

KEEN ON RETIREMENT



Tiny Homes Make a Huge Difference for Kansas City's Veterans

Welcome to Keen on Retirement
With Bill Keen and Steve Sanduski

Steve Sanduski: Hello everybody. And welcome back to another episode of keen on retirement. I'm your cohost, Steve Sanduski. And as always, we have Bill Keen. Hey Bill.

Bill Keen: Hey, Steve, how are you doing today?

Steve Sanduski: Doing fantastic. And you?

Bill Keen: Well, we're doing good here in Kansas City up, you know, we had temperatures up in the eighties here. And so after those negative 15 degree temperatures, we saw a few months ago I think we're doing well.

Steve Sanduski: Well, don't rub it in. We had just a little bit of snow on the ground yesterday when I woke up. So a little different up here in the far North,

Bill Keen: Well, that's what you get for being up there in the peninsula in Wisconsin, but I know it's a beautiful, beautiful place cause I've been there. So I'm looking forward to coming back.

Steve Sanduski: Yeah, well, looking forward to having you and Karissa up here again as well. Well, Hey, we've got another great episode here and I want to set just a little bit of context before we introduce our special guests. So Bill, I know you and Carissa and Keen Wealth Advisors are very philanthropic oriented, and I know you do a lot for the community, both of giving.

Your time, as well as given your financial resource. And every so often, we like to highlight some of the things that you and Carissa are doing and what the team at Keen Wealth Advisors are doing in the community. And that's really going to be the focus of our show today. I think we have an amazing guest who has uh, a terrific story and is doing some incredible things here in the community.

So we really want to highlight what's happening here. So Bill, I'm going to. Turn it over to you and have you introduce our guests here today?

Bill Keen: I am just super grateful to have one of the founders of what's called the veterans community Project on with us today. His name is Brandon Mixon and I was able to meet Brandon. Through some contacts that I have here in Kansas City. And I had seen what they had been doing through local media.

They have put up 49 tiny homes in Kansas City For homeless veterans to come into those homes and really get their lives back on track. And I'm looking so forward to chatting about that today with Brandon and then some of the vision that he has for the future about how the expansion of this organization is going to work across the country.

And some of the things that they're doing here in Kansas City, As this continues to grow. And the thing that really got me was the success rate. And we'll talk more about this as we go throughout episode today, but there's been a, an approximately an 85% success rate in helping folks get back on their feet and get integrated into productive lives.

Really thriving in, in our community. And I I'm just super honored Brandon, to have you on you taking the time to be a part of this. I can know that my wife, Chris and I and Keen Wealth are grateful to partner with you all in your efforts and welcome to Keen On Retirement, buddy.

Brandonn Mixon: Very excited about it. Me and you're kind of a legend in the podcast field. So really excited to be on a podcast with you guys. Tell my story and again, this excited to do it.

Bill Keen: Oh my goodness. We're legend Steve.

Steve Sanduski: We are at least in our own mind.

Bill Keen: Yes. Yeah. Right. You're very kind Brandon. I've studied your mission and the Veterans Community Project is it's dedicated to supporting every man and woman who took the oath for our country.

And it says we are determined to make a difference in the lives of homeless veterans, a task accomplished by the community for the community. the success that you're having is off the charts. So could you start out by giving our listeners just a little bit of history about how you became to be one of the founders and maybe a little bit of your time you were in the military yourself, so you, you understand this you're in the trenches, so to speak, you understand this issue.

Brandonn Mixon: Yeah. So a little bit about us fourth time, I would get into the story. So you kind of understand how both correlates. A lot of people will know us for the guys in Kansas City that build the tiny houses. You know, we've been very fortunate enough now to be on national coverage and a lot of that stuff.

And literally. Paving the pathway on what, you know, housing for homelessness in general looks like providing resources and services in general look like, and it's just been amazing. we're based out of

Kansas City, Missouri. We had this idea to do this in Kansas City, but we had no clue it was going to take off into the cities we're currently at now myself, my background I was an army guy.

Right. You know, one of the reasons why I joined the military was for that family. I wanted that brotherhood. I just wanted to feel like I wanted to belong. Right. And that was one of the reasons for creating VCP and I'll dive a little bit more in my story, but we wanted to create a place again that any veteran qualified for, and a lot of people automatically assume because you're a veteran, you qualify for all these veterans services.

That's not the case at all. A lot of dishonorably discharged veterans, a lottery service, a lot of national guard veterans did not qualify for any types of veteran services. Meaning, they could say, Hey, I'm going to, I'm thinking about committing suicide. I needed to go to the VA. Unfortunately, in a lot of cases, the VA just says, Hey, sorry, you don't qualify for our services.

We have to turn you away. And then you don't see any other organizations saying, Hey, I'm willing to help you. Not in a bad way, but it's because a lot of these organizations take federal funding, which limits on who they can and can't help. And we started this organization because we didn't want to leave any of our brothers and sisters behind.

And so one of, one of the only organizations in the United States that helps any veteran, again, it doesn't matter discharge status, length of stay in the military or whatever your case may be. You're my brother and my sister, I have your back. So, that's a little bit about us those of you that don't know, then I'm going to dive into my story.

Is that, is that all right?

Bill Keen: Oh, we would love to hear that. I would love for you to share it. I know about it, Brandon, but I would love for you to share it with our listeners. Really? What drove your passion and experience around this, your story.

Brandonn Mixon: So like I was telling a little bit earlier, 18 years old, right. Joining the military, looking for that brotherhood, looking for that family. Next thing you know 2011, I find myself on a If I have galaxy flying in Afghanistan, you know, it's pitch-black dark, next thing you know, we're going in for a they call it a combat maneuver landing.

It's like where they do a really, really, really deep dive and then a really fast landing it's so that a lot of the. The, the bullets, a lot of the stuff that shot at us, can't go directly into the aircraft. It's a more of a survivability. Right, right. And so this is my first experience kind of with combat as this, coming to this combat maneuver and Bulger, Merrifield, Afghanistan.

