

DeKalb County Veterans' Treatment Court

Mentor Manual

Most veterans are strengthened by their military service, but the combat experience has unfortunately left a growing number of veterans with mental health or substance abuse issues. “One in five veterans has symptoms of a mental health disorder or cognitive impairment. One in six veterans who served in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom suffer from a substance abuse issue. Research continues to draw a link between substance abuse and combat-related mental illness” (justiceforvets.org). Combat-related issues may contribute to escalated suicide attempts, arrests, incarceration, divorce, domestic violence, homelessness and despair. Veterans' courts attempt to divert eligible veteran-defendants with substance abuse and/or mental health issues into a specialized docket.

The concept of Veterans' Courts involves providing veteran offenders access to long-term substance abuse or mental health treatment services while under the strict supervision of the Veterans' Court. A Veterans' Treatment Court judge handles numerous veterans' cases and is supported by a strong, interdisciplinary team. He or she is in a much better position to exercise discretion and effectively respond than a judge who only occasionally hears a case involving a veteran defendant, and to better understand the issues that a veteran may be struggling with in their life. The DeKalb County Veterans' Treatment Court team brings together professionals from the criminal justice system, Veterans' Affairs Health and Benefits Departments, treatment centers, law enforcement and local community resources. The Veterans Benefit Administration will provide a representative to ensure that veterans receive disability compensation, and education and training benefits. The participants also receive support from veteran mentors affiliated with the Veterans' Court. Mentors provide camaraderie, support, and meet with participants to solve problems, connect with resources, and encourage. This collaboration among professionals and resources will assist veterans to regain stability, strengthen their families, secure stable housing and employment, and avoid further criminal activity.

The Veterans Treatment Court model requires regular court appearances, attendance at treatment sessions, case management supervision and frequent and random testing for substance use. Veterans respond favorably to this structured environment given their past experiences in the Armed Forces. At regular court appearances, participants are congratulated for progress, conditions are reviewed, incentives are awarded for compliance, or sanctions are administered for non-adherence to program rules. The ability to hold offenders accountable for their choices and behaviors in a timely manner is a valuable tool in modifying an offender's behavior. Many

veterans will have their charges reduced or dismissed, while others may not face incarceration in their case upon successful completion of the program.

Veterans accepted into the DCVTC must:

- Have served in the Armed Forces.
- Meet clinical criteria for substance abuse or dependence and/or a mental health diagnosis, and have a connection between the diagnosis and their criminal behavior.
- Have no charges pending in another county
- Have no prior/current violent felony charges
- Also, the current charges must fall within other specific eligibility guidelines, and guidelines regarding the Indiana Risk Assessment System.

The Ten Key Components of Veterans Treatment Court

In 2008, The Buffalo Veterans Treatment Court adopted with slight modifications the essential tenements of the U.S. Department of Justice Publication entitled “Defining Drug Courts: The Key Components”, (Jan.1997). There are key differences between Drug Courts, Mental Health Courts, and Veterans Treatment Courts. These Key Components provide the foundation for the successful operation of a Veterans Treatment Court.

Key Component #1: Veterans Treatment Court integrate alcohol, drug treatment, and mental health services with justice system case processing

Veterans Treatment Courts promote sobriety, recovery and stability through a coordinated response to veteran’s dependency on alcohol, drugs, and/or management of their mental illness. Realization of these goals requires a team approach. This approach includes the cooperation and collaboration of the traditional partners found in drug treatment courts and mental health treatment courts with the addition of the Veteran Administration Health Care Network, veterans and veterans family support organizations, and veteran volunteer mentors.

Key Component #2: Using a nonadversarial approach, prosecution and defense counsel promote public safety while protecting participants' due process rights

To facilitate the veterans’ progress in treatment, the prosecutor and defense counsel shed their traditional adversarial courtroom relationship and work together as a team. Once a veteran is accepted into the treatment court program, the team’s focus is on the veteran’s recovery and law-abiding behavior—not on the merits of the pending case.

