

KENT COUNTY VETERANS TREATMENT COURT

Nullo Relinquam Post Veteran—“Leave No Veteran Behind”



PEER MENTORING PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

The Kent County Veterans Treatment Court (KCVTC) is a court that has been specifically designated and staffed to supervise Veteran defendants who have been referred to a comprehensive and judicially monitored program of treatment and rehabilitation services.

KCVTC represents a non-traditional, treatment based approach to criminal offenders who are Veterans. Rather than focusing only on the crimes they commit and the punishments they receive, KCVTC also attempts to address some of the participants' underlying problems.

KCVTC is built upon unique partnerships between the Veterans Administration (VA), Kent County Prosecutor's Office, Public Defender, Probation, the Kent County Court systems and other community partners from the criminal justice, Veterans, and treatment communities. It is a program that structures treatment intervention around the authority and personal involvement of a single Veterans Court Judge. Veterans Court is also dependent upon the creation of a non-adversarial courtroom atmosphere where a single judge, dedicated court staff, and the treatment team work together toward the common goals of breaking the cycle of substance abuse and criminal behavior, and addressing trauma related issues, mental health, and substance use. An environment with clear and certain rules is created, and each participant's compliance is voluntary and within his or her own control.

Because of the unique problems and opportunities that present themselves in working with Veterans, treatment and rehabilitation strategies must be "reality-based." VTC programs must therefore recognize that:

- Veterans are most receptive to successful intervention when they are in the crisis of arrest and incarceration, so intervention should be immediate and up-front.
- Preventing gaps in communication and ensuring offender accountability are of critical importance, so court supervision must be coordinated and comprehensive.
- Mental health issues combined with addiction can be a longstanding,

- debilitating condition, so treatment must be long term and comprehensive.
- Addiction seldom exists in isolation from other serious problems that undermine rehabilitation, so treatment must include integration of other available services and resources such as educational and financial assessments, VA benefits, housing resources, vocational assessments, training and job placement.
 - Progressive sanctions and incentives are integral to the VTC strategy to address relapses and promote recovery.

The goals of the Kent County Veterans Treatment Court are to:

- Reduce participant contacts with the criminal justice system;
- Reduce costs associated with criminal case processing and re-arrest;
- Introduce participants to an ongoing process of recovery designed to help them become stable, employed and substance free while continuing mental health care through community/peer counseling or the VA;
- Increase public safety through increased supervision and close monitoring of progress.

KCVTC Peer Mentoring Program:

The Kent 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 treatment for veterans. In addition to these entities, the Court also relies heavily on a unique and vital component - Veteran Peer Mentors. Veteran Peer Mentors are part of the Court's team. As a fellow veteran and role model the mentor seeks to instill hope, provide advice, personal experiences, recommendations and guidance to justice-involved Veterans. These volunteers include but are not limited to Veterans who have served in Vietnam, Korea, Operation Desert Storm/Shield (ODS), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and Operation New Dawn (OND). These men and women volunteer their time to work with the KCVTC participants. The mentoring program thrives on the premise that behind every successful person, there is one elementary truth: ***"Somewhere, somehow, someone cared about their growth and development. This person was their mentor."***

Mission:

The mission of the KCVTC Peer Mentoring Program is to ensure that every participating Veteran receives the services they require by helping them navigate the system and by acting as a mentor, advocate, and ally.

Goals:

For our fellow Veterans, we will pursue these goals to the best of our abilities.

- 1) Help our fellow Veterans receive the services they need to reach their full potential as a productive member of society.
- 2) Help our fellow Veterans navigate the court system, treatment system and VA system.

- 3) Assess with the justice-involved Veteran their needs and accompany Veterans in making necessary adjustments on their journey back to civilian life.
- 4) We need to assume the Veterans we serve have a history of traumatic stress and exercise “universal precautions” by creating systems of care that are trauma-informed.

KCVTC Peer Mentoring Coordinator:

The KCVTC Peer Mentor Coordinator is essential in maintaining the success of the KCVTC Peer Mentoring Program. The Peer mentor Coordinator is responsible for recruiting prospective mentors, screening candidates, selecting KCVTC Peer Mentors, training the selected candidates, educating them about the KCVTC and conducting semi-annual evaluations of each Veteran peer mentor. The Peer Mentor Coordinator will be responsible for scheduling mentors to be present during the Court’s proceedings, and also coordinate all activities with the Court team’s staff and the Judge. Additional responsibilities include retention of peer mentors, assisting in the development of specialized training projects, and to sustain and evolve the KCVTC Peer Mentoring Program.

KCVTC Court Peer Mentor Role Description:

The role of the Veteran Peer Mentor (VPM) is to act as a coach, a guide, a role model, an advocate, and gives support to the Veteran. Based on shared military experience, the Veteran Peer Mentor has a unique affiliation, which makes it possible to encourage new behaviors with the Veteran, as s/he progresses through the court process. This will include listening to the concerns of the veteran and making general suggestions, assisting the veteran determine what their needs are, and acting as a support for the Veteran at a time when they may feel alone in a way that only another Veteran can understand.

