

VOLUME 3 | ISSUE 1 | SPRING 2021

CONNECTIONS

THE DIFFERENCE **YOU** ARE MAKING FOR YOUR NEIGHBORS IN NEED

**“I don’t
know where
I would be.”**

*How you helped Kyle find
shelter during a global
pandemic.*



Kyle during his service



Kyle with an Army buddy during their service



Kyle with FOX2 News reporter, Amy Lang

“I was made to feel as if I mattered. As if my service was worth something.”



Kyle during his service in 2009

Homeless in a pandemic

An Army Veteran's personal testimony looking back at his toughest battle yet

When I entered the United States Military in 2009, I never thought that I would ever need or require the services of Volunteers of America Michigan (VOA).

Eleven years later, in 2020, during the height of a global pandemic I found myself, a veteran of the Army, needing help from others.

Moreso, I never would have thought that VOA would be the group that would **save me from being alone on the streets with nowhere to go.**

Due to several residents in my apartment building being stricken with COVID-19, I was advised by my leasing agent and others not to return. I had to limit my exposure because I was considered high risk.

At that moment, I became a man without shelter. A man without residence, and a man without hope.

But hope came in the form of an agency that had been around since 1896, founded by two socialites in New York City who wanted to create a civic organization that would truly serve others and help those in need.

I never would've thought that I would become one of the many millions of individuals who would credit their salvation to Volunteers of America.

In late March 2020, I was put in touch with VOA. I was assigned a caseworker to assist me in finding a new place to live and whatever temporary shelter or resources I might need in the meantime.

I was greatly surprised that whenever I let my worker know what I needed, they provided it. They assisted me with many provisions including temporary shelter in a hotel during the extreme height of the pandemic, delivered free meals, supplies and

accessories essential to my survival. Because of VOA, I was able to stay healthy and safe during the dangerous time.

But most of all, the staff kept their word. They helped me find permanent housing.

Within months, they had me fully housed in a new apartment and assisted me with whatever I needed without hesitation.

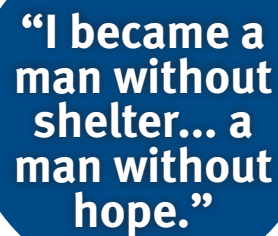
As a veteran of the United States Army, it can easily be said that sometimes we are a forgotten class and group of American life.

We're often and easily disregarded, discarded, and most times, taken advantage of. But with VOA, **I was made to feel as if I mattered. As if my service was worth something. That feeling is one that will never leave me.**

To know that my service to my country was repaid with the kindness of others, showed me the love and humanity that exists between all men and women. Between all people, regardless of race, sex or creed.

I'm quite sure that VOA has helped many during this pandemic - and those individuals should know they are truly blessed to have been assisted.

But I, just one man, know and understand that in a world where hope and faith can be hard to find sometimes, that Volunteers of America Michigan and their staff showed me that hope in your fellow man and faith in promises can truly be worth more than just what you hear on the television and radio.



“I became a man without shelter... a man without hope.”

We thank Kyle for not only courageously serving our country, but also for his willingness to share his story with you. Unfortunately, this just one story. There are still veterans out there facing this pandemic alone.



Siraylafa's story

Growing up, Siraylafa wanted to be a doctor. But, she was already working three jobs and was barely making ends meet.

“I was working one job and would literally change my shirt and then go to another job. I would take the bus and go work at a fast-food restaurant. My whole day was working minimum wage jobs and taking the bus. I was so tired. My feet hurt. It was hard and I wasn't even making ends meet.”

That's when Siraylafa found our health professions career training program. Her classes, books, uniforms, and exams were all covered.

“VOA opened doors and I was able to get my life together. I was able to buy my first car and get an apartment. I was able to find a higher paying job and have better skillsets.”

Now, Siraylafa is a Certified Nurse Assistant and is in the hiring process at a local hospital and enrolled in classes to become a Registered Nurse!

YOU can help others, like Siraylafa, change their lives!

Kenneth's story

Throughout his life, Kenneth, a United States Marine veteran, has faced several difficulties. Nothing compared to going through his divorce. To say that things have been rough would be an understatement.

“Getting over this divorce, has been the biggest challenge I've ever had, more than the Marine Corps, more than anything.”

Kenneth is a family man, making his divorce even harder. After using all of his savings to stay in hotels, **he had nowhere to go.** Trying to cope with his depression, Kenneth developed substance abuse problems.

“[VOA's services] are lifesaving. Not only for me, but for the other people here. They know where they could have been without this program. Everybody would be lost.”

After coming to our transitional housing for veterans, Kenneth found work at the VA. He is working on his recovery, and setting goals for the future.

You can ensure a hero has shelter, meals, and support during their darkest days. **YOU can be a hero for a hero.**

Susie's story

Susie and her husband, Henry, had run their own business for years. One day, that all changed when they had to close their doors and lost everything they knew. They were in desperate need of someplace to live and luckily fate led them to VOA's Partridge Creek Senior Village.

For the past three years they have been great neighbors to all. Susie participates in many of the activities such as bingo, crafts, and she belongs to the kitting club. She volunteers in the community and has even volunteered to teach yoga to her neighbors and fellow residents.

“We take care of each other!”

They have made many great memories and really enjoy the friendships that they have made. In fact, they've even recommended Partridge Creek to other friends that now live in the apartment next door!

“We thank God for giving us a chance to live here!”

Thank you for being a blessing to seniors. **YOUR kindness can ensure that other seniors are able to find an affordable place to call home!**

Housing for heroes

How you helped Barbara find community

Barbara is a United States Air Force veteran living at Delta River Senior Village. She served over two years in the Air Force right out of high school. She recalls that it felt like going to college. In this era, the Women's Air Force was new and only eight years old. She was enlisted during the Suez Crisis and recalls serving during that hectic time.

