



# THE NVF NEWS

## THE LIFELINE FOR AMERICA'S VETERANS

Memorial Day 2016

### Advocating for Veterans

We've all heard the phrase "It takes a village..." Recently, one of our Lifeline for Vets calls came from a decorated Marine combat vet who allowed us to post his case on The Huffington Post. You can read the blog, "The VA vs. Sergeant Major Jesse Acosta," at <http://nvf.org/acosta>.

Acosta called us because he had been denied further caregiving benefits; his blindness no longer qualified him. Severely injured and blinded in Iraq, he had been rated 100% disabled because of PTSD and TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury). In spite of this, he is fully employed and is an active veteran advocate.

Through the blog, his story reached a veteran advocate who wrote an appeal to the VA. In what seems record time, the VA reinstated his benefits. Jesse was delighted. Then he noticed his rating had been dropped a level, which meant that the amount of the benefit would be reduced. His advocate wrote a second appeal, this time copying the Secretary of the VA. Acosta received an almost immediate reply that his case was being reevaluated.

Advocacy works. Persistence works, too.

### A New Kind of Outreach: NVF Founder at Ironwood State Prison

Late in April, Shad Meshad returned to Ironwood State Prison at the request of James "Sneaky" White, a decorated Marine combat veteran. The two met at Tehachapi Prison in 1978 when Meshad spoke to a group of incarcerated veterans. White went on to establish ongoing veterans groups wherever he was transferred in the system. In addition to raising over \$350,000 for veterans and the communities around the prisons, James White has set up certification programs to educate incarcerated vets and help them find employment on the outside.



Not many incarcerated vets are aware that they are still eligible for some VA benefits. Those benefits are greatly reduced, but can still make a difference to families. The NVF blog on Huffington Post publicized two incarcerated vets at Soledad Prison who've established a Veterans Services Office within the prison. They now serve vets in other prisons and in other states, guiding vets through the claims process. Many of



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### For Vets, the Healing Powers of a Caring Friendship are Life-Transforming

Cristina Alfonso-Zea exudes positive energy and heart as she speaks to a large group of veterans. As with many vets, you wouldn't know Ms. Alfonso-Zea had been through hell and back to get where she is. She's a veteran and a survivor of addiction and attempted suicide. Deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, she returned home to face the challenge of PTSD and the life-crippling symptoms it can bring.

How she went from deployment, self-destruction and debilitating disorder to inspiring leader of an important educational foundation has a lot to do with the help she got from one caring individual. Frank Spady is that individual.



*Frank Spady and Cristina Alfonso-Zea*

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**The Lifeline for Veterans • 888 777-4443 • [www.nvf.org](http://www.nvf.org) • [vetsupport@nvf.org](mailto:vetsupport@nvf.org)**

Monday - Friday 9am - 5pm Pacific Standard Time • If you know a veteran or family that needs help, contact us today.

*We've moved! Our new address is: 5777 Century Boulevard Suite 350 Los Angeles, California 90045-5656*

## Healing Power of Friendships *(continued from page 1)*

They met when Frank was bestowing an award from



*Cristina Alfonso-Zea*

Goodwill of Southern Nevada. The recipient? Cristina. In her acceptance speech, she told of her fight with drug addiction and attempted suicide. Although everyone in the room was deeply touched by her story, Frank acted, striking up a friendship that turned out to be an important and lasting relationship for both of them.

A Vietnam veteran, Frank became Cris's mentor, protector, and confidant. Although they hailed from different generations and different eras of military conflict, they found common ground and deep respect for one another. And they both, it turned out, suffered from PTSD.

Traumatic experiences can trigger PTSD in anyone, but our veteran population is particularly burdened with it. Alienation is a key by-product of PTSD just as substance abuse and depression are common side effects of PTSD. That's what happened to Cris. And the final clincher was that women are more likely to develop PTSD than men, according to the National Institute of Mental Health.

At 17, Frank fought on the ground in the infantry before he went on to become a helicopter door gunner. While

substance abuse and depression haven't been his battles, Frank's PTSD symptoms have worsened over the years to now include seizures, and the violent nightmares haven't stopped since he returned from Vietnam. But meeting Cris has helped him. Frank took Cris under his wing because she's a fellow vet and because he cares for her welfare. But he's also made a serendipitous discovery in the process: helping Cris has had a positive effect on his own PTSD symptoms.

It is as if connecting with Cris has healed a part of Frank that's still suffering after all these years. There are other vets who've made the same discovery. Giving back, connecting, and helping others has benefits for everyone, not just vets.