I get out there. It's pitch black. I'm excited, right? Again, 21 years old, young dumb, diamond on top of the world, man, for once I felt like I belonged and I was ready for this mission and everything. On the flight line and ballroom Afghanistan crazy and ended up falling about two stories.

When we were unloading the C5 aircraft, landed on my left shoulder and my head. Didn't think anything of it again, 21 years old, I'm in the best shape of my life. My job in Afghanistan was a crew chief on Blackhawk. So I didn't need anything from medivac to this, the taxi service dog, Afghanistan, where I was going with this is, is our job is really intense, really kind of tight knit.

There's 12 of us for all of the RCEs that Afghanistan. And so when I initially had an injury, I didn't think anything of it. I kind of popped back up like, Nope, you know, I got a mission. I need to continue the mission. Right. Next thing, you know, I find myself about three months in Afghanistan. Love it.

To me, one of the best places I've ever been in the world, not in the aspect of, I think of what's going on around you. Like, weren't a lot of that, but I contributed to, again, getting back to the home mentality, feeling like I'm a part of this family, right? There's a really great book out there called tribe and it really explains it that I'm now understanding, but I was a part of that tribe.

I felt like I belonged again. I've never felt that in my life and inherent filmless 21 years old in Afghanistan.

Bill Keen: Brandon have you now you fell two stories, but you just passed it off. Certainly there was some damage done.

Brandonn Mixon: So, I didn't know at the time I hit my head, landed on my neck kind of popped back up, right? Like, Oh, I don't know what's going on. Got a headache, but I'm just going to drive on. Right. Because that's what they do. The military you just drive on. Right. You're focused on that mission and not focused on myself.

So from there kind of this, this whole three month timeframe when I'm there, I, that one was headaches, but we didn't realize that's what was going on. I was actually taking a lot of ibuprofen. Deadly amounts coming to find out is actually what I was taken my liver started kind of shutting down function-wise et cetera, but Moving a little fast forward Afghanistan, right?

That was a fob. Shank Afghanistan. Go out on a mission. I've done this mission a hundred times over, right. You know, probably have. 2000 hours under night, vision goggles or daytime hours, et cetera, just do admissions. And we go to one of our I believe it was shape. Battle was the actual fall we were at.

We were finding that a J bed and we landed and picked up one of the detainees that we were dealing with and coming up out of the fob. I saw some incoming on the right-hand side. No, when I say incoming, it could be small arms. It could be RPG. We'd have to worry about dish cause a lot which are anti aircraft guns, but called some incoming in the right-hand side.

What it was is it's really hard to explain, but imagine being kind of in a crater hole, right. With all these outlying cities with houses and stuff like that. So as you're coming out of those crater hole, you're kind of seeing the tops of them and you're kind of like, okay, what's going on? Well, I saw an initial smoke flume.

I thought it was an RPG. So people have this misconception of when you shoot an RPG, at least like this really cool smoke trail. That's not the case at all. Actually it just leaves an initial, like smoke plump and

you're like, Oh crap, where did it go? I lost sight of it. Right. So I called some incoming right-hand side pilot dumped the collective to come back into the fog to protect us right.

In case something was shot up at I didn't lock my inertia rules and it threw me in the back of the grenade, something of the pilot. Right. At the time I'm like, Oh man, I got some really bad pain aircraft wasn't damaged really at all, because it can kind of take some hard leanings like that. But the way of my, you know, my harness where I'm attached to the way I landed felt like I kind of popped my shoulder out of the socket.

Really bothers me. They ended up seeing Brandon and Hey, are you okay? Everything. All right. Cause I was kinda like, ah, thing that really hurt, like kind of initially given the first signs of maybe I'm shot or something. Right. And I'm like, no, no, I'm fine. We'll figure it out. We ended up going back to our father and the like, Hey man, we, we should probably medivac you.

You're not looking too good. So they ended up medevac'ing me to bogger Merrifield, right? The volume or those initially where they take all the wounded. When I landed in a ballroom air field you know, I was telling him, cause I was there with the other crew chiefs and stuff like that. Cause they had took me there and I was like, Hey man, I'll see you guys on a little bit, no big deal.

Like just give me a day. I'll be back in, back in. Yeah, no, a fighting order. Right? So I'm in bogger. Myrtleford air filled for a day. And the dog I came in we need to be some x-rays and a cat scan, but there's some things are not looking good. I was like, okay, well, what's, what's going on. He's like, we can't really talk about it right now.

We're really unsure. We want to amend evacuate of launch till, well, I knew if I'm going to launch show, man, like the odds of me coming back are probably not good. And I remember telling my battle buddies, Hey man, like I'm going to be back. Don't worry about it. Right. Well, I didn't really have the option.

They decided to the med-evac me son ended up, it's kind of like a really not short memory, but like. I fell asleep. Next thing you know, I remember myself kind of waking up in a KC, one 35 that QC one 35 is actual medevac bird that takes you to launch Hill Germany, Marshall. Germany's where they take all the wounded.

I remember kind of waking up and it wasn't like, I was just like, I don't know, like incapacitated we get up, but it was more one of those things like. Dude, like two days turned into next thing, you know, I'm waking up on this QC one 35, and I'm sitting in a regular seat and I look in front of me and all you see is all these wounded.

Right? kinda hard to explain, but when they do casual vac, they call it casually evacuation. They stack these bunks three tiers high and, and these three tiers, each bunk, they have assigned usually a doctor. And so I'm waking up with. You know, not to trying to get too graphic with this Bernie and smell, right.

You can smell like this, the burning smell and the soldiers like this moaning and really hurting with pain. I mean, this is a full-blown amount of acting here. You know, I have all my limbs and my heads is killing

me. My shoulder is killing me and I'm waking up and kind of seeing this going on and like, What am I doing here?

