

# 17<sup>TH</sup> JUDICIAL CIRCUIT COURT WINNEBAGO COUNTY VETERANS COURT MENTOR HANDBOOK



## ***Mission Statement***

*The mission of the Winnebago County Veterans Court Mentor program is to provide improved outcomes to fellow Veterans through support and encouragement as they make their way through the justice system.*

## ***Goal***

*The goal of the mentors are to act as coach, guide, role model, and support for each participant.*

## **THE WINNEBAGO COUNTY VETERANS COURT PROGRAM**

Participants agree to participate in the Winnebago County Veterans Program by signing a consent. They work with a team of court and treatment professionals to successfully achieve recovery and reduce or end criminal behavior in the future. Veterans Court will provides participants with access to PTSD and other mental health treatment, substance abuse treatment, medication, housing, entitlements, therapy, and other services that will help them achieve a life that is safe, stable and free from crime if they work hard and are honest in the program.

### **GENERAL PROGRAM INFORMATION**

Veterans Court is a voluntary program. That is why participants are required to sign the Consent to Participate in order to enroll in Veterans Court. Because they signed the Consent to Participate and agreed to voluntarily enroll in Veterans Court, they are accountable for complying with Veterans Court requirements and for completing the treatment services that are identified as needed for each individual participant. Generally, these requirements include attending court, reporting to their Veterans Court Probation Officer, participating in treatment assessments and services, refraining from drug and alcohol use, taking medications as prescribed, complying with all requirements of probation, and submitting to random drug testing.

Veterans Court is divided into three Levels plus Graduation. In the beginning, at Level I, the primary focus is on stabilizing their life and engaging in their treatment plan. The Veterans Court Team will work with them on any basic needs they may have and the Veterans Court treatment providers will assess for treatment needs and assign participants to treatment groups. Their treatment groups will focus on changing the thinking errors, behaviors and choices they have made in the past that have gotten them into trouble and also educate them about mental illness and addiction.

When a participant maintaining a stable lifestyle, making progress in completing treatment goals and following supervision requirements, the Veterans Court Team will move them to higher levels in the program, and if they successfully complete the program goals and requirements, they will graduate!

### **VETERANS COURT TEAM**

The Veterans Court Team consists of a dedicated judge, the problem-solving courts coordinator, a dedicated prosecutor, a dedicated public defender, dedicated probation officers, the VJO, treatment providers, the Veterans Court mentor coordinator, law enforcement, and data collection assistants. Volunteer mentors are also available to provide support and assistance to Veterans Court participants.

## **VETERANS COURT PROCESS**

The Veterans Court process is simple. It is a structured court program that provides treatment and closely monitors participant's compliance with treatment and all the terms of their probation order. Every decision of the Veterans Court Team is made as a team with the goal of helping participants be as successful as possible in achieving their goals in the program.

Before each court date, the Veterans Court Team meets for staffing. At staffing, the entire team discusses the progress that participants are making or any issues that may have occurred since their last court date. When a participant appears in court, the Judge and the team will talk to them about what the team discussed in staffing and give the participant an opportunity to respond. Their response and input are important to the team. If a participant is doing well, they may receive praise or another incentive. If there are concerns or violations, they may receive a sanction and/or a change to their treatment plan. Every response of the Veterans Court Team is targeted to help make the changes participants need to make.

## **VETERANS COURT SCHEDULE**

***VETERANS COURT STATUS HEARINGS:*** 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Mondays at 3:30 p.m. in Courtroom 216, Winnebago County Courthouse, 400 West State Street, Rockford, IL

## **MENTOR ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS**

- Must be a United States Military Veteran: Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines, Coast Guard, or corresponding branch of the Reserve or National Guard
- Must be in good legal standing, i.e. not on any type of community supervision.
- If in recovery must have significant recovery time
- Must be willing to submit to a background check
- Must be willing to sign a release for discharge and background records or submit DD 214
- Must be in good standing within the military or have been discharged in good standing
- Must not be employed by the VA or court system
- Must have a valid driver's license and proof of insurance.

## **TIME COMMITMENT**

Mentors are encouraged to make at least a one-year commitment to the program. Mentors also need to be able to commit to regularly attending to court sessions. Additionally mentors will need to meet with participants regularly in person to provide support, encouragement, and guidance.