Frank Spady, Chairman of the National Veterans Foundation, has made it his mission to help stop the 22 veteran suicides each day. He has also served on other non-profit boards such as the Las Vegas USO and Goodwill of Southern Nevada, in addition to a highly successful business career working multi-national corporations to achieve record-breaking sales. His friendship and support have played a major role in helping Cris regain her strength and conviction to succeed.

Showing care and respect in veterans' lives is more powerful than you know. Since each vet brings a unique set of experiences and reactions to his or her service, there's no single answer to how we can help. But finding your own way of making a difference for this community means you too may change a life.

## A New Kind of Outreach *(continued from page 1)*

these vets are serving either long sentences or life without parole. Creating an opportunity for them to have some agency over their own lives can be transformative.

The purpose of Meshad's April visit to Ironwood was to talk about his own history as a vet and veteran advocate, and to introduce the National Veterans Foundation to them, but things took a slightly different tack as Meshad visited each of four yards, talking to vets. Depending on the yard, he had about 90 minutes. The first 15 he used to introduce himself and the NVF, then he interacted with the inmates. *You need to be working now to prepare...get some counseling. Use the education plans James White has set up. Get as many certificates as you can so you have some kind of training when you get out. The prison system is trying to release prisoners ... you may find your sentence is cut ... your parole hearing soon. What are you going to say to the panel?*

*You need to be able to tell them where you'll go. What are you gonna do with the \$200 they release you with? Play like you're going on your parole hearing in two weeks.*

Meshad said, "I wanted to direct them to the things they can do to give them a shot when they get out. My message emphasized that they use their time here, not just serve time." After his talk about half of the vets came up and hugged Shad.

"This one-on-one, vet-to-vet way of working is the same model I set up in the Vet Centers across the nation," Meshad said. "It's the one the NVF uses on our Lifeline for Vets. Our prison outreach is just a new way to use it. And now in our office, counselors are already responding to letters from Ironwood."

## Our LifeLine for Vets...over 400,000 calls so far

### The Lifeline for Vets helps homeless veterans find housing solutions.

Information Services Representative Steve Duby took a call from a homeless



*Information Services Representative Steve Duby*

Air Force veteran in Chicago, calling from a payphone. She was discharged two years ago. The veteran, a military sexual trauma survivor, had been staying in local shelters. Steve did some research and found three different resources helping homeless veterans in the area and connected her with one of them. Steve let her know that if they couldn't help her to call back and he would keep looking. Two days later she called. One of the places had helped her get a furnished apartment, and provided her with first, last and a rental deposit. She was able to move in immediately. The agency is now helping her get a job.

Since its inception in 1985, the NVF's crisis and information hotline has fielded calls from all over the world; from towns and cities across America to outposts in foreign countries, even from the battle zones.

What sets us apart is the vet-to-vet model we use, and the fact that a live person answers the phone when the line is open. It's our goal to increase the hours of the hotline to 24/7. It's what's needed in this time of losing vets to suicide at **22 per day**. We need to enlarge the safety net so that no vet, no matter how difficult the situation, no matter how fraught the transition back to civilian life, *no vet slips through the cracks*.

A payment error at Social Security created a situation where a Vietnam veteran was unable to pay her rent. Active 1972 – 1985, she'd been Army Reserve until 1992, and now was in danger of being evicted. She contacted the rental agency right away and they were not willing to work with her even though she had lived there for over 13 years. (The situation was complicated by the fact that her housing was under rent-control. Those units are hard to find in a large urban area.) She told her VA case manager who contacted the NVF. Subsequently this veteran reached out to Kristine Hesse, NVF Women Veterans Outreach Coordinator for help. Kristine connected her with the office of Congressman Tony Cardenas. Cardenas's staff did an emergency inquiry to Social Security and got the problem resolved. To bridge the gap before the funds arrived, the Salvation Army Haven supported her with funds. But that didn't solve the problem. The landlords would not accept third party checks. Hesse said this was a huge problem in Los Angeles. Non-profit organizations have the funds to help people in need, but many, if not most, landlords will not accept third party checks. In the end, the congressman's office paid from an emergency fund to pay the missed rent. The veteran is back on track after a stressful situation that took the efforts of several people working on behalf of the veteran.