Like I needed to be back in Afghanistan with my brothers and my sisters. Like now I know that because I'm down, you know, the crew chief now somebody going, gonna have to fly my hours, which we were already flying 12 and 13 hours anyways. And getting these, these waivers to keep flying. Cause we weren't supposed to be flying, et cetera.

And now like I'm sitting there thinking that like, man, I'm kind of worthless. Like I don't have my legs. Well enough. I don't have my skin burnt. Like I I'm fine. Like get me off of this damn thing. I want to be back in Afghanistan. We landed in launches, Germany. Why launch? Well, Germany kind of going through extensive kind of, imagery and stuff like that.

Come to find out traumatic brain injury. My brain was swollen. My C1 C2 had been crushed. My T3 and T4 vertebrae were in crushed. I dislocated my shoulder and I had no clue. I even crushed my desk or I dislocated my shoulder and the doctor was like, Hey man, like. This is some pretty serious stuff we're going on when you send you back stateside.

And I'm like, again, thinking in my mind, like, no, like I am fine. Give me some F and aspirin I'll move on. Right? Like, that's my job as a soldier. the best way to explain to people is like, imagine being your first time in the NFL, your first game, you get tackled and you sprain an ankle, right?

You're like, no, put me back into this game. And that's the way I explain to people. Like, that's how I viewed Afghanistan. I loved it. One of the best things that ever happened to me. So next thing, you know, this is probably two days that I'd kind of learned all of those process. The third day, I believe it was the third day I went into the chow hall.

Right. And I remember seeing my pilot that I flew with quite a bit. Seeing them at the table is, is, you know, arms are all bandage. His head was bandage and I go to sit down with them, like, sir, what you. What are you doing here? And he said, Hey um, and some stuff happened. I'm like, no, like talk to me like that was our route.

Like what's going on? He's like, well, we ended up getting shot from underneath the aircraft's. It hit one of the pilot's hands and then hit one of the other pilots in the head and they ended up wrecking the aircraft kind of the cool, like fun fact, like not cool, maybe cool. They actually like pretty much wrecked it and landed inside of the the medical fobs.

So like at least they are like right there. Right. So like, Thank God that happened. But like, I viewed that as like, okay, that's my fault. Right? The guilt and the aspect of that's my fault, because that was my aircraft. That was my, you know, my normal route that I flew. And I knew what the lookout for did the other crew chief that was protecting the area for F did he know what he was looking out for?

So right then and there, I kind of battled with guilt. Like, it's my fault because I couldn't protect the aircraft because I was here trying to get my shoulder fixed on me. I was like that. And I started dealing

with that guilt. About the fifth debut in there, they said, Hey Renon, all right, we're going to medivac you back to Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

That's our station out of. And I was like, no, I want to go back to Afghanistan. Ended up being a big ordeal, long story short. they got me back to Fort Bragg. When I was at Fort Bragg, went through extensive rehabilitation and cognitive therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy to the learn. I know how to like, I can talk, but sometimes I have issues with like, You know, enunciating and stuff like that.

But again, like they put me in the word transitioning with time, right. That's where they put all these hurt guys and stuff like that. The guys that are missing limbs, et cetera.

Bill Keen: What's it called Brandon the warrior

Brandonn Mixon: Warrior transition battalion. And they put me in this unit and again, I'm seeing the guys that are just figured, you know, burned victims, et cetera.

And I'm like, dude, I have my two arms, two legs, like I'm doing okay. Like I don't need to be here. Just get me away from here. Let me go back. Well, prior to my military career, I did funeral detail, right. Nothing major, but it was just something really cool and opportunity that I had.

They saw that I had this prior background in funeral detail and they asked me to do the funerals for 80 seconds all of 80 seconds. Right. So not a big deal. I mean, I can, that's an honor, right. To be, you know, America's honor guard. And then being on that is a really big deal. Well, what ended up happening about you know, four months into me you know, on funeral detail there was two pilots that I knew from the FRG meeting that flipped patchy as well.

They ended up getting shot down and unfortunately Kia and Afghanistan. And I specifically remember doing one of their funerals and seeing kind of, you know, the mom and the daughter kind of took that. Right. You know, it really hit me because, you know, when you're going through different parts of war, you never understand.

Only like one part, you never see all three parts of it. Right. And at the beginning of the middle of end right. And I was the only guy in that unit that had deployed with those guys, but then we'll also go put on a funeral detail for those same guys. And so from there, I really bothered me mentally because I saw like that pain.

Right. And I can never explain that to anybody. It's, it's even hard to explain. From there. It was probably three or four days after that funeral. When I got back the medivac doc or the medical doctor came and said, Hey, Brandon just want to let you know, your, your med board process started, this is what we're going to start to do.

We're actually going to medical retire. You. And I'm like, what? Again? I'm like 21 years old. Right. And a doctor coming to me and saying, Hey, we're going to medical retire. You is like, kind of like. A slap in the face. Right? Again, I joined the military for the family and now my is telling me the way I view it.

My family is telling me I'm not good enough. I'm not fit enough. I can't continue to serve nothing I can do about it. March six, 2013 the retired me and sent me back home to Kansas City. City is where I'm from. And when I went through this whole process, I never saw anybody for mental health issues.

I never saw anybody to talk about these things that I was encountering. A lot of that stuff. All it was is saying, Hey, here you go. We needed the medical retire you out of the military. Here's this huge severance pay. And by the way, this is how you do interview skills. Good luck in Kansas City, pretty much, right?

Like that's really fast paced, but. It's not tailored to my needs. It was literally just saying, Hey, okay, here's the transition out of the military. Good luck deuces. Right. So come to Kansas City. I know I'm struggling with mental health issues. And man, like I kept thinking in my head, the only thing that's going to solve this is to take my own life, right.