Duties and Responsibilities:

- Attend court sessions when scheduled (as able)
- Be supportive and understanding of the difficulties Veterans face.
- Assist the Veterans as much as possible to resolve their concerns around the court procedures as well as interactions with the Veteran’s Administration system or any civic community delivery system.
- Be supportive and helpful to the other mentors within the program.
- Be open and responsive to supervision by the KCVTC Mentor Coordinator.

Requirements:

- Be a Veteran of one of the branches of the United States Military, including the Army, Marine Corps, Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard, or their corresponding Reserve or Guard branches.
- Adhere to all of the KCVTC policies and procedures
- Be in good standing with the law
- Commit to program participation for a minimum of 12 to 18 months
- Complete the required training procedures
- Participate in additional trainings throughout the time of service in the Court

Desirable Qualities:

- Willing listener
- Empathetic
- Encouraging and supportive
- Tolerant and respectful of individual differences
- Knowledge of Veterans Affairs and Veterans Commission services
- Knowledge of community resources and services
- Willing to share their own life struggles from military services and current life challenges

MENTORING PROGRAM POLICIES

Recruitment Policy:

The Court Peer Mentor Coordinator assumes the majority of the responsibility for recruiting new mentors. Other members of KCVTC as well as current mentors will support the Mentor Coordinator in these activities when necessary, including attending and hosting informational sessions. The KCVTC team, its collaborative partners, and current mentors are encouraged to refer highly respectable and reputable Veterans to the KCVTC Peer Mentoring program.

Inquiry Policy:

All inquiries around participation in the mentoring program, outside of an informational session or sharing the application and information sheet, are directed to the Court Peer Mentor Coordinator. It will be the responsibility of the Peer Mentor Coordinator to contact back any prospective mentors within two weeks of their inquiry.

Eligibility Policy:

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

Mentor Eligibility 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 or Guard Branches
- To adhere to all of the KCVTC policies and procedures
- To commit to program participation for a minimum of 12 to 18 months
- To attend court sessions as scheduled
- To complete the screening process
- To complete the required initial training procedures
- To participate in additional trainings throughout his/her time of service

Training Policy:

All KCVTC peer mentors must complete the required initial training procedures. This procedure will include:

- Observe several court sessions
- Discuss lead mentoring sessions and observation forms
- Complete supervision with the Court Peer Mentor Coordinator

It is the responsibility of the Court Peer Mentor Coordinator to plan, develop, and deliver all training sessions with support from other program staff, current mentors, and the judge.

Veteran to Veteran Matching Policy:

The Court Peer Mentor Coordinator will assign and match mentors and participating Veterans at each court appearance. As mentors are not always present at each court session the Court Peer Mentor Coordinator will have to match the available mentors with the participant in need. Whenever possible the Court Peer Mentor Coordinator will assign mentors based on the following criteria:

- Previous sessions where a Court Peer Mentor was assigned to a particular participant
- Matching branch of service and war time era
- Specific skill of a Court Peer Mentor that a participating veteran may need
- Similar age/gender/ethnicity

The Court Peer Mentor Coordinator will also take into consideration the requests of the mentors and participants, alike, in making matches. The Court Peer Mentor Coordinator reserves the right to assign a peer mentor to a Veteran participant as deemed necessary seen fit

Teambuilding:

At least once a year all mentors will be recognized for their role in the KCVTC. The Court Peer Mentor Coordinator is responsible for planning and implementing recognition activities.

Possible recognition activities include:

- An annual recognition event, where mentors are recognized for their length of service to the mentoring program
- Utilizing outstanding mentors in the recruitment and training of new mentors

Confidentiality Policy:

Confidentiality is an essential piece of successful mentoring. KCVTC participants need to know that their testimony and their mentoring session with a mentor are highly secured and confidential. Court Peer Mentor training will include instructions on Federal and State confidentiality policy including but not limited to: what information should be kept confidential, who has access to confidential materials, what confidential information can be used for, how it will be kept confidential, and the limits of confidentiality. In addition guidelines will be reviewed specific to how information about the mentors will be protected. All KCVTC peer mentors shall sign a written confidentiality agreement.

Unacceptable Behavior Policy:

It is the policy of the KCVTC that unacceptable behaviors will not be tolerated while a peer mentor is participating in the program. Behaviors that do not match with the mission, vision, goals, or values of the KCVTC will be considered unacceptable and are prohibited during court proceedings and mentoring sessions. Any unacceptable behavior, as determined by the Court Peer Mentor Coordinator or the Judge will result in a warning and/or disciplinary action including suspension or termination from the program.

