



ORANGE COUNTY VETERANS COURT MENTOR HANDBOOK

VETERAN'S COURT: A PROACTIVE APPROACH

As the veteran population in the United States continues to rise, so does the need for greater understanding of the impact of military service. In October 2008, the estimated United States veteran population was 23,442,000. Since October 2001, approximately 1.64 million U.S. troops have been deployed for Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom missions. Military service can impact the lives of veterans and their families in countless ways. Many returning veterans and their families cope with serious issues such as: alcohol and substance abuse, mental illness, homelessness, unemployment, and strained relationships.

Issues/ Problems Facing Veterans

Men and women in the United States military endure high costs of service. While some of these costs are immediate, such as death or injury, other costs may not surface until years later. The impact of military service on veterans can be substantial and long-lasting. These may include alcohol and substance abuse, mental illness, homelessness, unemployment, and strained relationships.

Alcohol and Substance Abuse

Alcohol and substance abuse exists among all classes, ages, and races of people in the United States. It is an issue that knows no boundaries and impacts a great deal of people's lives in some way. The veteran population is even more susceptible to alcohol and substance abuse than other populations in America. The 2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health found that 56.6% of veterans had used alcohol, and 7.5% reported heavy alcohol use in the previous month. Results of the 2003 survey also indicated a higher use of marijuana by veterans than non-veterans in the past month. However, of the 256,000 veterans in need of treatment for illicit drug use in the past year, [only] 20% had received treatment.

Homelessness

Homelessness disproportionately affects veterans. It is estimated that 23% of the homeless population in the United States are veterans. It is also estimated that on any given night, anywhere from 154,000 to 200,000 veterans are on the streets. In any given year, approximately 400,000 veterans will experience homelessness. Problems like homelessness are often accompanied by psychological trauma or illness. Within the homeless veteran population itself, 45% suffer from mental illness, and over half of them are struggling with a substance abuse problem.

Strained Relationships

When service members are deployed, they leave behind family and friends. Military life and deployment can have a lasting effect on not only on service members, but the people in their lives, as well. Research indicates that military personnel, particularly those who have been deployed several times, will suffer from strained marriages and relationships. These strained relationships may have further consequences. In 2006, 20% of service members planned on separating or divorcing.

Unemployment

Veterans face higher unemployment rates than their non-veteran counterparts. This is particularly true for veterans who served during the Gulf War era, from August 1990 forward. The younger the veteran, the more likely they are to experience homelessness. In 2005, the Bureau of Labor Statistics calculated an unemployment rate of 18.7% for Gulf War era veterans aged eighteen to twenty-four years old. For non-veterans aged eighteen to twenty-four the unemployment rate was only 9.9%.

Mental Health

Research indicates that the most pervasive and potentially disabling consequence of military service is the threat to the psychological health. Rates of mental illness are particularly high within the deployed veteran population. Signature injuries of the Iraq and Afghanistan operations are Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury, and (TBI). In particular, 17% to 28% of brigade combat teams are at risk for serious symptoms of PTSD.

The Department of Defense Task Force on Mental Health has determined that the current system of care for psychological health is insufficient in meeting the needs of service members and their families. The military's mental health care system reflects trends in American health care and mental health treatment. These trends demonstrate a shift towards acute, short-term treatment models. The Task Force has identified current barriers to service members accessing mental health treatment, including gaps in insurance coverage and the stigma, or perceived stigma associated with treatment. Many veterans are reluctant to seek assistance for their mental health needs. This reluctance is likely linked in part to the veteran's warrior mentality.

Guard and Reserve

These mental health issues are presenting themselves not only in active duty soldiers and Marines, but increasingly among National Guard and Reserve members. The recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan has called for a significant amount of deployments by the National Guard and Reserve troops, who, in the past, were less likely to be deployed. Studies indicate that special considerations are needed for these service members. On the Post Deployment Reassessment, 49% of the National Guard, and 43% of the Marine Reserve self-reported their psychological health concerns.

Women in the military

Female veterans are an area of unique concern. The impact of military service on women is distinct, especially when it comes to their mental health. Currently, 8% of the 23,442,000 veterans are female. As a sub-population, female veterans face a unique set of issues as a result of their military experience. Deployed women are currently facing more combat situations than in past wars. With deployment, comes a higher likelihood of PTSD, as well as the potential psychological impact of any sexual trauma perpetuated by fellow military personnel.

