

November 1, 2019 – October 31, 2020

# MN Helmets to Hardhats Initiative

## Progress Report

The Helmets to Hardhats Initiative assisted twenty-six veterans into union construction positions from November 1, 2019 – October 31, 2020. While twenty-six placements is 38% less than the previous time period with the slowed the construction economy and decreased apprenticeship openings due to the pandemic MN H2H appreciates the opportunity to serve those 26 veterans.



## Mental Health Support

The MN H2H program is committed to confronting the epidemic of suicide among veterans and active service members. As part of this commitment, we have made available a digital copy of the National Helmets to Hardhats program's Guide to Behavior and Mental Health to the training coordinators of apprenticeship programs in MN.

MN H2H Director, Justin Rost, has also been participating in a group responsible for redesigning the VA system's suicide awareness and prevention task force. This has been an ongoing effort to bring awareness to employers, social groups, and training facilities to help veterans in need.

*The purpose of the MN Helmets to Hardhats program is to help veterans and transitioning military along with National Guard and Reserve personnel find gainful employment in the union construction trades in Minnesota.*



This year (2020) brought many challenges to the MN H2H program. Due to the COVID 19 pandemic we saw many changes to how we could conduct business, provide outreach, network, and engage with the veteran community as well as a significant decline in sign-ups and placements. Although we were able to maintain relationships and partnerships that we had fostered in the past, we saw many limitations to our outreach this year which has proven to be an important factor in this program's success.

## MN H2H Overview

Construction Careers Foundation (CCF), a nonprofit organization, is dedicated to fostering and developing construction career pathways for Minnesotans, especially young adults. Working in tandem with the national office of Helmets to Hardhats, a national nonprofit organization that helps introduce military veterans to career opportunities in construction, CCF built a program,

supported by a two-year grant totaling \$400,000, approved during the 2017 session of the Minnesota Legislature, to recruit, retain, assist and support National Guard, Reserve, and active duty military members' and veterans' participation in construction trades apprenticeship programs registered with the MN Department of Labor and Industry (MNDOLI).

*Activities under the grant, monitored by MNDOLI, include connecting active members and veterans with career training and employment opportunities in the building and construction trades industries.*

During the 2019 legislation MN Helmets to Hardhats was granted an additional two years of funding totaling \$400,000 to continue its mission. Helmets to Hardhats is a national, nonprofit organization that connects National Guard, Reserve, retired and transitioning active-duty military service members with skilled training and quality career opportunities in the construction industry ([helmetstohardhats.org](http://helmetstohardhats.org)). Such training is offered by apprenticeship training organizations and because these apprenticeship programs are regulated and approved at both federal and state levels, veterans can utilize their Montgomery G.I. Bill benefits to supplement their income while they are learning valuable skills and on-the-job training.

Minnesota, New York, New Jersey, and Alaska have full-time Helmets to Hardhats programs. While most states have one employee for their programs, New York retains five employees.



*Justin Rost, a Sheetmetal worker and U.S. Marine Corps veteran, is the Director of the MN Helmets to Hardhats program.*

## **Principles**

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| <b>Service</b>   | To provide services in accordance with our own standard as well as the standards of the national office to any and all veterans that have honorably served or are currently serving in the military forces of the United States. |
| <b>Connect</b>   | To help veterans in need of other services through use of our contacts and networking partners.  |
| <b>Network</b>   | To continue to expand our contacts and partnerships of veteran service providers, union building trades, and veterans throughout the state.  |
| <b>Stability</b> | To help military service members successfully transition back into civilian life by offering them the means to secure a quality career in the construction industry.   |

## **Process**

To join Helmets to Hardhats, a veteran will go to the national website ([helmetstohardhats.org](http://helmetstohardhats.org)), create a profile and submit a resume. Once registered, the MN Helmets to Hardhats Director contacts the individual directly to help navigate towards a career pathway within the construction

industry. Participating veterans must have the following:

- Be at least 18 years of age

- Have an honorable discharge
- Have a high school diploma or equivalent
- Be able to pass a drug test
- Be able to complete a formal interview

## Activities

MN Helmets to Hardhats program helps veterans and transitioning military along with National Guard and Reserve personnel find gainful employment in the union construction trades in Minnesota by:

- Partnering with the National Helmets to Hardhats program to allow veterans access to an established website that is actively advertised throughout the country and military bases.
- Partnering with other veteran organizations such as the VA Hospital, MAC-V, and DEED along with many others to help veterans who may be unemployed or underemployed.
- Networking with veteran support groups such as the Eagle Group of MN Veterans, Beyond the Yellow Ribbon, and the Veteran Resource Group.
- Connecting with the MN Building Union Trades and their joint apprenticeship training coordinators and business agents.
- Networking with employers.

## Results

	<u>2016-2017</u>	<u>2017-2018</u>	<u>2018-2019</u>	<u>2019-2020</u>
Enrolled MN veterans with the National Helmets to Hardhats program who are receiving support	70	300	257	192
MN Veteran participation (registered with the MN Department of Labor and Industry)				
Active veteran apprentices all industries	688	809	938	831
Active veteran apprentices in the construction industry	604	703	775	703
Veteran Unemployment rate	NA	NA	3.2%	5.9%
Placements	NA	15	42	26

## Conclusion

In March of 2020, the U.S. joined the rest of the world in the COVID-19 pandemic. These unprecedented events required nearly every industry to drastically change the way business and networking are conducted. The Construction Careers Foundation enacted new business practices to prioritize the health of its employees and program participants. We attended virtual meetings, job fairs, and relied heavily on partnerships built prior to the pandemic. The National Helmets to Hardhats program also enacted similar guidelines for their regional managers and staff.

Construction was considered a critical industry and continued to complete projects through the summer and fall. However, we saw a lower number of signups this year accompanied by a lower number of known successful transitions into careers in the building trades due to continued economic uncertainty. As this pandemic continues, we keep striving to improve our results, our outreach, and promote careers in construction trades apprenticeships.

The MN H2H program continues to foster relationships with all of the programs we work with while creating new relationships when possible given the current obstacles. This year we focused on improving the information that is given to veterans, and communication between ourselves and the employers/programs with whom we work. Through the work we do, the program continues to improve veterans lives and strengthen Minnesota's construction building trades and our communities.