

**NOMINATION FORM**  
**COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION SERVICE LEARNING COMPETITION**

Institution: Trident Technical College

Title of Project: Tent City

Project Director: Victor Moscoso

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Establishment Date of Project: On or about November 20, 2015, December 17, 2015

Unit That Administers Project: Champions for Change

Total Number of Students Involved: 8

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS REGARDING THE NOMINATED PROJECT  
(Insert your response after each question; the response to each question should be no more than one page)

1. For purposes of this competition, the Commission on Higher Education defines service learning as college student learning at any level and in any situation that is *linked* in a direct, hands-on fashion to the resolution of a problem or concern in a target community outside the institution *and is related* to a college course with some type of reflection activity. How does your project meet the parameters of this definition?
2. Specifically, which segments of the college/university community does your project involve?
3. How many students (specify degree levels to the extent possible) does the project affect?
4. Describe the target community or communities your project serves.
5. Describe your project's effectiveness in helping to solve the problems or concerns in the target community.
6. Describe the degree to which your project enhances student learning while providing specific examples of the service learning activities the college students engage in. Also explain how the service learning activities reinforce or apply what the college students learn in the classroom.
7. Is there academic credit associated with the project (not necessary for submission)? If so, please explain the particulars.
8. If funding is required, how is the project funded and what is the approximate annual budget for the project?
9. Add any other comments you may have about your project.

You may also include supplemental information about the project (such as brochures, pictures, etc.).

Please return this form via e-mail by **February 26, 2016**, to:

Trena Houp, Program Manager  
Academic Affairs  
South Carolina Commission on Higher Education  
1122 Lady Street, Suite 300  
Columbia, SC 29201  
803.737.4853

**Tent City**  
**Homeless Project**  
**By**  
**Victor Moscoso**  
**Champions for Change**  
**Trident Technical College**

### **Abstract**

Homeless civilians are an undesirable cohort that walk the streets doing odd end jobs for money or food and are constantly being mistaken for worthless drunks that sleep on park benches within our communities. These people used to be vibrant citizens with families who contributed to our society. The aftermath of the housing market crash four years ago coupled with a recession where jobs were scarce and unemployment was high forced many Americans out onto the street to fend for themselves. As a result, tent cities were formed which had no running water, restrooms, or a trash disposal area. To add to the problem, many active duty military were returning to the United States after serving tours overseas in wartime conditions that psychologically affected them. Some of these military service members were later discharged without a complete bill of health and were faced with the cold realization of civilian life that later transitioned to a homeless civilian life. Many ended up in jail for one thing or another due to being unemployed and not able to maintain a place of living or purchase groceries. There are a wide range of mental illnesses and substance abuse that these homeless veterans can be suffering from but no one actually takes the time to find out who these people are and get them the help that they need. Community awareness is paramount so that we can help our heroes recover from their battle scars and become productive citizens again.

### **Homeless Description**

There is no urgency in place to resolving what is an epidemic of homeless civilians/veterans. According to the Census 2010, there are 34,313 Veterans in Charleston County for which there is an estimated 1500 homeless veterans. (Post and Courier, 2013) The accumulation of homeless shelters are turning away homeless veterans because they are at maximum occupancy. When a new homeless shelter is built there is a re-enactment of homeless veterans being turned away because of the shelter being filled so rapidly. As many times the United States has historically been in a wartime campaign, the Veteran Affairs Department has never been prepared for the array of military members returning with poor health conditions. Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom are both conflicts that have an increased risk with many various problems when returning to community life such as marital and financial difficulties, problems with alcohol or substance abuse, homelessness, and motor vehicle accidents.(JRRD, 2012) As a result, the Department of Veteran Affairs identified almost 3000 Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom veterans from 2005 to 2009 were homeless.

Additionally, a survey consisting of both Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom concluded that this particular cohort seeking Veteran Affairs care suffered a variety of severe problems that pertained to social functioning. For example, 49 percent of veterans reported problems participating in community activities, 42 percent getting along with spouse or partner, and 25 percent in finding and keeping a job.(JRRD, 2012) Also, the other

effects tallied were 52 percent with difficulty in controlling anger, 24 percent losing a job, 35 percent driving dangerously, and 20 percent with legal problems.(2012)

Homeless civilians/ veterans affected come from all walks of life. Single families (motherless and fatherless), amputees, women veterans, diverse ethnic backgrounds and religions, and military members impacted by Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are all faced with the challenge of trying to survive. One American soldier dies every day and a half, Veterans commit suicide at a rate of every 80 minutes, and at least one in every five Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars that served in Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or Traumatic Brain Injury.(New York Times, 2012) These disturbing statistics concerning our veterans that have sacrificed so much to protect our freedom in the United States are an embarrassment to our country where relief efforts have sparked community involvement to tend to government miscues.

