

The DOM unit.

Thank you hearing us. Lately the news focus has been on the Nursing units at the Grand Rapids Home for Veterans. Let me take a moment to tell you about the other unit at the home.

My name is Gregory McNeil. I am a US Navy Cold war Vet, from 81-87. I lived in the GRH4V Dormitory unit, or Dom unit as we called it from October 2010 to October 2012. 2 years to the day. I was discharged against my will, thrown to the street with little or no warning as many before me had been under the Sara Dunne administration.

The original purpose of the home was to help poor civil war veterans have a decent place to live, and to get them out of the "poor houses" that existed at the time.

I believe the Dom unit is the legacy of the original idea of the founding of this Veterans home.

When I arrived in 2010 I wasn't told much about it. I had no idea what I was getting into, I just knew it was a roof over my head, and a safe place to sleep. I later learned at the time the Dom unit was also called the transitory unit, where veterans were given a "time out". A chance to relax, and recharge their batteries so to say; to become refocused and then to slowly take it step by step to return to society. We were called the homeless veterans.

No one at the time explained the cost, or any of the money involved in our care at the home. Later I learned that as a homeless veteran with no income (as many of us were when we arrived) that the Michigan Veterans Trust paid for our cost of care. (Thank you). I was not told what that cost was, but later found out it was close to 2100 dollars a month or more. That was my take home pay when I was working 55 hours a week as a Tool and Die machinist which is a highly skilled trade that payed better than average than most factory jobs. And all we got for that was an 8x10 foot area for a bed, dresser, and small table, in a room shared with up to 3 other guys, separated by a curtain. 3 high carb meals a day in the main dining hall, most of our medical needs and some transportation needs.

time while better living conditions are found. If the vet needs to go to a VA hospital for long term care, or move into a retirement home or a nursing home, this would be that "time out" they need to refocus. It is hard to leave the status of being homeless because you have no resources available to help you leave it. Living at the Dom unit gives you those resources.

Yet many sick, disabled, homeless veterans were refused admittance even though the home had beds available. Why?! Some of these homeless vets have later been found dead on the homes property.

One guy walked from Saginaw, with just a backpack filled with cloths and little paperwork, and was denied admittance to Dom.

Some of these vets had Alcohol problems, others drug problems, others mental problems. The homes excuse was "we are not set up to help these people". Well what were they set up to do? Give us 3 hots and a cot because that's all I got from them. Anything else was the result of my own efforts.

Each of us was assigned to a dietician and a Counselor. In 2 years I never met with the dietician, and the counselor saw me twice. Once when I arrived and the night before I got kicked out, to inform me that I had a meeting with the top administrator (Sara Dunne) the next morning. No other counseling was given. My efforts to obtain SS disability were done by me alone, then I went outside of the home to hire a SS advocate to help me with my appeal.

The only help I received at the home was from Doctor Edgar, the head of the medical department at the home who held sick call twice a week for the Dom unit. He took interest in my health problems after the heart attack, and worked with me on them. I have nothing but praise for Doctor Edgar. He and 2 of the 5 nurses I had contact with on the Dom unit truly cared about the vets. The rest of the staff members were there just doing a job.

So let me wrap this up by stating the main points.

1. Under the Sara Dunne administration many vets were discharged from the Dom unit and banned from the property for life without fair and due process.
2. The Life ban policy must be changed.
3. The Unit mission and purpose of the Dom unit must be examined, and changes need to take place, if this is truly a home FOR veterans.
4. Veterans in the Dom unit need guidance and counseling to be available to them, and to be able to get help if needed to return to society.
5. Veterans need to be made aware of cost of care issues and how it can affect them financially later in life and at the present time while they are at the home.
6. The status of "homeless veteran" needs to be reinstated so that vets can become qualified to apply for Hud VASH housing, which will allow them to move out of the Dom unit and the home.
7. Better oversight of the homes staff and administrations needs to be imposed and checked on often.

Thank you.

Final note: I went to the Board of Managers Meeting yesterday 9 March 2016. Bob, the Board of Managers Chairman said he talked to Leslie and I should talk to her. I was informed that under the new administration I can appeal my eviction. I talked to Leslie the CEO, and she said MANY changes are coming including that one. She also told me to obtain a volunteer application. So it looks like the new administration at the home is now addressing this problem for all of us who got discharged by the Sara Dunn administration. That news just made my day.