Co-occurring disorders

When left untreated, mental health problems can lead to other serious issues, such as substance abuse. Individuals may use drugs and alcohol to self-medicate and alleviate the symptoms of an underlying mental health issue. More than half of the individuals abusing alcohol or other substances are suffering from a mental health disorder.

Background Information on Veterans in the Criminal Justice System

According to the Bureau of Justice (2004), there were 140,000 veterans incarcerated in State and Federal prison. Of these 140,000, 61% or 85,000 of State inmates and 57% or 79,000 of Federal inmates met the criteria for substance abuse, and there were 18% or 25,400 veterans in both State and Federal prison recognized for suffering from a mental illness.

Key Components of Veterans Treatment Courts

Veterans Treatment Courts operate similarly to drug treatment and mental health courts. Drug treatment courts operate within the guidelines of the Ten Key Components of Drug Court, developed by a commission of drug court practitioners in 1995. Veterans Treatment Courts feature the following 10 key operational standards which are adapted from the Ten Key Components.

Veterans Treatment Courts:

1. Integrate alcohol, drug treatment and mental health services with justice system case processing
2. Use a non-adversarial approach where prosecution and defense counsel promote public safety while protecting veteran participants' due process rights
3. Identify eligible participants early and promptly place them in the Veterans Treatment Court program
4. Provide access to a continuum of alcohol, drug, mental health and other related treatment and rehabilitation services
5. Monitor abstinence through frequent alcohol and other drug testing
6. Respond to veteran participants' compliance through a coordinated strategy
7. Maintain essential, ongoing judicial interaction with each veteran
8. Measure achievement of program goals and gauge program effectiveness through monitoring and ongoing evaluation
9. Continue interdisciplinary education and promote effective Veterans Treatment Court planning, implementation and operations
10. Forge partnerships among Veterans Treatment Court, Veterans Administration, public agencies and community-based organizations, generate local support and enhance Veterans Treatment Court's effectiveness

Mentor Component

An essential component of the Veterans Court program is the mentor program. This is where veteran mentors act as peer support to veteran participants. Veterans are better served by having a support system that includes fellow veterans who understand combat experience and the different aspects of military service. Mentors participate in a supportive relationship with participants to increase the likelihood that they will remain in treatment, attain and manage sobriety, maintain law-abiding behavior and successfully readjust to civilian life.

The mentor program consists of mentor coordinators and veteran mentors. Their roles, responsibilities, requirements and qualifications are discussed in the following section.

The mission of the Orange County Veterans Court Mentor Program is to ensure that every participating Veteran has a fellow Veteran to act as a mentor, advocate and ally.

Veteran mentors should:

1. Meet with participants (one meeting per week, one of which being face to face and other meetings may be telephonic or other electronic means) to assist in resolving their issues:
 - a. Each meeting should build on the participants' previous conversations
 - b. Meetings should be conducted in person (when and where possible)
 - c. Refer participants to appropriate services
 - d. Facilitate an understanding of courtroom procedures
2. Work collaboratively with the other mentors and the mentor coordinator.
3. Motivate participants utilizing a strengths-based approach by:
 - a. Provide encouragement to participants by highlighting their strengths, including, talents, skills, and knowledge
 - b. Focusing on what has been successful
 - c. Believing that participants have the potential to learn, grow and change
4. Maintain federal confidentiality standards.
5. Attend clinical and legal training programs supported or provided by the Veterans Court:
 - a. Mentors should attend an initial training session where topics may include Veterans Court's policies and procedures, mentoring dos and don'ts, psychopharmacology, mental illness, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury.
6. Communicate with their mentor coordinator to resolve any issues regarding time commitments, resistant participants or unmanageable challenges:
 - a. If a mentor fears for the safety of a participant or is concerned about a participant's behavior, the mentor should report any concerns to their mentor coordinator immediately.

7. Update the mentor logbook after speaking with a participant.
8. Commit to a period working with the veteran through graduation (6 to 18 months).
9. Provide a valid military service record (DD214 or DD215) and, submit to background verification.

Responsibilities of Veteran Mentors

The following responsibilities should be carried out by veteran mentors:

- Attend relevant training programs
- Communicate with the mentor coordinator regarding any issues
- Update the mentor logs
- Maintain confidentiality
- Maintain appropriate boundaries with participants
- Be respectful and always speak with a positive tone
- Be respectful of individual differences
- Share personal experience
- Promote and foster “can do” attitude
- Listen
- Be supportive and understanding
- Help motivate veteran to accomplish goals in treatment

While meeting with participants, mentors **must NOT**:

- Make clinical recommendations
- Give legal advice
- Provide psychotherapy
- Utilize a stern approach
- Inappropriately extend the boundaries of their relationship – no borrowing or lending of money, no sexual relationships, no drinking or drugs, and no unlawful activities
- Discourage participants from attending VA (no VA bashing).

