

Helmets to Hardhats

To Whom it may concern...

My Name is Zach Johnson and I am writing this letter on behalf of the Helmets to Hardhats program and it's Minnesota Director Justin Rost. I met Justin in 2018 while working for the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) as a Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) member. My job was to work in the veterans employment program to assist veterans with reintegration and employment needs. Justin would attend a lot of the same meetings I was at from Battle Buddies USA, to Eagle Group of Minnesota veterans and our Monday veterans networking meeting at the CareerForce center in Bloomington. His role was pivotal in helping DEED and myself achieve the numbers we had in assisting many veterans to get into the trades. When I moved to the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans Justin was right there beside the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program team. HVRP was used around the state and Justin's role with Helmets to Hardhats made him so incredibly useful to know what jobs were available, where we could get them into a construction careers, and a lot of the times doing it within a week or two. The veteran was then back on their feet, excelling in life. By now we had become friends, and as a United States Marine myself, the comradery kicked in. Every Job I have had in the veteran's service realm Justin has been a part of it. We bounce Ideas off of each other, we share best practices, we hand veterans off to each other for various needs. In the 6 years I have known and worked with him, I have lost count of how many veterans we have both worked with and he has gotten back to work. This program in the state of Minnesota is a lifeline for those to get back to work, for obtaining stability in their lives, and to build a foundation so they can find their version of Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my input. If further information from me is needed please contact me at Zach@davmn.org or 612-364-5358

Thank you again

Zach Johnson

Department Service Officer – Disabled American Veterans

Testimony from William Epps

To whom it may concern,

Originally I came into the Carpenter's union in 2013 after completing Summit Academy. Things were going well until 2015 when drugs and alcohol took over my life and I decided to leave the union. In September 2020, I checked myself into MN Adult Team Challenge, and since then have been clean of any and all substances for four years. In 2023 I decided to enter back into the Carpenter's union. How would I go about getting back in? A viable route that came to mind was to attend veteran career fairs. I began looking at MAC-V. They directed me to attend a career fair at Target Field and sure enough Helmets to Hardhats was there. Sharing my story with Justin, he assured me there is a place in the Carpenters for me. Justin shared information with me. A few months later at another job fair being held right here in St. Paul and I see Justin again. I updated him on my progress and job leads. I then went to work. In September 2024 there was another job fair in Minneapolis, during this time it was slow at the company that hired me, and I was out of work for a month. When I saw Justin, I walked to his table and told him about my situation. My spirits were picked up and my frown turned upside down seeing his familiar face. Justin gave me some contacts, and some job leads. I was down and out but not discouraged. There was a sense of peace knowing that Helmets to Hardhats was working on my behalf to ensure I was working to support my family. I talked to the contact Justin had given me and went back to work that week. Thank you for listening, have a wonderful day, and God bless.

William Epps

2/28/25

Minnesota Helmets to Hardhats Initiative

2024 update



278 Veterans entered MNH2H this year

- These service members received information on registered apprenticeship programs of their choice closest to them, sample testing, and access to the national H2H job board and website which provides links to the GI Bill comparison tool, and information on trades. Proof of registration is sent to the trades the service member selects as a trade or interest, and

1,500 Service members in MN have used H2H

- These individuals retain access to the website, job board, and can consult their MNH2H representative about questions or help they may need.

40 Veterans in MN entered registered apprenticeship with assistance from MNH2H this year

- While we are still gathering this information and expect this number to climb, we now have 40 veterans that will be starting rewarding careers in the construction building trades through registered apprenticeship.

Award winning effort

- MNH2H was selected as the Minneapolis VA Vocational Rehabilitation community partner of the year in 2023.
- H2H won the 2024 Hire Vets medallion award from HIREVETS.gov.

MN Helmets to Hardhats Initiative

Progress report

01-1-2023 – 12-31-2023

Director's Overview

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

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 2021 legislation MN Helmets to Hardhats was granted an additional two years of funding totaling \$450,000 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). 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.

Like 2019 and 2020, 2022 has continued to challenge 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.

Program Overview

MN Helmets to Hardhats Commitment Statements:

- 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.
- To help veterans in need of other services through use of our contacts and networking partners.
- To continue to expand our contacts and partnerships of veteran service providers, union building trades, and veterans throughout the state.
- 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.

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 is accomplished 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 like 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

Processes

To join Helmets to Hardhats, a veteran will go to the national website (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

Results

Here are the comparison results for the program's fourth year of operation.

Comparison statistics – November 2021 through November 2022:

45 - Known Successful Transitions (KST's are veterans that have completed entry paperwork and have been accepted into a union and has received employment.)

*Some trades have not reported numbers yet, so we do expect this number to increase.

Comparison Analysis

	<u>Dec. 2021 – Dec. 2022</u>	<u>Jan. 1, 2023 – Dec. 31, 2023</u>
Enrolled MN veterans with the National Helmets to Hardhats program who are receiving support. MN Veteran participation (registered with the MN Department of Labor and Industry)	104	194
• Active veteran apprentices – all industries	704	659
• Active veteran apprentices – construction industry	700	560
• Veteran Unemployment rate-	2.7	3.2
• Male/Female	M-679/F-25	M-632/F-27

Mental Health

MNH2H continues to focus on the mental health crisis that plagues our service members by providing resources and contacts for mental health professionals to employers, service members, and apprenticeship coordinators throughout the state. I was fortunate to be part of a

leadership team that created a mental health and suicide prevention toolbox for community leaders, employers, and friends and family of service members which helps them understand what service members may be going through, what the signs and symptoms may be, how to properly communicate with them, and what resources are available for these types of situations. This project was overseen by a Minneapolis VA mental health nurse and is being reviewed for nationwide use through the VA system. I have also given the afore mentioned groups the H2H Guidebook to Mental Health and am proud to say this has resulted in helping multiple veteran apprentices get help they desperately needed.

Impact

Since being created the Minnesota Helmets to Hardhats program has had more than 1,200 service members enrolled in the program, with nearly 230 of those individuals placed in construction careers through registered apprenticeship. This ratio is higher than any other state for placement through a Helmets to Hardhats program. Overall MN ranked 6th in the H2H national program for placements despite having a much lower population than the top 5 states.