



From Committee to Non-profit

The Veterans Non Profit (VNP) is a 501 (c) (3) founded in El Paso, Texas in 2015. It got its start as the Veterans Committee at the Unitarian Universalist Community of El Paso in March 2013. At that time, a community member, who was an outreach worker/case manager working with homeless veterans, kept running into gaps in services available to the El Paso veteran population. When he shared the problems with the UUCEP members, they formed the Veterans Committee. By December 2014, the committee was composed of 7 long term members, who primarily met the administration needs. An additional 24 individuals were committed and consistent volunteers.

The first gap addressed by the committee was food for hungry veterans and their families. The UUCEP's 501(c) (3) status allowed the community to enter into memorandums of understanding with El Pasoans Fighting Hunger and in April of 2013 the committee opened a food pantry in a small office in the community hall. As the committee planned the food pantry, they expected to help 15-20 veterans a month. The first month, they actually served forty people and the numbers continued to grow. By November 2014, the food pantry was serving over 220 people a month. The committee quickly recognized the need for mental health services within the population they were serving. This led to a memorandum of understanding with Emergence Health Network's Military Veteran Peer Network (MVPN). On November 6th 2014, they began offering facilitated groups for veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

By the fall of 2014, the food pantry had taken over another space in the community's small building. Yet the committee had identified another need that they felt they could address, if they could just figure out the logistics: a clothing closet. Homeless veterans need a source of clean clothes. Other veterans need specific job or interview clothes but could not afford them, making their home status precarious. The limiting factors were space and resources.

In December 2014, the committee had a strategic planning session. They generated a mission, vision, and purpose statement that was independent of their UUCEP parent. The committee explored the options for raising funds. It quickly became apparent that the cost of an audit was beyond the means of the tiny community that was supporting them. It was decided, with the blessing of the UUCEP, that it was time for the group to form its own non-profit with 501(c)(3) status. On March 18th, 2015, the group received its non-profit status from the State of Texas. On April 15th, they moved into their current location.

✓ What we do

One of the most important underlying premises for our existence is our desire to care for veterans whose service to our country demands respect. Nearly all of our volunteers, including the Board of Directors, are either veterans, soldiers, or families of veterans and/or soldiers.

We are completing our first full year of services. In our first year, our food pantry operation alone served more than 360 veteran households comprised of more than 570 unique individuals.

Our goal is to fill in gaps in programs and ensure that veterans have the wherewithal to take advantage of other programs.

There are programs that assist veterans with job training, job placement, obtaining housing, filing claims (for benefits that often take years to be granted), etc. However, placing a veteran into school or a job when he does not have anything to eat is not a vehicle to success. Likewise, helping an individual get a job, when they cannot afford the required clothing or equipment to keep that job, can become an exercise in frustration for all concerned.

An added benefit of our programs is that when we interact with these men and women over a prolonged period, they often open up and we are able to identify other needs that they may have. We can then help them meet these needs, usually by referral.

We have helped veterans find help for addiction problems, mental health problems that cannot be met by the PTSD groups that we now provide, housing needs, finding employment, getting and education and securing the benefits to which they are entitled.

Our PTSD counseling services, led by facilitators trained to Texas's BEITZ standard, are sometimes used by veterans who will not use VA provided services. Because we exist outside the chain of command or the formal Veterans Administration services, we are sometimes trusted where another source of assistance would not be. Some veterans do not trust the quality of care provided by the VA. Others, desiring a career in federal or law enforcement careers are hesitant to be labeled as having PTSD for fear it will close off opportunities.

Where we are going – our vision for our future.

While we currently run a food pantry and a clothing closet for veterans and their families, and in May after completing renovations we will resume our PTSD groups. Our vision is expansionary in the services we offer. Once we are able to pay staff, we envision being nearly a one-stop shop for veteran's needs. We have started building networks with other organizations and groups, particularly those that work with veterans. Eventually we expect to hire an individual to assist with claims for VA benefits and accessing other social services. While there are many groups in our community who provide such services, we feel that referrals can be counterproductive. When veterans develop rapport with our staff sometimes disclose information about PTSD or Military Sexual Trauma which they have not discussed with anyone else. Under such circumstances, it would be helpful if we could provide assistance directly.