Only for the aspect of. I think this is the answer. Again, I don't feel wanted, I don't want to feel loved. I hate to say this, but even my own parents, you know, as, as educated as they were, because they were an education viewed me as their little boy and that I need to grow up and get a job. Right. You know, at this point in time, I'm, 22, 23, just because of like how long it took me to get out of the military.

And I'm like, I don't even know, like what I qualify for, you know, like I can't use my shoulder that much. I can't love super heavy stuff, so I can't go work a warehouse anywhere. I'm not super brain smart. You know, that I feel from the aspect of, of numbers and colors and a lot of that stuff due to my TBI.

So like, I felt like I was really hindered and really cornered. And to me, the only right answer for me was like, cool, taking my life. Like, I don't want to be a hindrance to my wife. I don't want to be a hindrance to my parents. Like. And I also don't want to be a hindrance to my battle buddies because that's how I viewed myself.

Right. My battle buddies, I deployed with army. Like I felt just like, I was just a hindrance. I was a nobody. Pretty much tonight. I wasn't taking my life. My wife said she could kind of tell something was wrong. She's like, what's going on? Like, I don't want to talk about it. Don't want to talk. Don't talk about it.

And she's like, you know what? Like I noticed you're really happy when, when you were still military, have you thought about linking up with some military, other military guys? Well, she made a phone call and got me in with the wounded warrior projects. Right? Love wounded warrior project, great program, by the way.

I met some other like-minded vets, not like-minded in an aspect of like suicide, but like-minded about being around other vets. And then when I went to this wounded warrior project event I met some other vets that were really happy and I'm like, dude, why are you guys so happy? Like, again, I hated this part in my life.

Like I thought, excuse me, which I thought it was a piece of shit, man. And they're like, no, dude, we help other veterans. I was like, I love that. I love the way that makes the, you know, it makes me feel, et cetera fast forward. I made really good friends with some of those guys at that event. There was three of them to be executive.

I made really good friends with. We all kind of started at a big chat group in between us. Cause we're all about helping veterans in the community. Well, Chris, one of my buddies at times sends me a text and said, Hey man, can you spare a hundred bucks? I don't like a hundred bucks for what? Veterans? Day, 2000, I think 15.

And I'm like a hundred bucks for what he's like, Hey, we need to put a vet in a hotel. It's hard scenario to explain. My buddy Chris was working for United way at the time. So what you would do is you'd get a lot of these veterans in, and the veterans that would not qualify for services through United way or the VA.

He is literally calling us in this group or chatting us in a group. And we were paying for these things for these other veterans, right? Because all of us had this military retirement coming in or side jobs, et cetera, that we were spending our own money to try to help these veterans. And so he texted me, he was like, I was trying to tap that I was freshman.

I'm like, why the F do I need to pay a hundred dollars to get him into a hotel? Right. And then that's when he explained to me about veterans not qualifying for veteran services. What's absolutely blew my mind and broke my heart. Right. And from there, I'm like, dude, that, reminds me of myself.

Right. Really hurting and feeling lost. Right. And I was like, you know, whatever you need, I don't care. I'll empty my savings account, whatever it is, man. Just let me know how I can help in some way. About that same time. I met a guy on the side of the road, basically on the side of a bridge. I saw he was wearing that little army backpack, the backpack that you get when he joined the military and all that, and you know, divine intervention or whatever the case may be.

I felt like, man, I didn't really need to go talk to this guy. I really, I have to help this dude pulled over and sat down next to them. And I could tell he's about, he started telling me kind of a story. I told him I was a vet and told him my story. And he was telling me, you know, third tour in Iraq. his buddy had roadside bomb.

Well, why that's instrumental as is. He actually joined you know, the Marines with this, this buddy of his, and they kind of, they call it like a battle buddy system where they deployed together and kind of the whole night was again his best friend, third deployment in Iraq, but he had a roadside bomb and killed his buddy instantly.

Well, he had to live with the rest of them the whole time and deployment with that coming back on posts. He actually was drinking real heavily. That was his way to medicate, right. It was his way to, to forget a lot of his issues that he was struggling with because of the military and a little background of it.

So you guys understand when they debrief you, when he come back from Afghanistan or Iraq or wherever the case may be, what they say is, Hey, do you have any mental health issues? Well, especially in this case and a lot of the line units and the infantry, if you tell them, Hey, I'm really struggling with seeing this happen or this happened, you're casually view, you views you as weak, right?

So if you talk and the way you get punished from your, your command, because they're like, Oh, now you're not, tough enough to, to be an infantry guy and see a lot of this. So of course he didn't tell anybody that was going on and his way to cope with it as drinking. So next thing, you know, two months on base after deployment he gets pulled over due to a DWI, right?

Driving while intoxicated. Well, the military put them through ASAP. It's a substance abuse program. And through that time they said, Hey, you cannot drink whatsoever. If you drank work on a discharge, other military will continue to drink. Right. He didn't get his mental health stuff taken care of, continue to drink the cake them out of the military with the dishonorable discharge.

This is the guy that I'm literally sitting down next with and tears coming down his face. Like, tell me about how big of a piece of shit he felt that he's not even looked at as a military individual or as a veteran anymore, because he was dishonorably discharged and that he can't even go to the VA and get help.

He can't go to the VFW and get help. People won't even look at him in his face because they view that like how did you serve this honorably? Like a lot of people don't understand, it could be this symbol thing of getting out overweight in the military can be a dishonorable discharge, a drink in the military or doing drugs in the military is a dishonorable discharge and the, to, again, as a sobbing to me.

Right. And I felt that ENA, I felt that like, that's me. Like, I'm not going to leave this dude behind, like I have your back, dude. I love you. Let's figure this out together. I don't give a shit. What anybody else thinks of you? Like, you're my brother. You would've had my back in Afghanistan. You woulda had my back in Iraq.