But overall, Barbara really enjoyed her time spent in the Air Force. She was able to meet women from all around the United States and felt a lot of camaraderie and that's even where she met her future husband.

“It was a very wonderful feeling to serve your country, be in uniform, and travel. I'm very proud of the work that I did. There was a lot of pride going home in that uniform.”

After her service, Barbara moved back home to Michigan with her husband to start their family. Eventually her son followed in the footsteps of his parents and also joined the Air Force. Today, her granddaughter is serving in the Air National Guard. They are a dedicated military family, through and through!

Because of your support, veterans and seniors, just like Barbara are able to enjoy living in safe and affordable senior housing communities. We are thankful to Barbara for her service and love having her as part of our VOA family!

Thank YOU for making this possible for local seniors!

“There was a lot of pride going home in that uniform.”



Top photo: Barbara in uniform in 1956. **Bottom photo:** Barbara with staff from Lansing Hospice and VOA Delta River.



YES! I want to provide shelter for veterans today!

To donate online visit us at www.voami.org

Enclosed is my tax deductible gift of \$250 \$100 \$50 \$25 \$_____

I would like to make this a monthly gift annual gift one time gift

Check Enclosed Credit Card: Visa Mastercard Discover Amex

Name on card: _____

Card Number: _____

Exp: ____/____/____ CVV: _____ Billing Zip code: _____

Billing Address: _____

Signature: _____



OPERATION BACKPACK®

Full backpacks, full of promise

How you can provide much needed school supplies to homeless students

This year, there is an even greater need for supplies due to many families being out of work. With Operation Backpack®, community partners from across the state come together to ensure that children who are already facing enough at home, don't have to worry about feeling like a homeless kid on the first day of school. With the right supplies and a backpack that fits them perfectly, fellow students will see them as peers rather than the poor or homeless kid. More importantly, it is proven they will have a higher rate of success in the classroom and learn more.

With children schooling from home, they aren't able to borrow supplies from a classmate or teacher. Your kindness can shine in making sure they have their own supplies and everything they need to learn. Not only would your kindness be helping children, but you would also help struggling parents breathe a sigh of relief.

Ways to get involved:

1. Host a supply drive
2. Make a donation
3. Purchase supplies and drop them off

Learn more at www.voami.org/backpack or email us volunteers@voami.org

✂️ Did you know?

You can continue your impact by leaving a gift in your will for Volunteers of America Michigan.

- Please send me information on how to continue my impact by leaving a gift in my will.
- Please call me to discuss leaving a gift in my will for Volunteers of America Michigan.
My phone number is: _____
The best time to call is: _____
- My employer offers matching gift funds. Enclosed is the appropriate form from my Human Resources Department.



Thank you for keeping hope alive in your community!
Your gift is tax deductible as a charitable contribution. All gifts received are used where most needed to help care for people in need throughout the year.

Bringing smiles to veterans

How volunteers show homeless veterans they matter, and their service matters

Beverly, along with fellow members of the James Europe VFW Post 2233 Auxiliary, are some of the most thoughtful volunteers! They are always thinking about the needs of local veterans. The members know firsthand the sacrifices that veterans make, as many of them are veterans themselves, or a close relative of a veteran.

In addition to serving lunch at our transitional housing for veterans, they often bring treat bags for filled with sweets and cards thanking them for their service.

“We want to thank them, because they’re the ones that put their lives on the line for us to have the freedom that we have... We want to thank them for what they have done for us. We want veterans to be uplifted...and to let them know that someone cares about them.”

When asked what her favorite thing about volunteering is, Beverly said, **“Just seeing a smile brought to the face of a veteran!”**

It is volunteers like Beverly that make the difference for homeless veterans that find shelter at our transitional housing. Thank you James Europe VFW Post 2233!



Top photo: Post members making a donation to veterans. **Bottom photo:** Beverly with a VOA staff member.

If **YOU** want to make a difference for veterans, seniors, families, and children, sign up to volunteer at www.voami.org/volunteer or email us at volunteers@voami.org.



A veteran serving veterans

Learn more about our board member, Vanassa Owens-Warren

What do you enjoy most about serving on the board? Learning about all of the fabulous things being done for our community and contributing to the cause whenever I can.

What VOA services are you most passionate about? I am most passionate about veteran programs for the homeless along with senior housing. It is important to assist homeless veterans upon discharge from the military and to provide job opportunities in the communities where they live, through vocational rehab programs. As the senior population increases with the aging baby boomers and more disabled seniors, housing assistance is always needed.

Who inspires you? My parents inspire me to be the best in all I do. My father used to always say, “Good, Better, Best, never let it rest until your good is better and your better is best.”

To learn more about Vanassa Owens-Warren, a United States Air Force Reserves Veteran and VOA Board Member, go to: https://www.voami.org/news_and_events/meetvanassaowenswarren



Giving purpose. Restoring dignity. Providing shelter. Maintaining independence.

We are no stranger to hard times. **We have been helping Michigan's most vulnerable for 125 years.** In that time, we have seen just about every challenge that could keep someone from living life with dignity.

When hard times come, we do whatever is needed to help those who need it most. From the 1918 Flu Pandemic, The Great Depression, the Financial Crisis in 2008, and now the Coronavirus Pandemic, we have been through it all.

With each moment in history - one fact remained true - **YOU, our faithful community, were there to make this work possible.**

THANK YOU!

To learn more, visit www.voami.org/125Years



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