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## Bringing Veterans Care Home

For three years, Kathryn West and the Minneapolis VA Health Care System (MVAHCS) have worked to place Minnesota Veterans in caring and stable homes. West is the program coordinator for the Minneapolis Medical Foster Care Home program.

It may not be a traditional choice for most Veterans and their families, but it offers a safe, long-term, home-like environment for Veterans who are unable to remain in their own homes because of health issues.

During its short history, the program has seen positive results related to Veterans' physical, mental and emotional health. The program currently serves 14 metro-area Veterans. Those Veterans who are eligible for care at the MVAHCS are eligible for the program.

Nationally, 36 states have operational programs totaling 67 sites. Since 2006, these sites have served 760 Veterans.

Through the program, eligible Veterans are matched with an approved



*Minneapolis Foster Home Caregiver Monnier Marzouk assists a Veteran Fred Gaertner up a flight of stairs.*

home. Caregivers are able to provide 24-hour supervision and care for conditions that may include mobility and memory issues, heart disease, diabetes, substance abuse, Parkinson's disease, spinal cord and brain injury. Caregivers also provide companionship and opportunities to interact with the community through various activities.

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# Free Entrance to State Parks

Free one-day Minnesota State Park vehicle permits are available to military personnel stationed outside Minnesota and on leave, those visiting a state park within 90 days of leaving active service, and any resident Veteran with any service-connected disability. Bring your current military orders and military ID or a copy of your disability determination letter and let the park attendant know your military status when you arrive.

A free annual Minnesota State Park permit is available to any Veteran who has a total and permanent service-connected disability. Present a copy of your determination letter to the park attendant for the free annual sticker.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has several discounts and programs for service members and Veterans, explore them all at [www.dnr.state.mn.us/licenses/military/index.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/licenses/military/index.html).

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## Bringing Veterans Care Home Continued from cover

Many caregivers have professional backgrounds in nursing or other skilled care areas, but a medical background is not required.

The MVAHCS also cares for Veterans in the program through a home-based primary care team that usually consists of a nurse, occupational therapist, social worker, recreational therapist, dietician and medical foster home coordinator. Respite care is also available to caregivers.

West centers her attention on maintaining this high level of care and cultivating the program in order to meet the needs of area Veterans. She focuses on two important elements in order to make this happen. It is her job to find the best caregivers and support the community that cares for the caregivers and for the Veterans. She asks herself, “How do the community systems interact to provide community health care?”

One way she accomplishes this is by collaborating and communicating openly with Veterans, and especially caregivers. The program works with the caregivers to create an open relationship between the MVAHCS, the caregiver and the Veterans. This relationship is a two way street. “This isn’t the VA saying, ‘this is how things are’, this is the VA saying let’s make a team,” said West.

West hopes to have 30 Veterans in homes by the end of this year, and believes that a program like this is a positive addition to the network of Veterans care in the state. In the years to come, West and the MVAHCS will work to meet the changing needs of the Veterans community. 🌍

*Community members with a passion for care and Veterans who are interested in placement can learn more about the program at [www.minneapolis.va.gov/services/serv\\_fosterhome.asp](http://www.minneapolis.va.gov/services/serv_fosterhome.asp) or by contacting the Medical Foster Home Program Coordinator at (612) 467-2619 or 866-414-5058, extension 2619 (toll-free).*