You will see my life. This is the least that I can do is have you back a little fun fact, by the way, there's actually more programs out there for felons than there are for dishonorably discharged veterans. Is that not mind blown? That is absolutely my villain. You're saying, Hey, this guy is whatever case they're in prison or whatever.

They have better programs out there for them than they do for dishonorably discharged veterans that served in the military for whatever the reason may be. They got out this honorably other than honorable, et cetera. So the same time this whole thing was going down again. The perfect storm buddy reached out to me and said, Hey, you know what?

I'm tired of sitting here, fighting with these other nonprofits to try to get these veterans help. We're already spending our own money. Let's just create our own nonprofit. Let's create a nonprofit that. Says, yes. They're veterans, right? That says, you know, I got your back. Let's figure this out on top of that.

We knew we wanted to do some type of transitional housing, a lot of veterans when they transition out of the military they just go live on the streets because it's a lot easier for them because that's the military mentality. Right. So next thing you know, we created a veterans community project now with veterans community projects.

We knew, like I said, I wanted to, we wanted to do tiny houses. That's where I kind of came into play. nobody

Bill Keen: Was this? Brandon, what year would this have been now?

Brandonn Mixon: The 2016 is kind of when it started on a, on a napkin to 2017, literally building the very first tiny house on my driveway. Right. I had no clue what I was doing. I just was like, I do the straw or short straw and it's like, here you go.

And you have to figure out how to build a tiny house. Well, I have no clue how to build a tiny house. So literally went back to my, you know, the best time of my life, the military, right. And was figuring out how to build a tiny house watched YouTube. And then the layout actually came because reminding a lot of the barracks lifestyle, B Hudson conexes, that's like the tiny house concept on the back end of that.

Chris and Kevin and Brian. they're creating this program of outreach services, right? So again, a lot of these veterans are struggling with services. So what we did is we actually bought a building and how we were able to buy that building and provide services is Kristen and Brian actually mortgaged their houses.

Right. They went all in and said, here you go. We have a little bit of equity left in our house. We're going to mortgage our houses because nobody would loan us any money. We were trying to tell people that we wanted to do this nonprofit. And on top of that, we were telling everybody, Hey, we want to stay privately funded.

We don't want to take any government funding because if we took government funding, they are limited on who we can and can't help people look at us. Like we were I don't know, we might as well just been crazy. Right. Because that's how people looked at us. So we kind of took the leap of faith and said, okay, we're going to buy a building.

Out of that building. We wanted to provide like a set of resources, right. resource referrals on top of that, we created the very first thing I did in States with the VA as a Kansas City transit authority bus pass program. Right. We housed it out of here. What was awesome about that is the KC ATA said, Hey, we'd love what your definition of a veteran as anybody who's served.

Right. And so we were able to issue them bus passes. So they will go from point a to point B the jobs, et cetera. And we were able to do 1.2 million rides in the first year. Now this was going to be a five-year program. They didn't even amount that amount of rights for five years. And here we just did 1.2 million rides in the first year of our program being opened

Where I was going with that is, is.

That was an opportunity for us to be able to start talking with a lot of these guys, because again, people were coming out of the woodworks for this, this bus has program. We were able to say, Hey man, where are you living? Are you needing help with anything? Like, is there any job resource referrals? Like what do you need us to be able to build a program around what a lot of those veterans that were coming in there?

So, that's a little bit about like the program and, and a little bit about the tiny houses.

Bill Keen: And that's 89th and Troost is where you bought those initial buildings, correct. And started renting the tiny houses, which

Brandonn Mixon: Yeah. so that little tiny house I was telling you that I was building on my driveway, how we actually sold the whole idea is that we went to every fair, everything and started telling people like, Hey, we're going to build this tiny house. So sitting on a trailer. And people are like, cool, I'm going to donate to you.

Right? And then this whole thing just took off. Next thing, you know, USA today ended up doing a story on us. Time magazine ended up doing a story on us. And this is almost before we even started a housing. Anybody people are like me, and this is cutting edge. when we started building I worked with the city.

Well, none of the houses we initially built were according to code. Well, we started doing research, nobody in the United States built tiny houses according to code. So we're like, I have no clue what we're doing. So, you know, like you do in the military, right. It's like, shoot, ready, aim, you know, and that way.

We just had to figure it out. And um, I worked with the city to build a tiny house, according to code. So that's kind of like what a lot of people know this for. And why the tiny house thing is really big here in Kansas City, because we've been the only ones to build the tiny houses according to code.

But why is that important? Well, it allows us to be inside city limits, right? It allows us to the veterans that are inside the city limits, basically get them the resources that they're going to use outside of when they transition out of our program, the same aspect that they're able to use the bus pass program.

And so that's really why the tiny houses have been successful. Not only that when the individual veteran lives inside of one of the tiny houses there's a case manager, right. That helps them with their process. That case manager builds a program around the individual's needs. So if an individual is homeless due to a money management issue and maybe a mental health issue, we can focus on those underlying issues and help them with their transition as a lot of government funded programs, right?

Not hating on them might be a six-month, nine-month, 12-month program. Well, in a lot of cases, what ends up happening was is Hey, and these 12 months you're going to have to do What's the state, this money management and maybe it's this workforce development or like, Hey, yeah, I know you're 97 years old, but you're going to have to go work and do 3000 hours here on top of shows that you're able to do that in great physical shape.

And by the way, because you're on a government funded program, you're not able to smoke or able to drink you're setting them up for failure right away as run through our program. Right. We allow you know, alcohol depend on the individual veteran or smoking or whatever the case may be.

Because again, as transitional housing, we're building this program around their needs. So it's not fair for me to say, Hey, because you're on our program, you can't drink. Well, let's be realistic when they get their own house. They're going to drink or they're going to smoke or they're going to do what they're going to do.

Right. So I'm much rather work with them on their case manager to be able to make sure they're successful doing that and using it the right way, instead of saying, Hey, all right, you're completely done with our program. Now we're transitioning out. And next thing you know, they're going on a drinking binge because they haven't had alcohol for 12 months or whatever the case may be.

