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# Homeless vet: 'Someone's got to clean this up'

Tuesday, November 13, 2007

By Ted Roelofs  
The Grand Rapids Press

Vietnam War veteran Kirk Henry is the first to admit his life has been a mess.

About a year ago, he said, he began receiving military disability payments after he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. A few months later, he got a letter informing him they would stop because he missed a meeting with his probation officer.

That's when he lost his Grand Rapids apartment and took refuge in the Guiding Light Mission.

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"Someone's got to clean this up," said Henry, 55, who is hoping a free mobile legal clinic today in Grand Rapids for low-income veterans can help.

The clinic, funded by a \$200,000 state grant, is the first stop in a statewide tour by University of Detroit Mercy School of Law volunteer attorneys and law students. Other stops are scheduled for Flint, Lansing, Benton Harbor, Pontiac and Battle Creek.

With veterans making up about one-fourth of the nation's homeless, advocates say free legal help is a good start on a much broader problem.

"They seem to be disproportionately represented among the homeless population," said Larry Mulligan, a Grand Rapids lawyer who has donated legal help to veterans for several years.

But there is evidence Michigan isn't doing all it can for its veterans.

According to a 2004 master's thesis submitted to Harvard University, the state lags much of the nation in several categories. Michigan stands 44th among states in federal health care spending per veteran and 47th in disability compensation, according to the information.

The U.S. Government Reform committee found Michigan veterans wait 206 days for a decision on disability claims, compared to a national average of 177.

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