

## **Allegheny County reaches milestone of housing plans for all homeless veterans**

The Department of Human Services' (DHS) Bureau of Homeless Services and the Allegheny Link have been instrumental in reaching the goal of ensuring that any county veteran who is homeless has a permanent place to live.

Chuck Keenan, Administrator, Bureau of Homeless Services, joined local representatives from the U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development and the Veterans Administration, along with other Allegheny County and City of Pittsburgh personnel, to form a task force that conducted the Pittsburgh Rapid Results Veterans' Homeless Boot Camp. The project began in August 2014 and should conclude by March 2016 with the news that 460 veterans have been linked to permanent housing.

The federal government has funded and conducted such boot camps in several locations nationwide, but Allegheny County did not meet criterion to have a boot camp here. However, the local task force formed of its own volition and set out to find and house every veteran in need. The results of its efforts will be sent to the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness for certification that homelessness among veterans has been ended in Allegheny County.

Chuck said the Allegheny Link and its Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) provided vital support for the effort. As DHS partners, providers and street teams located individuals, Link staff assisted in confirming veteran status and also tapped the DHS homeless database to help locate people. The intensive search for veterans took place at emergency shelters, transitional housing and on the streets as well.

The Veterans Leadership Program of Western Pennsylvania maintained a list of veterans in need, and partner organizations assigned someone to follow the case of each veteran to ensure housing placement. A key accomplishment of Boot Camp was the ability of participants to cut the red tape that could block permanent housing. "We all worked together to reduce the application process and reduce the time it took to get housing," Chuck said. "We made better use of resources."

The federal Continuum of Care grant assisted the Boot Camp process, allowing veterans to be able to afford permanent housing through a combination of rental assistance and supportive services. In addition to housing, veterans received other supports including case management, health care benefits, and assistance in finding jobs.