Right. And so we're able to monitor that with the case managers on top of. The veterans in the village have a, like a battle buddy that checks up on them that have maybe been through the same scenario and making sure they don't get left behind. That's the biggest thing is making sure that these guys are saying, Hey, like we believe in you, we love you.

Like, let's figure this out. We're doing this together and making sure that these guys aren't doing it alone. Right. So that's a little bit like case management and the aspect of, in the village. I'm sure that we could cover a hundred different things, but I just want to make sure I hit the key points for you.

Bill Keen: I was thinking about too, the wraparound services that seem so powerful to me, you know, navigating governmental offices.

Can be a huge task for folks that are, on solid ground in their lives. So the idea that a homeless veteran would try to navigate all these services with whether it's VA social security, the DMV, the, I dunno, you name it. would be overwhelmed.

And you've already got your, the center that you're working on, but now this navigation campus that we were so inspired by and wanted to come alongside you with and help you with. Can you explain a little bit about that navigation campus as, that's evolving here?

Because I think that's very powerful.

Brandonn Mixon: Yeah, absolutely. You know, before surprised everybody kind of with that and new kind of concept. So we have two kind of different campuses, right on site where our 49 tiny houses, we have a community center. That community center is a 5,000 foot community center. And what's unique is the veterans are able to access that the 49 veterans in our village are able to access that.

Now, when I say veterans, we house families in our village, we house individuals in our village, we house men, women, you name it in our bills, right. We actually have family owns as well that they live in, Yes. So in Kansas City, another fun fact there's only one shelter in Kansas City that allows pets in, and it's a women's battered shelter.

Other than that, we're the only other nonprofit in Kansas City that allows pets to come into their program with them. That's very important for success in a lot of cases due to building and maintaining a relationship because on a lot of cases, they've never been able to do that. So making sure we do that with pets, but out of our community center onsite, that services, they can access the vets in our village.

We have a dental clinic out of our, our building. We have a healthcare clinic out of our building. We have a veterinary clinic out of our building. We have a dog wash out of our building. We have a training kitchen out of the building and a commercial kitchen on the building and like a computer lab and a lot of that stuff.

But those are all just resources just for that. That's my village. That's been huge in the aspect of like, again, the vet comes in, has messed up teeth and stuff like that. We literally have just been able to change veteran's lives by been able to fix the teeth, being able to fix the hair, like you name it, like this little simple stuff like that, that we take for granted.

Now with that concept, that was kind of our first concept of the tiny houses that took off. That's been really instrumental in making these beds. I can happy and successful. So when I went back to the drawing board and said, all right, we're doing a lot of first. We know a lot of these veterans that are coming off the street, they're going to another outreach center, which we have like kind of a campus it's hard to explain.

But they go into that and get food bags every day, hygiene bags, every day, a resource referral C community case manager out of our building. We said, Hey, We're tired of sending these guys, literally 20 miles down the road on a bus line, trying to get a piece of paper signed. So they come back to us to make sure they have a housing voucher, or maybe they just need a link out with VSO to help them with their disability claim.

We said, What would it be like if we could everything we need to under one roof, we started looking around, never been done before. We said, you know what? We have the perfect scenario. We kind of have this whole campus set up. What if we built a campus that literally housed the VA out of there? So a person from the VA, a person for social security administration, so they can get their stuff signed off a person from.

You know, DMV or the DAV or the VFW or whatever the case may be. The other community resources that we're using in the community. Because our big thing is we're not trying to copy any other services. There's really great partners in Kansas City that are really darn good at what they do. Let's just house them out of here.

So when the veteran comes in and again, this can be any veteran, doesn't have to be a homeless veteran. It can be a veteran, literally still in the military, just needing help with social security. Or how to apply for food stamps or whatever. Let's do this at a one building. So that was kind of when our birth came along and we pitched this crazy idea and said, Hey, we want to build a building that we're going to house all these organizations out of.

They're not going to pay for anything because they can't because they're government funded. And if they pay for that, they would have to go buy the same stipulations we do. So we say, Nope, no, no, we're not charging you whatsoever. And then on top of that, being able to provide workforce development, and a lot of volunteer services under one roof.

So that's where we created this whole campus. Right? And this campus is going to be huge not a fun factor, but a little fact that you guys need to know our thought process behind this is we can engage any veteran. So a lot of you guys are familiar with statistic of the 22 veterans that commit suicide a day, right?

The genome 18 of those veterans are not accessing any types of services. That's mind blowing, not accessing any types of services, meaning they're not going to the hospital. They're not going in these buildings to get help for food, et cetera. So our thought is, is like, Hey, what if we just created this veteran hub where they belong?

They want to be with their other brothers and sisters. They're going to be more apt to ask for help, especially if I can say, Hey, yeah, dude, I got that for you. Let's go over to the next building right here. Let's go. The social security. Let's go ahead and apply for that. Let's go ahead and apply for the HUD VASH voucher.

Do we got your back? You're not alone doing this. We're going to make an impact in that. Not only just that, but being able to make services so much simpler for these guys. So they don't get bounced around all over and just give up. Right? So that's currently what we're doing and that's been amazing.

And having the guys, you know, donate Dell large amount of money to help us build that building. You guys have said, I have your back, I believe in your mission and, and we're doing it. We're doing it together. I mean, it's, this is mind blowing. Sorry. I gotta like really antsy talking about it just because like, I know what this means to me.

Like me looking back now, I felt like I got left behind. That's not going to ever happen to another veteran here. And it's because of you guys. And even then, like, your listener is saying, Hey, like I believe in this mission, I have your back too. And it's just, it's just amazing to even think about like, having that opportunity to make sure we don't leave anybody behind anymore.

You know?