There are three Tent Cities currently in Charleston, SC where they are somewhat hidden under the I-26 overpass. The main Tent City dwellers are utilizing an old city park that has not been maintained for quite some time. Nearby is a skateboard park area that is fully functional for daily use. Many of the park lights are inoperational where there is minimal lighting. Every year more and more volunteers are needed to help the homeless civilians/veterans with food, clothing, and medical examinations in order to help them transition to civilian life and contribute to their community. Homeless civilians/ veterans are introduced to supportive organizations like Goodwill Industries that supply clothing and job services. A Mental Health Clinic for therapeutic counseling, Nulife Transitional Recovery House, One80Place, and Star Gospel Mission for housing, food, clothing, and job services. A majority of these support services would not be operational without a number of community volunteers needed in keeping them functioning

where many homeless civilians/ veterans depend on to stay alive and see another day. There is also a group effort of volunteers from Goodwill Industries, Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center, and Stand Down Against Homelessness that get together at Armory Park located in North Charleston that host an event called “Stand Down”. Supportive Services that are set up at this event include free medical and dental screening, haircut, food, clothing, and counseling on Thursday and Friday from 8 am. to 1 pm.

The Tent City Project goal is to somewhat mimick the Stand Down methodology but with an everyday impact versus being a two day event. Although, the Tent City Project is still in the developmental stage where more collaboration is needed whereto the objective remains the same to end homelessness. For instance, the collaboration with local church groups and the The LowCountry Food Bank are services that Champions for Change are currently researching can have a daily impact. The generous contributions from community businesses/ Trident Tech campus organizations and Trident Tech students/ staff volunteers involvement in this Tent City Project is simply prevalent to the success of any Non-Profit organization.

### **Planning**

Communication is vital when planning a project and collaboration with the community is the key to success. Invitation to Champions for Change Human Service community events formulates into a professional relationship with one another and provides the knowledge needed for human service apprentices in working with community support agencies/ organizations. This worthwhile experience can be used by students to familiarize themselves with the type of supportive services the community offers in order to helping those in need of assistance. As a result, the exchange of new ideas and programs in resolving community issues can be more effective to finding a resolution. Naturally, this goes both ways where the community may

require assistance from Champions for Change in supporting their efforts toward resolving a community need for the betterment of the community.

### **Implementation**

When implementing the Tent City Project it took a great deal of coordination. We had to set-up a drop off point for the donated items, which had to be checked and stored daily in accordance with school policy. For those who were not able to drop off donated items we scheduled a date and time for pick up. We ensured we had the manpower and supplies needed to complete the project by having enough volunteers and tables. We had to coordinate a carpool for students involved with the project on the day of the event along with loading the vehicles with the donated items. We had to manage two separate tables. One for professional/ casual clothing and the second table with blankets and personal hygiene items. The timeframe that it took to complete the project from beginning to end was 3 ½ to 4 hours.

### **Outcome**

Champions for Change scheduled the Tent City Project twice. First time was before Thanksgiving and the second time was before Christmas. First time we serviced approximately 50 homeless clients where we wrote down a list of needs and got to know the type of clients we were dealing with. Thirty-five percent were veterans, Thirty-five percent were victims of the housing market crash, twenty-five percent were addicts, five percent were women. The second time we serviced over 80 homeless clients and noticed that there were more tents. The percentage on type of clients remained the same. However, the second time we were able to team up with a local church group in assisting the homeless at a location called “The Hot Dog Mission”. The Hot Dog Mission is an area established for providing hot meals to the homeless, which is a weekly venue for church group volunteers in the Charleston area.

In conclusion, it is pleasing to know that the efforts by community businesses/ organizations, community volunteers, and Champions for Change in helping the homeless civilians/ veterans of Charleston currently has shed some light at the end of the tunnel. On February 4, 2016 the newly elected Mayor Tecklenburg announce a 30 – 60 day plan to provide shelter for the Tent City Homeless. Although Tent City has been in existence since the housing market crashed, it is promising to know that a plan is in place to get the Tent City homeless residents the help they need to being healthy productive citizens. Keep in mind that on any given night, there are between 130,000 to 200,000 American Veterans living in homelessness in which formulates to 20% of our country's homeless population.(Soldiers On, 2013) According to the U.S. Conference of Mayors 2013 Hunger and Homelessness Report, for the next year city officials expect the number of homeless families and homeless individuals to continue at the same level where resources to provide emergency shelter are expected to decrease substantially.(Post and Courier, 2013) Knowing that the odds are against this plan of action, maybe this can spark an initiative nationwide to take Charleston lead in battling homelessness that has haunted this city for to long.

### References

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