Key Component #3: Eligible participants are identified early and promptly placed in the Veterans Treatment Court program

Early identification of veterans entering the criminal justice system is an integral part of the process of placement in the Veterans Treatment Court program. Arrest can be a traumatic event in a person's life. It creates an immediate crisis and can compel recognition of inappropriate behavior into the open, making denial by the veteran for the need for treatment difficult.

Key Component #4: Veterans Treatment Court provide access to a continuum of alcohol, drug, mental health and other related treatment and rehabilitation services

While primarily concerned with criminal activity, AOD use, and mental illness, the Veterans Treatment Court team also consider co-occurring problems such as primary medical problems, transmittable diseases, homelessness; basic educational deficits, unemployment and poor job preparation; spouse and family troubles—especially domestic violence—and the ongoing effects of war time trauma.

Key Component #5: Abstinence is monitored by frequent alcohol and other drug testing

Frequent court-ordered alcohol and drug testing is essential. An accurate testing program is the most objective and efficient way to establish a framework for accountability and to gauge each participant's progress.

Key Component #6: A coordinated strategy governs Veterans Treatment Court responses to participants' compliance

A veteran's progress through the treatment court experience is measured by his or her compliance with the treatment regimen. Veterans Treatment Court reward cooperation as well as respond to noncompliance. Veterans Treatment Court establishes a coordinated strategy, including a continuum of graduated responses, to continuing drug use and other noncompliant behavior.

Key Component #7: Ongoing judicial interaction with each Veteran is essential

The judge is the leader of the Veterans Treatment Court team. This active, supervising relationship, maintained throughout treatment, increases the likelihood that a veteran will remain in treatment and improves the chances for sobriety and law-abiding behavior. Ongoing judicial supervision also communicates to veterans that someone in authority cares about them and is closely watching what they do.

Key Component #8: Monitoring and evaluation measure the achievement of program goals and gauge effectiveness

Management and monitoring systems provide timely and accurate information about program progress. Program monitoring provides oversight and periodic measurements of the program's performance against its stated goals and objectives. Information and conclusions developed from periodic monitoring reports, process evaluation activities, and longitudinal evaluation studies may be used to modify program

Key Component #9: Continuing interdisciplinary education promotes effective Veterans Treatment Court planning, implementation, and operations

All Veterans Treatment Court staff should be involved in education and training. Interdisciplinary education exposes criminal justice officials to veteran treatment issues, and Veteran Administration, veteran volunteer mentors, and treatment staff to criminal justice issues. It also develops shared understandings of the values, goals, and operating procedures of both the veteran administration, treatment and the justice system components.

Education and training programs help maintain a high level of professionalism, provide a forum for solidifying relationships among criminal justice, Veteran Administration, veteran volunteer mentors, and treatment personnel, and promote a spirit of commitment and collaboration.

Key Component #10: Forging partnerships among Veterans Treatment Court, Veterans Administration, public agencies, and community-based organizations generates local support and enhances Veteran Treatment Court effectiveness

Because of its unique position in the criminal justice system, Veterans Treatment Court is well suited to develop coalitions among private community-based organizations, public criminal justice agencies, the Veteran Administration, veterans and veterans families support organizations, and substance abuse and mental health treatment delivery systems. Forming such coalitions expands the continuum of services available to Veterans Treatment Court participants and informs the community about Veterans Treatment Court concepts. The Veterans Treatment Court fosters system wide involvement through its commitment to share responsibility and participation of program partners.

Veteran peer mentors are essential to the Veterans Treatment Court team. Ongoing veteran peer mentors interaction with the Veterans Treatment Court participants is essential. Their active, supportive relationship, maintained throughout treatment, increases the likelihood that a veteran will remain in treatment and improves the chances for sobriety and law-abiding behavior.