## **DESIRABLE QUALITIES IN A MENTOR**

- Good active listening skills
- Supportive and Encouraging
- Have the ability to set and keep personal boundaries

- Be respectful of individual differences
- Ability to empathize with a wide variety of people
- Have a strong moral and ethical character
- Ability to maintain strict confidentiality
- Strong communication skills

## **MENTOR DUTIES**

- Mentors should regularly attend court sessions. During the court session the mentor will stand at the podium with his/her mentee and be a support for them. The input and support of a mentor is invaluable to the participant and Veterans Court team.
- The Thursday prior to court sessions mentors must turn in their mentor log to PSC staff so it can be shared with the team at staffing. Any concerns or positive events should be shared with the participant's probation officer so they can be relayed to the Veterans Court team.
- The mentor needs to meet with participants regularly in the community. *(Responsibilities when meeting with participants are outlined in more detail on pages 8-11)*
- Mentors may be asked by the team or participants to help provide transportation on a limited basis dependent on the mentor's availability. *(Transportation responsibilities are outlined in more detail on pages 11-12)*
- When meeting with participants mentors, provide general support and encouragement to participants.
- Mentor collaboration with the other mentors is critical

to the function of the mentor program. This collaboration may include communicating if you are unable to attend a court session. This will ensure that all of our participants have a mentor to fill in and be a support during court.

- Mentors also need to collaborate and communicate with the Veterans Court Team. The completion and submission of the mentor log is an important part of that communication. Additionally mentors should call or e-mail the participant's probation officer to share concerns or positive feedback.
- Confidentiality is one of the most critical components of the Veterans Court program. For our participants, protecting their privacy is important to their ability to trust the team and be successful. For our team it is also important that the Veterans Court Team functions as a cohesive unit. This means that any decision made is represented as a team decision not an individual's opinion. To protect the team's confidentiality it is important to never identify to a participant what any individual team member advocated for as a response to behavior.
- All mentors must attend an initial training session about the Veterans Court mentor program. Additional training opportunities may become available and mentors are strongly encouraged to attend as many as possible.
- Mentors must remain in good legal standing and not be on any type of community based court supervision.

## RESPONSIBILITIES WHEN MEETING WITH PARTICIPANT

### TO DO

- Mentors need to meet regularly with participants to provide them with support. If a participant is not interested in meeting with their mentor it is important that the probation officer is notified and it is documented on the mentor log.
- Mentors act as coach, guide, role model, and support for each participant.
- Mentors should help guide participants to appropriate Veterans Court team or community resources. (*see resources hand out or speak with team about available resources*)
- If a participants express concerns about relapse, mentors should encourage the participant to reach out to the Veterans Court team, review their relapse prevention plan, and reach out to their recovery support network. It is important to notify the participant's probation officer about these concerns so the team can help monitor and support the participant.
- If a participants express mental health concerns the mentor should encourage the participant to immediately reach out to Veterans Court team. The mentor should notify the VA clinical staff and participant's probation officer immediately.
- If a participant discusses current, past, or future illegal activity the defendant should be encouraged to discuss this with their defense attorney.
- Mentors should provide support and understanding

regarding the difficulties that the participant is facing.

- As a support the mentor should encourage participants by highlighting their strengths, talents, and skills.
- Mentors can also help motivate participants to believe in themselves and stay focused on their goals.
- It is encouraged that meetings take place in the community and not at participant's or mentor's residences to help maintain appropriate boundaries. Some options for community meeting could be batting cages, bowling, volunteer opportunities, restaurants, etc. The only exception to this would be if transportation or specific needs are identified by the team.
- Participants should be encouraged to be honest with the team if struggling with substance abuse or mental health concerns. If struggling, remind participants that the team is here to support them and provide resources.
- Mentors should confine their role to the limits of their training and competence. Mentors are intended to be a support and a resource to direct participants back to appropriate Veterans Court team members and resources.
- All information shared with a mentor should be protected as confidential. *(Outlined on pages 12-13 are guidelines to help determine what should and should not be shared with the team. If ever in doubt contact the probation officer)*

## **NOT TO DO**

- Mentors should never make clinical recommendations or provide therapy. Even if you are a trained clinician giving clinical recommendations as a mentor is well outside the scope of the mentor's role. Participants should always be referred back to their clinical team.
- Mentors should never give legal advice or information. Even if you are a trained attorney, judge, police officer, etc. giving legal advice is outside your role as a mentor. Participants should be encouraged to take legal concerns back to their defense attorney.
- Mentors should always be non-adversarial with participants. At no point should the mentor be argumentative or become aggressive in speech or posture.
- Mentors should not extend the personal boundaries of the mentor relationship.
- Mentors should not engage in any monetary business arrangements or commitments. No monetary or non-monetary loans should be made between mentor and participant. Neither the mentor nor the participant should be in receipt of gifts or services from the other.
- Neither the mentor nor participant should exploit the relationship for personal gain or personal advantage.
- The mentor is only meant as a support and should not shame the participant in any manner.
- Abuse of any kind whether sexual, mental, physical, financial, etc will not be tolerated by the mentor or participant.

