



## OACAA News

### OACAA Launches Ohio VETS Program to Aid Low-Income Veterans



OACAA has launched the Ohio Vocation, Education, Training & Services (Ohio VETS) program at six pilot Community Action Agencies in Ohio to aid veterans at 200 percent of

the federal poverty level and below.

As the name indicates, the program will offer education and training to assist veterans in finding meaningful employment at a living wage, and provide them and their families with other supportive services to help them attain self-sufficiency.

“Ohio has the fifth largest veteran population in the U.S. and with more service men and women coming home, and a higher unemployment and poverty rate for veterans, we feel this program is very important. It will not only aid our veterans and local heroes, but will enhance the economic security of Ohio,” said Phil Cole, executive director of OACAA.

There are over 900,000 veterans in Ohio and many more returning to an economy that is still struggling and a job market that remains sluggish. Those veterans returning from the war in Iraq and Afghanistan (Gulf War-era II veterans) have seen higher than average unemployment rates with a rate of 12.1 percent in 2011, compared to 8.3 percent for all veterans and 8.9 percent for the nation as a whole according to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics. The percentage of veterans in poverty has increased significantly in recent years also. Currently, more than 1.4 million veterans are living below the poverty line and another 1.4 million veterans are living just above it. “Ohio’s Community Action Agencies have the experience and the services to help our struggling veterans attain self-sufficiency and live happy, healthy and productive lives,” Cole said.

The Ohio VETS program is being offered at the following pilot locations throughout Ohio:

- Community Action Commission of Erie, Huron & Richland Counties - Richland County location
- Community Action Commission of Scioto County
- Community Action Partnership of the Greater Dayton Area
- Council for Economic Opportunities in Greater Cleveland
- Washington Morgan Community Action
- WSOS (Wood, Sandusky, Ottawa & Seneca Counties) Community Action Commission

While each location will be offering different services to meet the unique needs of their community, each site will provide a case manager dedicated to serving veterans that is either a veteran themselves or has experience working with veterans, helping them translate their military skills to civilian job requirements. The case manager will meet with the veteran and their family to determine their needs, any barriers to self-sufficiency and create short- and long-term goals, with the ultimate objective of attaining meaningful employment and overcoming economic instability. The agency will then provide education, training and supportive services, or refer the veteran to services to help them attain their goals.

To help veterans gain meaningful employment, agencies will provide a variety of services from training for resume building, interviewing techniques, computer literacy and vocational training, to working with area employers to help them understand the benefits of hiring veterans, including tax incentives. Supportive services include those needed to provide a safe and healthy home from rental and mortgage assistance to utilities assistance, transportation assistance,

## OACAA News

clothing, food, financial literacy training, life skills, parenting skills, school readiness for children, emergency assistance and mental health services. Agencies will be partnering with local veterans services agencies, local Jobs & Family Services and other organizations to help provide these wrap around services.

The program has received the support of Sen. Sherrod Brown. “Veterans who sacrificed to keep our homeland safe should never have to worry about being homeless,” Brown said. “That’s why community-based programs like OACAA’s Ohio VETS program are so important. Rather than merely address the symptom, this initiative connects veterans with the skills needed to enter the workforce and other resources needed to live with dignity. This is about ensuring our veterans have the benefits that they have earned and deserve.”

The pilot program will run through June 30, 2013. “It is our hope to expand this program throughout the state,” Cole concluded.