Veterans Non Profit Veterans Food Pantry Numbers

400

350

300

250

200

150

100

50

0

Sep-15

Oct-15

Nov-15

Dec-15

Jan-16

Feb-16

Mar-16

Apr-16

May-16

Jun-16

Jul-16

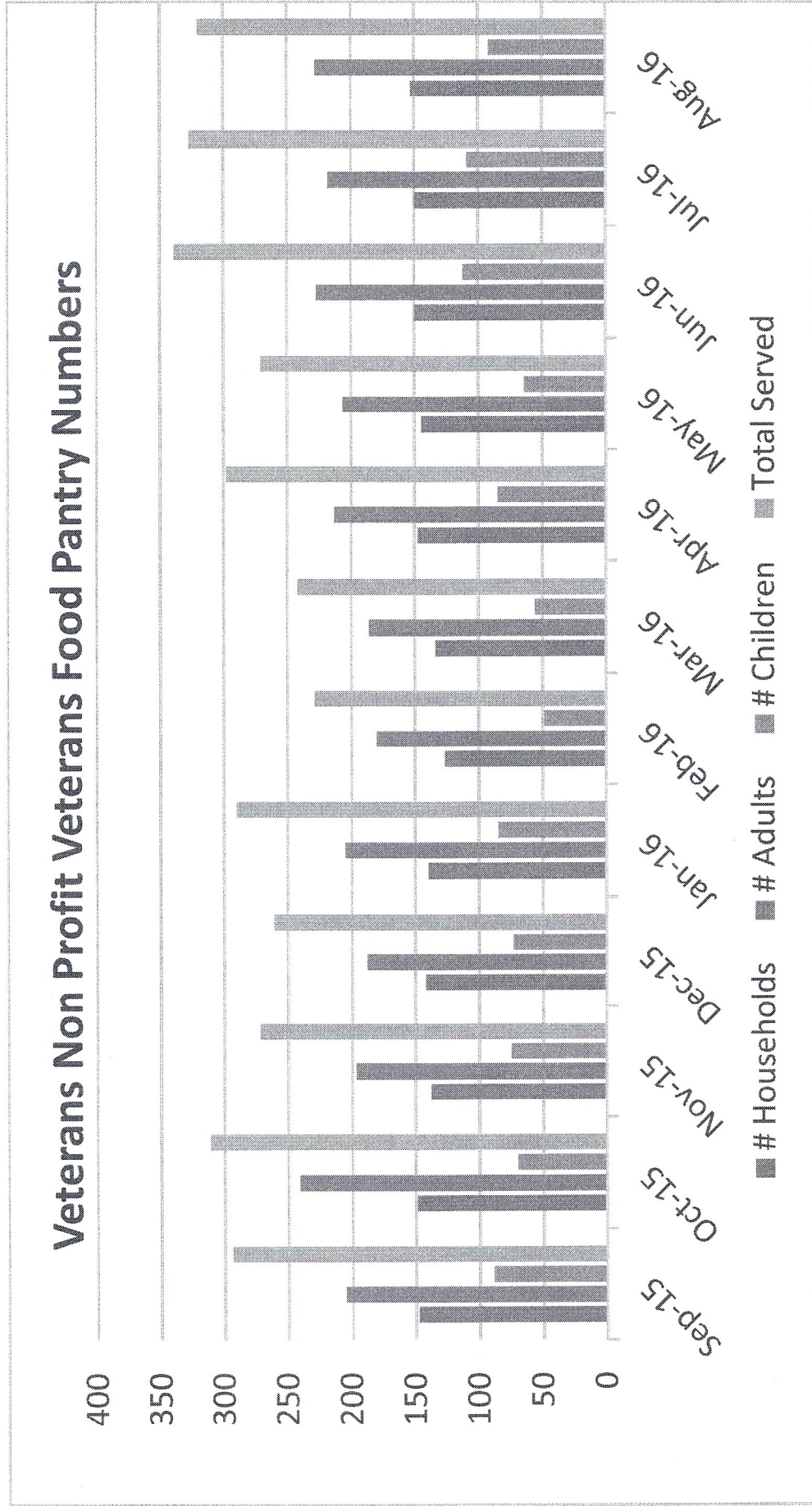
Aug-16

Households

Adults

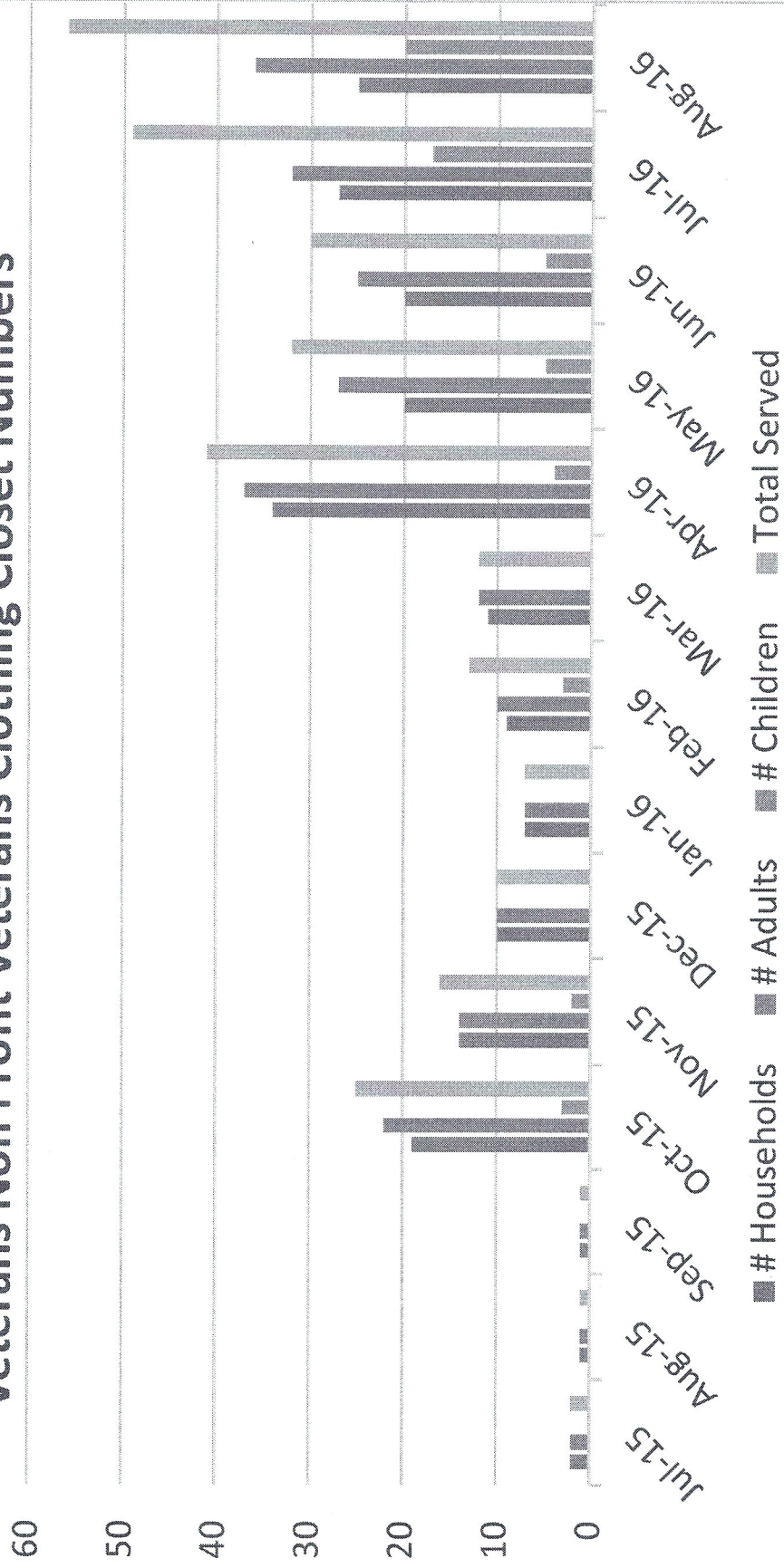
Children

Total Served



	# Households	# Adults	# Children	Total Served
May-15	60	83	30	113
Jun-15	87	121	51	172
Jul-15	96	145	58	203
Aug-15	111	152	53	205
Sep-15	148	205	89	294
Oct-15	149	241	70	311
Nov-15	138	197	75	272
Dec-15	142	188	73	261
Jan-16	140	205	85	290
Feb-16	127	180	49	229
Mar-16	134	186	56	242
Apr-16	148	213	85	298
May-16	145	207	64	271
Jun-16	150	227	112	339
Jul-16	150	218	109	327
Aug-16	153	228	92	320

Veterans Non Profit Veterans Clothing Closet Numbers



	# Households	# Adults	# Children	Total Served
Jul-15	2	2	0	2
Aug-15	1	1	0	1
Sep-15	1	1	0	1
Oct-15	19	22	3	25
Nov-15	14	14	2	16
Dec-15	10	10	0	10
Jan-16	7	7	0	7
Feb-16	9	10	3	13
Mar-16	11	12	0	12
Apr-16	34	37	4	41
May-16	20	27	5	32
Jun-16	20	25	5	30
Jul-16	27	32	17	49
Aug-16	25	36	20	56