Bill Keen: That's right. And, you know, I, I'm so inspired by the work that you're doing before definitely we want to talk about the national expansion and some of the other needs. Media attention that you've gotten. Cause it's been, it's been, I know you've probably, it's probably blows you away.

If you think about back to being that 22 or 23 year old kid in a bad place. And thank goodness, by the way that, that night, your wife directed you to that wounded warrior project and, things turned out the way they did here on this side of being at a Tough spot. But you know, I think about the success rate that you all have had, and I think that's powerful for you and for the veterans, for sure.

First off for you, and then also for even our listeners and other supporters and so forth. You're seeing about an 85%. Is that a number that I know we've been talking about where folks are able to get reacclimated into community, if you will? Well,

Brandonn Mixon: Yeah, absolutely. It actually, it's back up to more of a 93%, which is absolutely huge,

Um, in the answer. Yeah. it's less than in, in most cases, 20%, less than 20% in other housing authorities. What we contribute that to is, again, our case management ratio, right? Being able to really focus on the underlying issues with a lot of these guys and build the program around their needs.

But we're also seeing, again, a lot of programs are 12-month program. We're seeing 16 to 18 months. If we're transitioning them the 16, 18 months range, that's where that 93 94% success rate comes from as we're keeping them basically permanently housed and stable, which nobody has been able to try to figure out that number again, since we're not taking federal dollars, we can play with the length of stay.

And then when we transition them out mentally, like I said, this is what we're figuring out. 16-to-18-month timeframe mentally. They're saying, Hey, I'm stable. I'm able to stay stable now. And that's, what's in, ended up happening. I hope I explained that kind of correctly like it,

right?

Bill Keen: Oh, for sure. Steve, they furnished the tiny houses with all new supplies with, you know, with dishes, with silverware, with microwave, and they're nice. The inside. It's a nice, it's a nice look and feel inside these tiny homes. And when the veteran leaves they're able to take all their supplies with them.

Brandonn Mixon: Yeah. So, when an individual or individual veteran opens the house, everything inside the house is brand new. So pots paints the dishes fridge oven bed I mean, do you name the table that they have the laptop they have on top of that? Their intake process, right? Of kind of getting interviewed in a way.

We find out that they have family, whatever the case may be. So then we put pictures up of their family and maybe some of their favorite military photos, et cetera, and build around their needs. When they transition out again, that's there, since the us investing into them, they feel like people actually care about me.

And that's when they are like, Yes, I'm into this program. Like I am worth it. Right. And when they transition out, guess what? They have a fridge, they have an oven, they have all that stuff for their house when they transitioned to the permanent housing. And all of this stuff is brand. I mean, it's nice stuff we're talking about.

We have granite countertops in there. We have a lot of state-of-the-art stuff what's been amazing is, is. No, we're not, you know, paying out of our pocket per se, this is donors saying, Hey, let's donate this. Let's give them this. So we have partnerships built with Ikea, you know, with the brassica furniture, from our, you know, with Mitsubishi and a lot of these companies that are like, no, like.

We believe in your mission and it is very important and we're setting them up for success. So yes, everything inside the house, because it wasn't when they transitioned, they what's so amazing is as me, I think my, I think my garage or my, my front door for granted every single day, the coolest thing I've ever heard is like, well, I get my own front door.

It just liked me. And I that's, that's pretty powerful, you

Bill Keen: Yes, Yes, it is. Tell us about the national expansion. Okay. Because one of the things that has been an interesting, that I thought was very empowering was they're expanding nationwide and Steve, the area that they're in here in Kansas City, I would call it South Kansas City. their campus has actually improved.

Property valuations So folks might wonder about that. is this and how does this work? Well, the way that they've done this and the quality of the work that they've done and what they're doing, it's actually improving the communities in the surrounding where they're putting in these, campuses.

And so share a little bit about the nationwide expansion and some of the media attention that you've gotten around, that some of the momentum that you all are, are seeing.

Brandonn Mixon: Yeah you know when we created this, this was just a hobby for us. We had no clue it was going to take off. And then when time magazine was down here doing a, an article on us, they partner with you on Casey. And it's the only time in history that they've been able to pinpoint actually bringing a homeless population to an area and actually raising the property value.

And that's that thought a blow on a lot of these individuals minds like Holy cow, are you kidding me? So what kind of sparked the national expansion thing is Jason candor former secretary of state thought to be one of the next, you know, vice presidents for United States. Was here on a, an election per se, you know, kind of coming through.

He stops in and loved what we were doing. He was a vet himself. Well, the next thing we know about two months later, when he was on campaign, he dropped out and reached out to Brian and said, Hey, man, I don't want anybody to know. That's what I'm really having mental health issues. I've been kinda thinking about taking my life.

He's like, dude, we need to get you into the VA. So he directed him to the VA and. Right. Wrong or indifferent. we didn't hold his hand at the VA. He came back and he said, Hey you know, I got I got a degree from, I think it's Georgetown, right? Like he has his doctoral degree, his law degree from Georgetown.

And those who can't navigate the VA came back to us and said, Hey, like I can't do this. Like, I really need help. Went down there and got enrolled in the VA, got mental health you know, help and came back to us. And then I said, man, I owe you guys on our life. And we're just like, what are you talking about?

And he's like, literally I didn't have anybody to reach out to. You're talking to the dude that literally. Has, you know, Barack Obama texting them and Jill Biden, texting them and like all these influential figures

saying, Hey, I'll get you the best help you want. The dude just wanted to be around his brothers and sisters.

He wanted to feel like he used, cared about and loved. And that's what we were providing here. And then when he came back to us, he said, Hey you know, I've grown, you know, let America vote. I've done all these other great things. He's like, okay. I'm going to take this thing nationally and we're like, kind of laughing, like, yeah, yeah, dude, like good for you.

That's cool. Like, you're probably gonna go be a politician again. Right. But he was like, no, like truly I owe you guys my life and we're like, dude, we're not doing it. He said, all right, cool. So you're saying, you know, if I was in Cincinnati and I didn't have anywhere to go, I would have taken my own life.

