4-1-2015

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Recommended Citation
Rodrigues, Jill, "University First in Rhode Island to Endorse Campaign to End Homelessness" (2015). Featured News Story. 481.
https://docs.rwu.edu/weekatroger_featured_news/481

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University First in Rhode Island to Endorse Campaign to End Homelessness

Pledging support to Zero: 2016, RWU joins statewide campaign to end homelessness among veterans and chronically homeless by 2016

April 1, 2015 | Jill Rodrigues ’05

BRISTOL, R.I. – As the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless and volunteers across the state worked in March to collect signatures of support for the Zero: 2016 campaign to end homelessness among veterans and the chronically homeless, Roger Williams University became the first university in the state to offer an organizational endorsement.

This week, the Coalition announced that it had reached – and in fact exceeded – its goal of 2,016 endorsements in Rhode Island, among a handful of states selected to launch Zero: 2016. The intent is to use the commitments to illustrate the existence of the public and political will to undertake efforts such as increasing the availability of affordable housing to end homelessness in Rhode Island.

In pledging support for Zero: 2016, Roger Williams University President Donald J. Farish praised the initiative and noted how it complements other programs at RWU to enhance veterans’ services and address issues of homelessness and affordable housing across the state.
“At Roger Williams University, we take seriously our role within the state to help our military veterans lead healthy and successful lives,” Farish says. “It is our social responsibility to adopt a leadership position on critical issues such as addressing homelessness among our state’s veterans, and it provides an opportunity for our students to see those efforts in action and how we can all make a difference close to home.”

Among the University’s other contributions to veterans’ issues, RWU is collaborating with Operation Stand Down Rhode Island, the R.I. Department of Veteran Affairs and the V.A. Medical Center (among other partners) to offer the Veteran’s Gateway to College and Career Success program, a free 12-week, non-credit program for veterans and their spouses that refreshes skills important for college and for the workforce.

And in the Fall 2014 semester, students volunteered via the Feinstein Center for Learning and Community Engagement on a registration survey of homeless veterans in Rhode Island, helping to develop a snapshot for the launch of the Coalition’s Zero: 2016 campaign of the number of men, women and children affected by homelessness, the demand they place on emergency services, and their ability to find housing.

The University’s endorsement of Zero: 2016 was facilitated by Christine Fagan, collection management librarian, who learned about the initiative at a local presentation by the Rhode Island Coalition for the Homeless.

“By serving meals in a local community program to the hungry, many of whom are also homeless, I had developed a personal connection with our guests,” Fagan says. “Their plight became much more evident to me through this connection, so when an opportunity to do something presented itself, I had to contribute.

“Once I became a volunteer in the Coalition’s campaign, RWU quickly came to mind, including the many social justice initiatives taken on by the University over the years. I knew the campaign would receive enthusiastic support and participation from everyone from administrators to students.”

In addition to the organizational endorsement, Fagan – with support from staff and students – collected many more individual commitments from students, faculty and staff across Roger Williams. A day before meeting their deadline, the R.I. Coalition for the Homeless announced that it had far exceed its goal of 2,016 endorsements for the Zero: 2016 campaign.

To learn more about Zero: 2016 and to endorse the campaign in Rhode Island, visit www.rihomeless.org.