- Intimate or sexual relationships of any kind are not permissible.
- If a participant violates any of these boundaries the mentor should end the meeting, notify the probation officer, and refrain from further meetings until further direction from the Veterans Court team.
- If a mentor is found to have violated any of these boundaries they could be immediately removed from the mentor team.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

Mentors maybe asked at the request of the Veterans Court team or by the participant to provide transportation to groups and appointments on a limited basis. Below are some guidelines on transportation.

### **GENERAL TRANSPORTATION**

- If able, the mentor can help with transportation to appointments
- The necessity for transport assistance may be on short notice. (example: car will not start). If able the mentor can transport the participant to a group or appointment. The participant should never guilt or coerce the mentor into providing transportation. If this happens the participants probation officer should be notified immediately.
- If the transport request become habitual and/or overwhelming the participant's probation officer should be notified. Participants are expected to have back up

transportation plans and mentors should only be utilized as a last resort.

## **FURLOUGH**

- A participant on furlough is still considered in custody of the Winnebago County jail. They are only allowed to leave for the purposes of the furlough order. This means they can only be transported to the location identified in the order, in the company of only those identified in the order, and if applicable returned to the jail.
- Participants should be taken directly from the jail to their destination and if applicable returned directly to the jail. Any deviation from this should be reported to the participant's probation officer.
- The participants are not allowed to meet with any person other than the person designated in the furlough order. (No family, friends, spouse, children, etc are allowed to know about the furlough or meet with the participant while out of custody.) This is for the safety of the mentor, participant, and jail staff.
- If the participant chooses to leave at any point the mentor is **not** responsible for stopping, restraining, or retrieving the participant. If this happens the mentor should contact the Veterans Court team, the client's probation officer, and Winnebago County jail immediately.

## **WHAT TO SHARE WITH THE TEAM**

### **TO SHARE**

- Immediate concerns about harm to self or others.
- That the defendant is going through a hard time or struggling. Specific details especially relating to trauma should not be shared. If in doubt speak with a member of the clinical team.
- Any success or achievements made by the participants. The team is always looking to reinforce the progress a participant makes both in the program and in their personal life.
- If you as a mentor are being triggered please reach out to the VJO as your sobriety and mental health are just as important to the Veterans Court Team as the participants and our own.

### **NOT TO SHARE**

- Specifics about military or personal trauma should not be shared with the whole team. If you have concerns these things can be shared with the clinical team.
- Any reports of illegal activity that you find concerning should only be reported to the Court Coordinator. Alleged illegal activity is especially difficult for the team to traverse. The Court Coordinator has experience in managing these situations and can help resolve them.

## WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE IS IN CRISIS

- If the participant is having a mental health or medical crisis the participant or you can call the VA Triage Line at 1-888-598-7793 24 hours a day 7 days a week for immediate assistance.
- If the participant is having thoughts of self-harm or is suicidal the participant or you can call the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 (press 1 for self-harm/suicidal) 24 hours a day 7 days a week for immediate assistance. The trained professionals can help assess the situation and even dispatch an ambulance if necessary. If after meeting with a participant they did not state they were suicidal but you have concerns you can also call this line to alert VA staff to follow up.
- Encourage the participant to reach out to their support network (sponsor, meeting, etc).
- Encourage the defendant to review their relapse prevention plan.
- Encourage the participant to reach out to members of the Veterans Court Team.
- If needed contact 911 immediately.
- Validate their feelings and experiences.
- Always contact the Veterans Court Team to notify them.

## **IMMEDIATELY NOTIFY THE TEAM**

- If the participant becomes aggressive or violent with you call 911.
- Participant displays inappropriate or sexual advances/harassment towards you.
- Conflicts arise that cause the participant to not be a suitable mentee.
- If being a mentor becomes destabilizing to your mental health or sobriety.

## **IMPORTANT NUMBERS**

Problem-Solving Courts Main	815-319-4805
Adult Probation Main	815-319-6250
Rockford VA Clinic Main	815-227-0081
VA Triage Line (Medical/Mental Health)	888-598-7793
Veterans Crisis Line	800-273-8255
Problem-Solving Courts Main	815-319-4805