You guys are okay with that. And we're like, yeah, you can't pull that card on this man. Like, darn it. I guess we're going nationally. So, He's taken this thing nationally. Our goal is to be in eight cities by 2022. Again, what's so unique about this as we're building these tiny houses according to code, and that allows us to be inside the city, the city limits.

We're currently working on Longmont, Colorado. What's new and cool and cutting edge about this is, is they're actually building our development inside of a development, Longmont, Colorado, that the houses are anywhere from, I think it's 600,000 to \$4 million. Right. And then,

Yeah. And it's actually in the center of it, right.

So I've been, it, isn't kind of the whole nine people. Like why would you do that? Well, affordable housing is really hard to come by. And so we kind of fit that affordable housing on top of the new generation of, you know, HOA dues or amenities were kind of included in that. And so people were totally okay with saying, Hey, Yeah.

If I'm paying HOA dues, I might as well just go ahead and help people out with it. Right. Instead of me having a fancy sauna or pool or whatever, like I want to help this, this other population, right. In order to kind of like, okay, like, we'll see how this goes. Like, that's kind of hard. Like, I don't want to live next to a homeless person, you know, but it's just the way our houses are built and case management and a lot of that.

So we went to one of the board meetings and Colorado, cause we're like for sure you know, one one's going to throw up because think about it. No everybody goes for it. And I think like 42 people showed up to talk about this scenario, nobody said one thing about us building the homeless you know, housing and Longmont would, they were concerned about was the Monarch butterflies.

And we were going to put them like that. This tells you like. The mindset, like people are here are okay with this. Like we love it. We're currently in Longmont, Colorado now, legacy in St. Louis. We're working on, on Sioux falls, a lot of different places, but again, it's taken off, we've had over 4,000 cities reach out to us.

And we had no clue that was going to happen. It literally is. It's been taken off like crazy. We're just trying to make sure we do the model. Right. And making sure we're taking care of a lot of our veterans.

Bill Keen: We're just honored to be a small part of your efforts. Brandon, and I want to make sure I tell you first off, thank you for your service.

Brandonn Mixon: Thank you, sir.

Bill Keen: it's a huge deal. And to all your, your brothers and sisters there as well that have served and all the folks that you do serve that have served you know, We're a financial program and a retirement planning show. And, we talk a lot about, you know, social security, Medicare taxes, the stock market will the living in retirement and estate planning and all those topics. But the topic that we got to discuss today and the work that you're doing is it's in my mind every bit as important, And so I just really appreciate you allowing me. To use my platform here to bring awareness to you and to your organization and to all the momentum that you have going right now. And, if somebody wants to learn more Brandon, What's the best way for them to get in touch with you all or learn more about your organization?

I know the website for sure. And maybe some other possibilities maybe too, or your facility. I mean, I you tell us

Brandonn Mixon: Yeah, absolutely. So it's veterans community, project.org. We have Instagram, we have like a YouTube channel. That's the best way to, to kind of learn more about it as soon as an email to our info inbox. That's another way to get engaged or follow us on Facebook. We post a lot of different stuff on Facebook.

Because, well, you know, I challenged every single one of you guys to come down and tour, you know, here in K.C. And this get involved, you know, to be honest with you, Bill, I just want to say thank you for having my back. You know, I literally picture myself, you know, on the street, you know, kind of being that guy and being lost in that battle and you going on that battlefield and describing my hand, man, or dragging me to safety.

I mean, that's, that's what you guys have done. And I just want to give you that, that viewpoint because you have our back, you know, the community's had our back and, and now, you know, your view is hopefully they have our back too. And I just want to say, thank you literally for also pulling me out of the trenches as well.

So, sorry. I know that was kind of like touchy-feely, but I just wanna let you know, like truly how humble and think I am for you for you having my back man, and pulling me out of that trench, you know,

Bill Keen: Brandon, thank you for, for voice in that. It's in my opinion about just the least that we could do for other so, but I appreciate you voicing that in a major way. Thank you.

Brandonn Mixon: Yeah. I mean, there's a lot, it means a lot to us, man. You're doing more than the them, but a baseball game and clapping you're in the trenches with us. So I, I truly am thankful for that, man.

Bill Keen: Well, you're welcome. I was in that generation born in 1968, that as Vietnam was ending that I didn't serve in the military. So I was kind of in that. zone age, you know, I'm 52 today. And my grandfather who I've done posts on Steve, you might recall. And we have some things here.

He was a, he was a ranger. He was in the big red one. He stood guard at the trials of Nuremberg did time in world war II, Korea, Vietnam, and I loved spending time with him and hearing the stories from him. And he was just my hero. and that was as close as I got to military.

And so I have a deep, respect for the liberties that you all, all branches have given our country. It's not lost on, on me and never will be so.

Brandonn Mixon: No. Thanks. And thanks for giving us the platform, you know, to your viewers and listeners, man. Hey, if he knows somebody that's struggling or. Even in Kansas City, like, did we have their back, don't leave them behind, you know, just like, you know, Bill and, and, and step in the trenches for a bit and then help them out and say, Hey, like I know this great program.

Let's figure out how to get you involved in it, or, Hey, let's figure out how to bring it to our city. Because you guys can make that impact as well and change your life as well. So I just want to make sure that those guys hear that.

Bill Keen: That's a great point. well, Brandon, thank you so much for spending time with us today. I deeply appreciate it. And for any of you listeners out there again, please reach out to VCP. To Brandon directly or any of the folks at VCP, if you want to understand more, take a tour, get involved.

And if you have any questions for me specifically, or personally, you can always reach out to me as well. Be keen@keenwealthadvisors.com. And I'll be happy to share with you our, passion around this project. So we'll look forward to seeing everybody on the next episode, Keen On Retirement.

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