer callers to the appropriate organization administering the SSVF program in their area.

The SSVF program administered by Community Hope - Hope for Veterans now serves homeless and at-risk veteran households in Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex, Union and Warren counties in New Jersey and Bucks, Lackawanna, Lehigh, Monroe, Northampton, Pike and Wyoming counties in Pennsylvania.

The national 2-1-1 network makes available a free, user-friendly phone number that serves 90% of America's population, and connects some 16 million people a year to critical resources, information and services. In New Jersey close to 230,000 people called 2-1-1 for help last year. Over 212,000 visited the website in search of resources and education.

Tours of New Jersey's 2-1-1 call center are available upon request. For additional reports about calls handled by NJ 2-1-1 Partnership contact Thomas Mergola at 973-929-3705 or visit www.nj211.org.