Requirements and Qualifications for Veteran Mentors

To become a mentor:

- Complete a mentor application form (attached)
- Provide a valid DD214 or DD215 (honorable discharge is preferred, but not required)
- Submit to a background check
 - No convictions of a violent felony in the last 5 years (if you are a Veterans Court graduate this does not include the offense for which you were referred to Veterans Court)
 - No conviction of substance abuse related offense in the last 5 years (if you are a Veterans Court graduate this does not include the offense for which you were

- referred to Veterans Court)
- If you are a Veterans Court graduate you must be 12 months post- graduation and have no new offenses, charges, or arrests
- Not be an active employee of the Ninth Judicial Circuit Court, an active member of law enforcement or a member of any other organization that may present a conflict of interest with the mentor program
- Commit to a working with the veteran through graduation (6 to 18 months).

Recruitment Policy

The Veteran Mentor Coordinator assumes the majority of the responsibility for recruiting new mentors. Veteran Mentors are strongly encouraged to refer highly respectable and reputable veterans to the Veteran Mentor Program. Additionally, Veteran’s Court Team members and Veteran Mentors are strongly encouraged to attend and host informational sessions and training for perspective mentors.

Inquiry Policy

All inquiries about participating as a Veteran Mentor will be directed to the Veteran Mentor Coordinator. The Veteran Mentor Coordinator will respond to any prospective mentor inquiries within two weeks.

Eligibility Policy

Each Veteran Mentor must meet the eligibility criteria to participate in the program. Extenuating circumstances may be reviewed at the discretion of the Veteran Mentor Coordinator.

Knowledge of a Prospective Mentor’s Negative History

Current Veteran Mentors with knowledge of any prospective mentor’s history or background that may jeopardize the integrity of the Volunteer Mentor Program, the Court, and the Veteran Participants must communicate their knowledge or concerns to the Volunteer Mentor Coordinator.

Screening Policy

Each prospective Mentor must complete the screening process. The Volunteer Mentor Coordinator is responsible for conducting the screening process. The decision to accept or deny an applicant will be made by the Mentor Coordinator based on the process and criteria set forth in this handbook. Feedback regarding the prospective mentor’s denial may or may not be given. The right to withhold or give feedback is solely at the discretion of the Mentor Coordinator.

The Volunteer Mentor Screening procedure will include, but not be limited to:

1. Completing a written application form (including DD214/215)

2. Passing a background check
3. Completing a personal interview

Training Policy

All prospective mentors must complete the required initial training or they will not be able to mentor during court proceedings.

Training may include but not be limited to the following (the first wave of mentors may have different training):

1. Observe Several Court sessions
2. Shadow three mentoring sessions with three different mentors
3. Lead three mentoring sessions while being observed
4. Complete the observation forms
5. Discuss experience leading the mentoring sessions
6. Complete individual supervision with the Mentor Coordinator

Assignment Policy

The Volunteer Mentor Coordinator will assign mentors to a veteran participant at each court appearance. As mentors are not always present at each session, the Volunteer Mentor Coordinator will assign any available mentor to the participating veteran. Whenever possible the Volunteer Mentor Coordinator will assign mentors based on the following criteria:

1. Previous sessions where a Volunteer Mentor was assigned to a particular Veteran Participant
2. Same branch of service, for example, Air Force-to-Air Force, Marine-to-Marine, etc.
3. Same war time era, for example, Vietnam to Vietnam and Iraq to Iraq
4. Specific skill of a Volunteer Mentor that a Participating Veteran may need
5. Similar age/ gender/ ethnicity

Additionally, the Volunteer Mentor Coordinator will also take into consideration the request of the Volunteer Mentor or Veteran Participant. The Volunteer Mentor Coordinator reserves the right to assign a mentor to a Veteran Participant as seen fit.

Documentation and Record Keeping Policy

During Court proceedings, each contact between the mentor and the veteran participant will be documented in the Veteran Mentor Log by the Volunteer Mentor. The Veteran Mentor Log is kept in a binder or notebook and has the name of each veteran participant on each binder and demographic information such as marital status, branch of military, MOS, etc..