Role of the DCVTC Mentor

The Veteran Mentor acts as a coach, a guide, a role model, an advocate, and a support for the veteran participant.

Many of our veteran participants have isolated themselves, have alienated family and friends, and have given up on themselves. Their volunteer mentor may be the only person participants feel they can turn to for help and understanding. We ask that mentors exchange contact information with participants and meet to get to know them.

We ask that when you are communicating with a participant and you sense something is wrong or out of the ordinary, contact their case manager and they will instruct you in what to do. Our goal is to protect the community and our participants, and help them rebuild their lives. Holding participants accountable for all their actions is an important part of their recovery and stability.

As many of our participants have experienced substance abuse issues, we ask that mentors be committed to participants' abstinence from alcohol and drugs. Please, understand that meeting where alcohol is served is prohibited.

Mentor Duties and Responsibilities

1. Attend one court hearing a month.
2. Participate in and lead mentoring sessions.
3. Act as a resource for veteran participants.
4. Act as a role model and friend, not as a counselor.
5. Communicate with the court about successes and concerns. Court admonishes, mentors motivate.
6. Commitment to follow the mentoring program policies and attend trainings throughout time of service.
7. At least a 6 month commitment to the mentoring program in order to maintain an effective program.

The mentoring program requires mentors to be a veteran of the United States Military, have an honorable discharge, and provide a DD214 stating such.

NOTE: Mentors must always defer to mental health experts when the Veteran exhibits behavior associated with depression and/or suicidal thoughts. It is imperative that Mentors refer to mental health providers and inform the probation officer of any of the above behaviors if suspicious that the Veteran is struggling with such issues. Remember: When in doubt, it is better to be safe.

Veteran Mentor Desired Qualities

- Active listener
- Encouraging and supportive/sensitive to the needs of our Veterans
- Tolerant and respectful of individual differences
- Knowledge of Veterans Affairs services
- Knowledge of community resources and services
- Proactive

- Dependable/Reliable

Veteran Treatment Court Mentors must recognize that many of the offending veteran's issues are much deeper than "making bad choices" or "breaking the law".

Ideas:

Provide transportation.

Help veteran offender find employment.

Escort them to court or the VA.

Eat lunch/have coffee.

Take phone calls for advice on life.

Refer to resource book provided by the court.

Do NOT:

Do NOT enable participant by lessening consequences or minimizing poor decisions.

Do NOT give legal advice. Refer questions about court or legal matters to probation.

Do NOT attempt to be a counselor.

Court Process:

- After receiving information about a potential veteran offender, the coordinator determines eligibility.
- The coordinator or designee will complete an assessment and present the relevant information to the Team. Final determination for acceptance resides with the Judge.
- The VA Justice Outreach Specialist helps the veteran determine their eligibility for earned health, education and other benefits.
- Accepted veterans sign a participation agreement that functions as their plea agreement and rules while in the program.
- The case manager and participant create program goals and a case plan to work toward stability and/or sobriety, including addressing education, employment, housing, social support, peer groups, and drug and alcohol use.
- Participants will appear for regularly scheduled hearings, attend treatment, meet with probation officers, complete alcohol/drug screening, and attend mentor meetings/support groups as required throughout the program.

- Case plan and goals will change throughout the program based on the veteran participants' circumstances and progress.
- Based upon performance, treatment completion, and case plan and goal execution, participants will graduate the program upon the Judge's recommendation.

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Volunteer Mentoring Program Application

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Phone 2: _____

Branch of Service: _____ Length of Service: _____

Type of Discharge: _____

Current occupation: _____

Are you available on Thursdays from 2:00 PM -3:00 PM? YES NO

What does being a "mentor" mean to you?

What motivated you to want to participate in the Veterans' Court Mentoring Program?

What skills and experiences do you bring to the mentoring program that will be helpful to you, the other mentors, or the veterans in the program? _____

What are you hoping to take away from volunteering with the Veterans' Court Mentoring Program? _____
