

# **VA Loma Linda HCS – Critical Time Intervention-style Employment Services**

An Innovative Practice in VHA Homeless Program Operations

**White Paper**

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Developed by  
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## INTRODUCTION

The VHA Homeless Program Office identifies and disseminates innovative practices in homeless program operations. The VA Loma Linda Healthcare System (HCS) has been identified as a site with an innovative practice for their use of Critical Time Intervention (CTI) principles in employment services.

## PRACTICE OVERVIEW

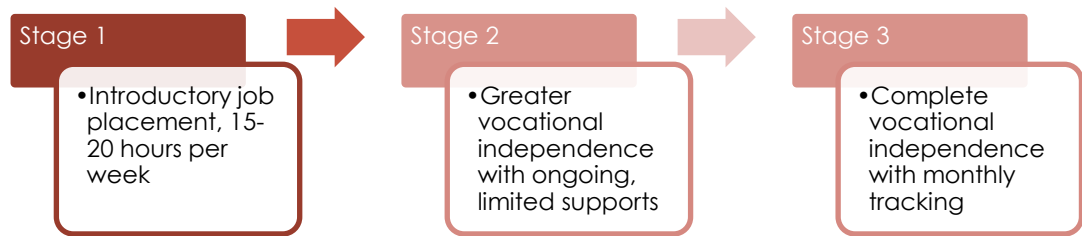
**Addressing the vocational and employment needs of chronically homeless Veterans in stages of decreasing intensity and increasing independence is effective in integrating Veterans into the workforce.**

For many chronically homeless Veterans participating in the Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program, having their basic needs met is a top priority. These Veterans have experienced homelessness for long periods of time and have medical, mental health, or substance use disabilities. However, even with disabling conditions, some Veterans express a desire to maximize their monthly income and improve their financial and housing stability through employment. To gain employment, they often need to work through the circumstances that lead to their homelessness as well as other employment barriers such as long gaps in work history or the need to develop hard and soft skills. To help ensure that HUD-VASH Veterans seeking employment were successful in their efforts to enter the workforce, staff at the Loma Linda HCS borrowed principles from CTI and developed a staged approach to delivering employment services.

CTI is an empirically-supported, time-limited case management model designed to resolve homelessness and minimize adverse outcomes for individuals with mental illness. Services are delivered in discrete stages that last approximately three months in duration, with the most intensive services provided during the initial stage. As Veterans move through each stage, the intensity of the services decrease as Veterans' demonstrate increases in independence. Although this modified framework is often used by HUD-VASH teams to provide housing-based case management services, the staff at Loma Linda HCS believed that this approach could also be applied to employment services. Specifically, they borrowed the concept of decreasing support as the Veterans stabilize and improve in their place of work.



At Loma Linda, these services were delivered in three stages. Veterans expressing interest in employment were



invited to an initial session with a Vocational Development Specialist (VDS) to determine their goals and preferences. When Veterans signaled that they were ready to proceed with Stage One, the VDS helped place them at introductory jobs with pre-identified, participating employers. For example, Loma Linda's employment specialists had pre-existing relationships with managers at local grocery stores who offered jobs starting at 15 to 20 hours per week. There were also other available time-limited part-time jobs, lasting between 90 to 180 days. In all these employment situations, Veterans were actual employees in the community and paid directly by their employers. To help develop these opportunities, the VDS made sure to highlight employer incentives, such as those offered by the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act, while being transparent about the various benefits and risks.

Stage One's goals included the establishment of an early therapeutic relationship between participating Veterans and the VDS while also easing Veterans into the workforce through low-demand, but meaningful duties. During this time Veterans also attended weekly counseling and job coaching workshops. Veterans with more barriers to employment were placed with employers who were experienced in employing Veterans with more significant challenges. Both Veterans and employers received extensive training and support as needed. Support for Veterans was provided on a range of topics that included personal hygiene and self-care, work-place skills, emotional intelligence, problem solving, time management, business etiquette, and communication and interpersonal skills. This was concurrent with their HUD-VASH case management participation. For employers, this model provided onsite workshops conducted by the Loma Linda's Community Employment Coordinator regarding the benefits of hiring and retaining Veterans with disabilities and solutions to unique challenges and common issues. As Veterans progressed, workshops shifted to resume development, interviewing skills, and identifying long-term employment goals. All Veteran contacts were documented in CPRS with appropriate templates that provide uniformity as well as ease of tracking the Veteran's progress.



Employment plans were developed and reviewed every thirty days and renewed as the Veteran advanced through each stage.

Stage Two began when Veterans were successfully hired into long-term employment placements and typically lasted approximately 90 days. While Veterans would initially be seen by the VDS two times each month, this contact frequency decreased to once per month as Veterans became established and stable in their jobs. Employment plans were frequently updated to include short- and long-term goals with measurable objectives and outcomes while remaining person-centered and strengths based. Veterans entered Stage Three when they were assessed to be essentially self-sufficient regarding employment. In keeping with CTI principles, contacts were reduced from once a month to once per quarter. Veterans were encouraged to utilize interpersonal skills already gained with the continued understanding that they could increase their contact frequency and intensity of services with the VDS at any time if they felt that they needed it. Stage Three also marked preparation of exit from homeless program employment services. When both Veterans and the VDS mutually agreed that termination of services was appropriate, an exit summary was documented in CPRS that reviewed services provided, the duration of Veterans' participation, and outcomes achieved.

In keeping with Housing First principles, this model did not exclude Veterans working towards establishing or maintaining a substance abuse free status. In fact, seeking employment often served as a motivator for achieving sobriety. Veterans who have participated in this strategic methodology have expressed satisfaction noting that it helped them avoid feeling overwhelmed and anxious and provided an opportunity for a new beginning. **Additionally, this practice has led to 56% of Veterans in HUD-VASH having competitive employment, greatly exceeding the target of 40 percent at the end of fiscal year 2018.**

## CONCLUSION

Delivering employment services gradually and in stages can help address the vocational needs of chronically unemployed and chronically homeless Veterans and may improve their chances of success in obtaining meaningful employment. We would like to thank the dedicated staff at the VA Loma Linda HCS for sharing their practice.

If you have questions about this practice, please contact Barry Davis, Vocational Development Specialist, at [Barry.Davis@va.gov](mailto:Barry.Davis@va.gov).

