How to Build a Peer Mentor Program for your Veterans Treatment Court

Presented by:
Kisten Born, VTC Coordinator, 4th JD
Danielle Hamilton, VTC & Mental Health Court Coordinator, 18th JD
Jay Lobins, Lead Peer Mentor, 18th JD
Leo Martinez, Lead Peer Mentor, 4th JD
What is a Veterans Treatment Court?

Hybrid adult drug & mental health court

- Serves vets struggling with trauma-related issues
  - PTSD, TBI, substance use, other MH issues
  - Directly related to military service
- Diverts vets from CJ response into a specialized veteran’s problem solving court

GOALS:

- Promote public safety
- Ensure participant accountability
- Support recovery
- Improve quality of life for participants & their families
Phases of 18th JD VTC

1. Stabilization & Engagement
2. Intensive Treatment
3. Transition & Community Engagement
4. Reintegration & Maintenance
5. Aftercare
Typical Veterans Treatment Court Team

- Magistrate/Judge
- Coordinator
- Treatment Providers
- Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist – VA
- Probation Officer
- Deputy District Attorney
- Public Defender
- Deputy Sheriff/City Police
- Lead Peer Mentor
What is unique about a VTC?

• Shared military experience
  • Culture in which service members take care of each other
  • Common military experiences, particularly for those who have served in combat or within a specific campaign, connect individuals and families together

• Use of Veterans Administration for services

• Use of Mentors
  • Peer support is a key factor in helping targeted populations through a crisis, assisting them in developing necessary navigation and survival skills, and improving the quality of their everyday lives
  • This easily lends itself to an environment where service members rely on the natural support of their peers to cope with stress
What is a peer?

- Navigational battle buddy to guide throughout the VTC process
- The Peer offers support and encouragement for veterans in the court system by spending one-on-one time with the veteran after they appear for proceedings in the VTC
- Primary liaison from participant to the community
- Resource for participants to help with housing, jobs, VA, link into other needed resources
- Cultural understanding for team
VTC Peer Mentors

• The Peer Mentor Program offers support and encouragement for veterans in the court system by spending one-on-one time with the veteran after they appear during the proceedings of the VTC.

• Peer Mentors’ active, supportive relationship maintained throughout treatment *increases the likelihood* that a *veteran will remain* in treatment and *improves his or her chances* for law-abiding behavior and sobriety.
Mentor Duties & Responsibilities

• Attend Court scheduled sessions
• Participate in and lead mentoring sessions
• Supportive and understanding of the difficulties the veteran clients are facing
• Assist the veteran clients as much as possible to resolve any concerns around the court or VA systems
• Peers should remember:
  • They are not a therapist
  • Boundaries are their friends
  • Support of the client’s participation in VTC and orders from the Judge is important
Matching Policy

Some LPMs choose to match peer mentors to VTC participants according to:

- Branch of service
- Occupational specialty
- Combat experience
- Similar age/gender/ethnicity
- Specific skill of mentor matched to need of mentee
- Previous sessions where mentor/mentee matched and got along
Goals of the Peer Mentor Program

- Participate in training to prepare for working with U.S. military vets and service members involved in the CJ system with trauma-related injuries and co-occurring disorders.

- Maintain high standards of personal conduct, acting as a role model for those they serve.

- Respect the rights and dignity of those they serve, providing support and empathy during the recovery process.

- Assist the veteran in accessing community resources, advocating for them when necessary, and supporting participation in treatment.

- Keep current with emerging knowledge relevant to recovery, openly share this knowledge with colleagues.

- Advocate for the full integration of individuals into our community and promote the inherent value of these individuals to those communities.
What makes a good peer?

- **Passion & Dedication** – not usually paid so need to be invested
- Prior military experience – culturally competent
  - Understand the battle buddy/wingman connection

The best Mentor qualities include:
- **Mindful Listener**
- **Empathetic**
- **Nurturing**
- **Trustworthy**
- **Observant**
- **Respectful**
Finding, Screening, & Retaining

• Who we look for:
  • Knowledge & Experience (Accredited Service Officers), Branch of Service, Combat Experience, Age, Gender, Active Duty/Reserve/Guardsmen

• Screening
  • Criminal History
  • Commitment to Program

• Retaining
  • Unpaid, at least 6 month commitment
Mentor Process

• Keep it simple
• ALL MENTORS are Veteran Advocates
• They are a resource for the vet
  • Help the vet and their family navigate systems
• Make sure VA healthcare and any claims are in place
• 50% of the time they are just a bonding as a friend
• Training is in how to navigate systems, not counseling
• Some peer programs use a resource book or other mentors to help the vet if problems arise
• Problems associated with court or counseling are referred to Coordinator/court personnel
How do you recruit peers?

• Primarily falls to the Lead Peer and the Coordinator
• Where do you find Vets in your community?
  • VFWs, Vets Center
  • American Legion (go to bingo night!)
  • DAV (Disabled American Veterans)
  • Shriners/Masonic Lodges/Lions Club
  • Church groups/Knights of Columbus

• Finding OEF/OIF Vets can be tougher (younger vets)
  • College campuses (internships), local military posts, social organizations
What training does a peer need?

• Lead Peer Mentor and Coordinator responsible for
• Core Training:
  • Military Culture (OEF/OIF issues specifically)
  • Boundary setting (transportation/monetary needs)
  • Motivational Interviewing Techniques (learning to listen)
  • Understanding local CJC and who the players are
  • How to stay in your lane/not a therapist

Peer Mentor Program
Apply Here
What training does a peer need? (cont’d)

- Lead Peer Training:
  - Roles of the VTC staff and providing appropriate information
  - How to manage volunteers
- Felony vs. Misdemeanor Issues
  - Felonies need more support, participants have a lot more riding on their successful completion of the VTC
  - Understand felony revocation issues, sealing issues, job issues
Role of Lead Peer Mentor

• Lead Peer Mentor
  • Needs to manage the team of peers
  • Role on team at staffing:
    • Keep track of paperwork/interaction logs with participants
    • Reports on client status
    • Helps keep non-military staff culturally competent
    • Explains why a participant might be bothered by a comment or gives a response from a veteran’s perspective
      • Example: I can do this myself, I’m tough, I was an NCO, etc.
Role of Regular Peer Mentor

• Depends on
  • Type/size of VTC (misdo vs. felony)
  • # of participants
  • Where the program is located (transportation)
  • Are the peers involved in the Aftercare Program?
A Day in the Life of a Peer

A Day in the Life of Leo Martinez....
How to Sustain a Peer Program

• Determine VTC needs first
  • Felony program – more training, more “professional” needs
  • Misdemeanor program – can use more volunteers

• Grant writing
  • BJA, SAMHSA, Byrne Grants, Local Funding
  • Partner with a local military group – they may have funding

• 626 Funds – State is starting to recognize needs

• Forensic Peers – recruiting graduates to help
Questions?
Links to Resources

- http://www.justiceforvets.org/veteran-mentors
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Contact Information

Kisten Born
Problem Solving Court Coordinator II, 4th JD
• Work: (719)-452-5039
• kisten.born@judicial.state.co.us

Danielle Hamilton, M.S.
Problem Solving Court Coordinator II, 18th JD
• Cell: (832)-729-7609
• danielle.hamilton@judicial.state.co.us

Jay Lobins
18th JD VTC Lead Peer Mentor
• Cell: (808)285-1631
• Jay.Lobins@HelpOutNotHandOuts.org

Leo Martinez
4th JD VTC Lead Peer Mentor
• Cell: (719) 377-0474
• Leo.martinez@aspenpointe.org