The Documentation Process:

1. The Veteran Mentor will take the assigned Veteran Participant's Log with them during any mentoring session
2. The Volunteer Mentor will document the mentoring session in the Log
3. Documentation of all mentoring sessions is necessary and mandatory
4. Volunteer Mentor will not promise any outcome for a Volunteer Participant
5. After the mentoring session has been documented, the Volunteer Mentor will put the Log back in the appropriate place
6. The Volunteer Mentor Coordinator, Project Director, Court staff, or the Judge will lock the Log in a safe and secure place
7. When court is not in session the Log will always be kept in a locked and secured place

Confidentiality Policy

Confidentiality is an essential piece of successful mentoring. Veteran Participants need to know that their testimony and their mentoring session with a mentor is highly secured and confidential. Veteran Mentor training will include a mandatory confidentiality workshop.

Unacceptable Behavior Policy

Unacceptable behaviors will not be tolerated while a Veteran Mentor is participating in the program. Because of the direct impact a mentor has on a Veteran Participant, behaviors that are not aligned with the mission, vision, goals, and values of the Orange County Veterans Court are unacceptable and prohibited during court proceedings and mentoring sessions.

Recognition and Awards

At least once a year all mentors will be recognized for their role Veteran's Court. The Veteran Mentor Coordinator is responsible for planning and implementing recognition activities. Some possible recognition activities include:

1. An annual recognition event where mentors are recognized for their length of service to the mentoring program
2. An annual picnic utilizing outstanding mentors in the recruitment and training of new mentor

Veterans Court Mentor Application

Date: _____

Last Name: _____ First Name: _____

Address: _____

DOB: _____ Gender: _____ SSN: _____

Best Phone Number: _____ E-mail: _____

Service Branch: _____ Service Dates: _____

Rank: _____ Combat/Support of Combat Operation: Yes ___ No ___

Disabled: Yes ___ No ___ Type of Discharge: _____

Area of Operation: _____

Number of Deployments: _____ Area of Deployment(s): _____

Last Duty Station: _____

Previous Units Assigned: _____

Job(s)/Positon(s)/Career Field: _____

Achievements/Commendations: _____

Post Service Employer: _____ Position:

Do you speak a language other than English? Yes ___ No ___

If yes, list languages:

Have you previously served as a mentor? Yes ___ No ___

If yes, in what capacity and where? _____

Are you willing to submit to a background investigation? Yes ___ No ___

How did you learn about the Mentor Program?

What does being a mentor mean to you?

What skills and experiences do you bring to the mentoring program that will be helpful to the veterans in the program and the other mentor?

What are you hoping to take away from volunteering with the Veterans Court mentoring program?

Mentor Agreement

I, _____ attest that I am a veteran of one of the branches of the United States Armed Forces, including the Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, or their corresponding Reserve components.

In order to be a mentor in the Orange County Veterans Court, I agree:

1. To adhere to all of the Orange County Veterans Court policies and procedures.
2. To commit to participation until the Veteran graduates.
3. To complete the required initial training as specified by the Court.
4. To participate in any additional training as specified by the Orange County Veterans Court.
5. To visit with the participant for at least once a week, with one session being face to face.
6. Not to engage in any drug use, alcohol use, sexual activities, or any other unlawful activities with the court participants.
7. To notify the Veterans Mentor Coordinator or the Judge if the participant becomes suicidal or wants to harm others.

Signature

Date

State of Florida Ninth Judicial Circuit

Information Release

Social Security Number _____

Name (Please print) _____
First Middle Last

Date of Birth _____ Race _____ Sex _____

Driver's License Number _____

State _____

Expiration Date _____

I consent to the release of information about my ability, employment history, and fitness for employment by employers, schools, law enforcement agencies, and other individuals and organizations to investigators, personnel staff, and other authorized employees of the Florida State Courts and Ninth Judicial Circuit for consideration as a Veterans Court Mentor.

I agree to submit to Florida Criminal Information Center (FCIC) and National Criminal Information Center (NCIC) record checks.

I understand that all information collected during the background check will be kept confidential.

I understand that I do not have to agree to this background check, but refusal to do so may exclude me from consideration as a Veterans Court Mentor.

I hereby also extend my permission to those individuals or organizations contacted for the purpose of this background check to give their full and honest evaluation of my suitability for the mentor position, and other such information as they deem appropriate to this role.

Signature _____ Date _____