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Whitley County

Veterans Treatment Court

**Mentor Handbook**

**History and Purpose**

The Whitley County Veterans Treatment Court program began preparation in 2014 for the implementation of a Problem Solving Court in Whitley County. The Veterans Treatment Court has a purpose of helping participants achieve total abstinence from drugs and/or alcohol, be diverted from jail or prison, and to have a more satisfying law-abiding life. The Veterans Treatment Court is designed to reduce re-arrests, promote self-sufficiency through employment and education, and to help participants remain in the community as a productive and responsible member of society. The Veterans Treatment Court program is voluntary on their part. The program involves participants working jointly with the courts, community supervision, treatment providers, the Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefit Administration, veterans employment representatives, veterans service organizations, veterans service officers, and other key team members, all dedicated to their recovery for a minimum of 12-18 months. There is long term commitment to this program, as they will become involved with community support group meetings, attend substance abuse treatment (if indicated), participate in mental health treatment (if indicated), be subject to strict community supervision, submit to random drug testing, and make regular appearances in court.

**Mission Statement**

The mission of the Whitley County Veterans Treatment Court is to have a collaborative response from the community for delivering services to veterans involved in the criminal justice system. The Veterans Treatment Court will provide a structured tract to help rehabilitate participants from a more cooperative approach as opposed to the traditional criminal justice system. The Veterans Treatment Court will provide assistance in rehabilitative programming, vocational skills improvement, and treatment for mental health and/or substance use disorders. This collaborative approach will help give guidance and support, in addition to providing the tools needed to be law abiding citizens.

**Why a Veterans Court?**

Some may wonder, why create a treatment court specific to veterans? Why not work with these individuals within the established drug and mental health treatment courts? There are many answers to this question. Perhaps the most significant is that veterans are a niche population with unique needs. Service members have many shared experiences. Many of these experiences are not common among their non-military peers. Members of the military and veterans are a unique population, which calls for tailored care. Traditional community services may not be adequately suited to meet their needs. Service members and their families experience unique stressors as part of the military experience. Thus, the deliveries of high quality care (for psychological and substance abuse health, prevention, early intervention, and treatment) requires providers who are knowledgeable about and able to empathize with the military experience.

**Key Components of Veterans Treatment Court**

Veterans Treatment Courts operate similarly to drug treatment and mental health courts. The Veterans Treatment Court is a hybrid court combining Drug Courts and Mental Health Courts into one Veterans Treatment Court. The Whitley County Veterans Treatment Court operates within the guidelines of the Ten Key Components of Drug / Mental Health Courts, developed by a commission of drug court practitioners in 1995. Veterans Treatment Courts feature the following Ten Key Components:

**Veterans Treatment Courts**

1. Integrate alcohol, drug treatment and mental health services with justice system

case processing.

1. Use non-adversarial approach where prosecution and defense counsel promote

public safety while protecting veteran participants’ due process right.

1. Identify eligible participants early and promptly place them in the Veterans Treatment Court Program.
2. Provide access to a continuum of alcohol, drug, mental health, and other related

treatment and rehabilitation services.

1. Monitor abstinence through frequent alcohol and other drug testing.
2. Respond to veteran participants’ compliance through a coordinated strategy.
3. Maintain essential, ongoing judicial interaction with each veteran.

8. Measure achievement of program goals and gauge program effectiveness through

monitoring and program evaluation.

1. 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 effectiveness.

**What is a Volunteer Veteran Mentor?**

The role of the volunteer Veteran Mentor is to act as a coach, guide, role model, advocate, and support person for each veteran participant with whom he/she is working. Mentors understand the roles of other support team members and “fill the gap” to help keep the participants moving successfully toward completing the Veterans Treatment Court program. Often times, veterans are more comfortable interacting with other veterans with similar military experiences. The Mentor is NOT a counselor and this is strictly enforced. We leave the counseling to professionals. Additionally, the Mentor will be a “resource” to the veteran. Access to support services will help reduce the stress that can be caused by distractions like housing or family needs, VA benefits, educational assistance, civil legal service, and the like.

Volunteer Veteran Mentors maintain a very unique role, working directly with participants in a facilitator, advisor, sponsor, and supporter role. Mentors meet with participants at court sessions and are asked to also have contact between sessions. The mentor program is run by a Mentor Coordinator and participants come from all branches of the military. Many mentors have been drawn from a number of veteran service organizations and governmental organizations.

