

Leavenworth County Veterans Treatment Court

Peer Mentor Handbook

May 2024



No Veteran Left Behind

Presiding Judge

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Section 1 Veterans Treatment Court (VTC)

The Court system in Leavenworth County realizes veterans face several challenges in addressing their military service-related trauma. Approximately 1.6 million American troops have served in Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom) and/or in Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom). Noteworthy are national reports regarding the frequency of returning veterans experiencing mental health and/or substance use disorders. Service-related trauma may contribute to escalated suicide attempts, arrest, incarceration, divorce, domestic violence, homelessness, and despair.

Veterans Treatment Court addresses veteran defendants with mental health and/or substance use disorders that are charged with felony or misdemeanor criminal offenses. The court substitutes a treatment problem-solving model for traditional court processing. The veterans voluntarily participate in a judicially supervised treatment plan. At regular status hearings, treatment plans and other conditions are periodically reviewed for appropriateness, incentives are offered to reward adherence to court conditions, and sanctions for non-adherence. Completion of their program is defined according to specific criteria. Upon completion, their charges may be dismissed or expunged.

1.1 Challenges Our Veterans Are Facing

Many Veterans are known to have a warrior's mentality and often do not address their treatment needs for physical and psychological health care. Often those who are referred to a Veterans Treatment Court are homeless, helpless, in despair, suffering from alcohol or drug use, and/or serious mental health issues. Their lives have been spiraling out of control. Without the collaboration of the VA Health Care Network, the Veterans Treatment Court, volunteer veteran peer mentors, and a coalition of community health care providers, many would continue to be untreated and would suffer the consequences of the traditional criminal justice system of jail or prison. This collaboration of unique partners affords the opportunity for these veterans to regain stability in their lives, to have their families strengthened, to have housing for the homeless, and to have employment for the employable. The treatment court team will find them, offer them assistance, assess their needs, manage their care, and help them solve their problems.

1.2 Veterans in the Criminal Justice System

Roughly 200,000 active-duty service members leave the armed forces each year. Most transition to civilian life successfully, demonstrating resilience amid a wide range of risk factors and obstacles. Others, however, struggle with mental health challenges, substance abuse, homelessness, and criminality.

Roughly one-third of veterans report having been arrested and booked into jail at least once in their lives, compared to less than one-fifth of non-veterans. According to the most recent national survey, a total of 181,500 veterans were in U.S. prisons and jails.

Participants of the Court will have access to our peer mentor support program provided by a team of volunteer veteran peer mentors. This team is supervised by a Mentor Coordinator whose role is to recruit, train, and supervise the volunteer peer mentors. The Mentor Coordinator will assign a mentor to meet with a veteran participant and discuss any ongoing problems or issues of interest. Mentors engage with their Veterans to problem-solve existing issues and bring to the attention of the Mentor Coordinator any issues that the court may be able to assist in resolving. This relationship promotes and fosters through encouragement a "can do" attitude in the veteran, that the veteran can accomplish their goals in treatment, that the veterans are not alone, and that the mentors are there for them. At the beginning of the court operation, the volunteer veteran peer mentors will not waiver in their commitment, time, or dedication, despite the fact they are not monetarily compensated for their time or expertise. Faithfully they are present, ready to serve every Veteran - without reservation. The goal is to empower the Veteran so they can continue their success after graduation from the Veterans Treatment Court.

1.3 Ten Key Components

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.

Leavenworth County VTC has adopted these Ten Key Components of Veterans Treatment Courts.

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

Veterans Treatment Courts promotes 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 non-adversarial 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.

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.

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

Frequent court-ordered AOD 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 AOD 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.

Section 2 Peer Mentor Support Program

Peer mentors serve to engage, encourage, and empower the Veteran participants. Peer mentors listen to the concerns and problems of participants and assist them in finding resolutions. They provide feedback to participants and highlight their success. Most importantly, peer mentors act as a support for the veteran participant in a way that only other veterans can. The shared experiences of another veteran will be critical in assisting the participant to regain

control of his/her life and successfully connect to and maintain community supports, which will lead to successful completion in the Veterans Treatment Court. This relationship will help to promote a positive attitude in the veteran while encouraging them to be self-motivated to accomplish their goals. Knowing that they are not alone and they have someone “in their corner” who understands them is a key element of the VTC program.