Veteran Peer Mentor Funding Policy:

Funds to support the mentor program will be initially funded by a demonstration grant. Continuation funding will be supported by area Veterans groups. Distribution of these funds will be made at the sole discretion of the KCVTC peer mentors. The following are examples of what funds may be used for:

- Bus passes or tokens and/or Parking
- Other identified needs to support the Veteran in returning to a productive law abiding citizen

VETERAN PEER MENTOR CODE OF ETHICS

The following principles will guide the Veteran Peer Mentor (VPM) in the various roles, relationships, and level of responsibility in which they function professionally. These expectations also apply to training participants with respect to interactions with peer colleagues.

1. The primary responsibility of Veteran Peer Mentors is to help people achieve what they want most in life, their own goals, needs and wants: Veteran Peer Mentors will be guided by the principles of self-determination for all.

2. Veteran Peer Mentors will maintain high standards of personal conduct: They will also conduct themselves in a manner that fosters their own recovery and integrity. As a Veteran Peer Mentor what you do reflects on others. Therefore, you will be asked to represent your profession with integrity.

3. Veteran Peer Mentors will openly share their recovery stories and will likewise be able to identify and describe the supports that promote holistic recovery: Our recovery story is the most powerful tool we have.

4. Veteran Peer Mentors will, at all times, respect the rights and dignity of the people with whom they work: As a VPM, we treat our peers and colleagues with dignity and respect, regardless of the situation or environment. This doesn't mean we can't express differing opinions, etc., but that we always do so in a respectful manner. It is especially important that we use respectful language and practice in a way that holds all people we walk with in high regard. VPMs will never intimidate, threaten, harass, use influence, physical force, or verbal abuse, or make unwarranted promises of benefits to the individuals with whom they relate. VPMs recognize that everyone is different and we all have something to learn from one another. Therefore, VPMs will not practice, condone, facilitate or collaborate in any form of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, race, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, marital status, political belief, mental or physical disability or any other preference or personal characteristic, condition

or state.

5. Veteran Peer Mentors will advocate as a partner with those they support that they make their own decisions in all matters when dealing with other

professionals: The people with whom we work are always our peers. However, we can be strong advocates when we work in partnership with other professionals.

6. Veteran Peer Mentors will respect the privacy and confidentiality of those they support:

The community is very small, so it is critical that we be trustworthy with the sensitive, personal information people share with us.

7. Veteran Peer Mentors will advocate for the full integration of individual into the communities of their choice and will promote the inherent value of these

individual to those communities: VPMs will be directed by the knowledge that all individuals have the right to live in the least restrictive and least intrusive environment of their choice.

8. Veteran Peer Mentors will not enter into dual relationships or commitments that conflict with the interests of those they support:

“Dual relationships” refer to one or more additional relationships with someone that you work with as a VPM. No matter how hard we try to remove power differentials, they cannot be totally removed. When we engage in other relationships, we risk role conflicts. VPMs will never engage in sexual/intimate activities with those to whom they are currently providing support, or have worked with in a professional role in the past 5 years.

9. Veteran Peer Mentors will not engage in business, extend or receive loans, nor accept gifts of significant:

This code allows us to always keep a clean slate, and not even have the “appearance of impropriety” of conflict of interest.

10. Veteran Peer Mentors will not provide services to another when under the influence of alcohol or when impaired by any substance, whether or not it is

prescribed: We always want to be assured that we can think clearly when we are working in a professional capacity. When drugs or alcohol are clouding our mind, we run a great risk of saying or doing something that can be harmful to another and to the profession as a whole.

VETERANS TREATMENT COURT CORE VALUES

The National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP) has developed the Ten Key Components for Drug Courts, which have been utilized as the foundation of the Veterans Treatment Court as follows:

1: Veterans Treatment Court integrates alcohol, drug treatment, and mental health services with justice system case processing:

Veterans Treatment Court 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, community health care partners for Veterans who cannot or do not wish to access the

VA system, veterans and veterans family support organizations, Court peer mentors and Trauma and Recovery Peer Specialists.

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.

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.

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, mental and co-occurring illnesses, the Veterans Treatment Court team also consider needs 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 military and war time trauma. Peer mentors are essential to the Veterans Treatment Court team. Ongoing peer mentoring with the Veterans Treatment Court participants is crucial. Their active, supportive relationship engages a Veteran throughout treatment, increasing the likelihood that a veteran will remain in treatment and improves the chances for holistic life changes, i.e. sobriety and law-abiding behavior.

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 Veteran participant's progress.

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.

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.

8: Monitoring and evaluation measure for 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 programming.

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, peer mentors, and treatment staff to criminal justice issues. It also develops shared understandings of the values, goals, and operating procedures among the military culture 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, peer mentors, and treatment personnel, and promote a spirit of commitment and collaboration.

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, mental health and substance use 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.