**Mentor Component**

An essential component of the Veterans Treatment Court program is the “mentor program” where veteran mentors act as peer support to veteran participants. Veterans are better served by having a support system that includes 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 a Mentor Coordinator and veteran Mentors. Their roles, responsibilities, requirements, and qualifications are discussed in the following sections.

The Whitley County Veterans Treatment Court relies on cooperation and collaboration between the criminal justice system, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and community treatment agencies to provide comprehensive services for veterans. In addition to these entities, the court also relies heavily on Mentors. Mentors are veterans who volunteer their time to assist the court. Mentors are part of the court’s team and provide advice, personal experiences, recommendations, and guidance (not counseling) to veterans involved with the legal system. During the period of mentoring, a Mentor is assigned to a veteran participant and they discuss any ongoing problems or issues of interest (to the veteran participant). They work to problem-solve existing issues and bring to the attention of the court any issues that the court can assist in resolving. This relationship promotes and fosters, through encouragement, a “can do” attitude in the veteran; the veteran becomes motivated to accomplish his or her goals in treatment, feels that he or she is not alone, and knows that the Mentor and the court are there for them. The Mentor is not expected to solve problems such as housing, benefits, social services, etc. but may help by referring to professionals who can.

Veteran participants are likely to respond more favorably with another veteran than with others who have not served or who have not had similar experiences. The conversation and interactions between the Peer Mentor and veteran participant are on the level of equality rather than from a position of authority. The change in demeanor of the veteran participants becomes an opportunity to make a profound impact on the lives of all veterans who enter the court. We anticipate the Peer Mentors’ active and supportive relationships, maintained throughout treatment, will increase the likelihood that a veteran participant will remain in treatment and improve their chances of sobriety and law-abiding behavior.

**Peer Mentor Role Description**

**Mission:**

To ensure that every participating veteran receives the services they require by helping them navigate the system and to act as a mentor, advocate, and ally.

**Function:**

The role of the volunteer Mentor is to act as a veteran advocate, be a resource when the veteran encounters life problems or issues, and be a support for the individual he/she is working with. The Mentor is NOT a counselor, probation officer, or case manager.

**Values:**

Courage to help another veteran meet the demands of the court and civilian life.

Always faithful to the mission of restoring integrity to the veteran.

Teamwork.

Honor in all you do.

**Goals:**

Volunteer Mentors help fellow veterans receive the services they need to reach their full potential as productive members of society.

Mentors help them navigate the court system, treatment system, and the VA system.

Mentors assess the veteran’s needs and help them adjust back to civilian life. In general, the Peer Mentor acts as a coach, a guide, a role model, an advocate, and a support for the veteran participants. The Peer Mentor’s coaching, guidance, and support will demonstrate the special understanding that only another veteran can provide.

**Peer Mentor Duties and Responsibilities** ­

* Attend court sessions when schedule allows.
* Attend mentor group meetings as needed. ­
* Participate in, and lead, mentoring sessions with the veterans they are matched with, outside of the courtroom setting. ­
* Be supportive and understanding of the difficulties the veteran participants are facing, and assist in resolving concerns when possible.
* Assist the veterans as much as possible to resolve their concerns around their court procedures. ­
* Assist veterans on how to access and navigate the Veterans Affairs system and other systems. ­
* Be supportive and helpful to other Peer Mentors. ­
* Work respectfully and professionally with the participant and other Peer Mentors. ­­
* Maintain documentation of dates of contact with the veterans and submit those records to the court.

**Peer Mentor Requirements**

* ­Be a United States military Veteran: Army, Marine Corp, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, or their respective Reserve or National Guard branches and have served Honorably. ­
* Submit to a background check.
* Be a good standing and law-abiding citizen.­
* Have genuine concern for veterans in the legal system.
* Adhere to all state/county/federal laws and Whitley County Veterans Treatment Court policies and procedures. ­
* Commit to program participation for a minimum of one year. ­
* Attend court sessions as scheduled. ­
* Participate in necessary trainings initially, annually, or as necessary. ­
* Be ready to respond when needed in court.

**Peer Mentor Desirable Qualities**

* Active listener. ­
* Responsible.
* Encouraging and supportive.­
* Tolerant and respectful or individual differences. ­
* Knowledge of Veterans Affair services.
* Knowledge of community resources and services.

**Staff Contacts**

**Whitley County Veterans Treatment Court**

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