*Women Veterans Outreach Coordinator  
Kristine Hesse*

### The NVF assists veterans of all eras, regardless of their discharge status.

Operations Director Rich Rudnick took a call from the wife of a decorated two-tour Vietnam veteran living in Northern California. She called in tears looking for help with her husband's PTSD symptoms and the fact that they were about to be evicted from a property where they have lived for nearly a decade. The house had recently been sold to a new owner who wanted them out of the house. Because of his PTSD the Veteran can't work and due to his discharge, he isn't eligible for disability benefits. Rich got the veteran on the phone and found out the couple had been approved for a Section 8

## Our LifeLine for Vets *(continued from previous page)*



*Information Service Representative  
Wendell Guillermo*

voucher, but he told Rich they couldn't find a place in their area that would take it. After four days of working on the problem, Rich set up a conference call with the family and a local organization that helps veterans find housing, and referred them to a program that would treat the veteran for his PTSD. The family has a new home now and the veteran is in treatment.

### **The Lifeline for Vets assists the family members of veterans as well as former service members with veteran related issues.**

Information Services Representative Wendell Guillermo took a call from the son of a World War II Veteran whose father had passed away recently. The son was trying to put together a history of his father's service and was looking for help getting copies of his discharge papers. Wendell called the National Archives and, after some research on their end, was told the records weren't available, possibly due to a fire in one of the records offices many years ago. They offered to do some more in depth research for a fee, which



*Director of Operations Rich Rudnick*

Wendell sent them. The National Archives were able to find the veterans discharge papers which showed that the man's father had been a decorated combat veteran, and Wendell got the records to a very grateful son.

If you know a veteran who needs assistance with medical treatment, PTSD counseling, VA benefits advocacy, food, shelter, employment, training, legal aid, suicide intervention, or any other transitional issue, call the Lifeline for Vets at **888-777-4443**.

## Chuck Ashman Joins the NVF

The National Veterans Foundation has a new addition to our leadership team, focused on raising awareness and support for our programs assisting veterans with the transition from military to civilian life: Director of Strategic Alliances, Chuck Ashman.



*Business Matchmaking CEO Chuck Ashman*

Chuck is the CEO of Business Matchmaking. He and his team have been honored by federal and state agencies for their help in launching and growing veteran-owned small businesses. Business Matchmaking is now in its tenth year as a public-private non-profit foundation and twice selected as the nation's leading veteran small business support program.

Chuck is a former TV anchor for KTTV and talk show host at KABC and KFI in Los Angeles and moderator of *The Devil's Advocate*, a nationally syndicated personality program. He has appeared on *Oprah*, *The Today Show*, *Good Morning America*, *Larry King Live* and *Sixty Minutes*. He currently hosts a global internet weekly program called "Diversity American Style". He is the author of several biographies including *Diplomatic Crime* and *The Nazi Hunters* and is past president of worldwide marketing at 20th Century Fox Studios.

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## Chuck Ashman Joins the NVF *(continued from previous page)*

"We are very excited to be working with Chuck," said NVF President & Founder Shad Meshad. "He brings decades of business experience and contacts in government, corporate America, the film and television community, and veteran-owned businesses. His creativity, business savvy and dedication to the work we're doing at the NVF has already been a huge asset. We hope to have Chuck as a resource for many years to come."

"If there was Olympic competition among veteran organizations," said Chuck, "Shad Meshad's team would win the Gold as both the thought and action leader. To quote the poker players, 'I am all in!'"

Chuck is an Army Veteran and Vice Commander of the Jewish War Veterans of the United States.



*Captain for Dark Mornings*, Shad Meshad's personal Vietnam War memoir is available in paperback for only \$25.

All proceeds go to The National Veterans Foundation.

Order your copy today!

Call 888-777-4443

Since 1985, The National Veterans Foundation (NVF) has been a leading resource for more than 400,000 veterans and their family members. Our experienced team of trained professionals includes veterans of Vietnam, the Cold War, Iraq and Afghanistan who understand first-hand the issues facing today's veterans and their families. Our sole purpose is to help you get the help you need as quickly as possible.

### MISSION OF THE NATIONAL VETERANS FOUNDATION

To serve the crisis management, information and referral needs of all U.S. veterans and their families through:

1. Operation of the nation's only vet to vet toll-free helpline for all veterans and their families.
2. Public awareness programs that shine a consistent public spotlight on the human needs facing American veterans and their families.
3. Ongoing outreach to connect homeless and low income veterans with food, clothing, transportation and other essential resources.

The National Veterans Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.  
All contributions are fully tax deductible.

### OUR TEAM

Shad Meshad, MSW, LCSW, CTS, TFTdx:  
President  
Micheal Washington: Director of Resources  
Rich Rudnick: Director of Operations  
Kristine Hesse: Women Veterans Outreach

Wendell Guillermo: Information Services  
Gerald Hillard: Information Services  
Steve Duby: Information Services  
Bill Morgan: PR & Development Specialist  
Cathie Sandstrom Smith: Editor, Writer

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