2.1 Mission of the Peer Mentor Support Program

The mission of the Veterans Treatment Court Peer Mentor Support Program is to ensure that each participant in the Veterans Treatment Court is matched with peer mentor support to help in navigating the system as they work their way through recovery and reintegration.

2.2 Goals of the Mentoring Program

- Help our fellow veterans receive the services they need to reach their full potential as productive members of society.
- Help our fellow veterans navigate the court system, treatment systems, and the VA system.
- Assess our fellow veteran’s needs and help them adjust back to civilian life.
- Build supportive relationships maintained throughout treatment to increase the likelihood that a veteran will remain in treatment and improve their chances of sobriety and law-abiding behavior.

2.3 Peer Mentor Coordinator

The Peer Mentor Coordinator, with the assistance of the Veterans Treatment Court Coordinator, will screen and interview all potential mentors. The Peer Mentor Coordinator will be responsible for training selected candidates in skills to facilitate mentoring sessions and skills specific to the Veterans Treatment Court. The Peer Mentor Coordinator will be responsible for individual and group supervision of the volunteer peer mentors, as well as scheduling peer mentors to be present during the Veterans Treatment Court proceedings. The Mentor Coordinator is part of the Court’s team and relays any mentor concerns to the court. The Peer Mentor Coordinator works in collaboration with VTC Coordinator.

2.4 Veteran Peer Mentor Requirements

- Be a veteran of one of the branches of the United States Military, including the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, or their corresponding Reserve and National Guard branches.
- Adhere to all the Veterans Treatment Court policies and procedures.
- Commit to program participation for a minimum of one year.
- Complete the Peer Mentor orientation program and any additional training that may be required by the program.
- Complete and file an application form with the VTC Coordinator.
- Complete the screening process including record check and interview.
- Peer mentor applications with criminal history may be excluded.

***Knowledge of a Prospective Mentee's History**

Current Veteran Peer Mentors with knowledge of any prospective mentee's history or background that may jeopardize the integrity of the Volunteer Peer Mentor Support program, the Court, and/or the Veteran Participant, must communicate their knowledge or concerns to the Peer Mentor Coordinator, the VTC Coordinator or the Judge.

2.4.1 Veteran Peer Mentor Desirable Qualities

- Active listener.
- Supportive and able to maintain boundaries.
- Positive role model.
- Provides positive encouragement.
- Confident in sharing personal experiences.
- Acts as an advocate in the best interest of their mentee.
- Is available when a Veteran is in need of support.

2.4.2 Peer Mentor Disqualifications

- VTC peer mentors will not enter into legal actions, financial actions, or intimate relationships with Veterans in the VTC program.
- VTC peer mentors will not use the VTC program and/or mentee in any campaign materials, advertising, endorsements, or promotional materials.
- VTC peer mentors should not accept gifts of money, property, or services, from the Veterans in the VTC program.
- VTC peer mentors should not engage in activities with their assigned Veteran while under the influence of alcohol or illegal drug use.
- Any action to recruit or coerce a mentee financially, politically, or religiously will result in exclusion from the mentor program.
- Peer mentors who are arrested/charged with criminal offenses may be excluded.

***Peer Mentors, acting as part of the Leavenworth County VTC, should maintain a positive public appearance in accordance with the goals and guidelines set forth by the VTC program.**

Any public representations that may reflect negatively on the program are not acceptable.

We encourage Veterans to apply to the mentoring program. Acceptance into the VTC Peer Mentor program is done on a case-by-case basis. While these guidelines are intended to cover various situations, in order to better protect and serve the participants we reserve the right to limit anyone's participation as a mentor. The VTC has the option to alter mentor assignments or exclude mentor participation at any time if it could be perceived as a conflict of interest.

A mentor may be removed from the program without cause for any reason that violates the terms of the VTC.

Contact Information

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