

## **Veteran Treatment Court**

### **Project Abstract**

Briefly summarize the proposed project.

Collin County is the sixth largest county in Texas by population (of one million plus) and lies just northeast of the Dallas –Fort Worth Metroplex. The county has 13 District Courts and 7 County Courts at Law. The 296<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court will preside over cases for the Veteran Treatment Court (VTC) Program, which will be a pre-trial diversion court. The elected Judge John Roach, Jr. (Marine Corp Veteran) presides over the 296<sup>th</sup> District Court and sits by assignment to the North Texas Regional Veteran Treatment Court spanning 5 counties and all contiguous counties in need of Veteran oversight. The regional specialty Court is the only kind in the Nation whereby the Judge travels to the Veteran in hopes of reducing recidivism amongst the justice involved Veteran community and increases the likelihood of Court appearances.

The VTC is a specialized diversion program for justice-involved veterans (JIV) with whose crimes correlate to injuries suffered as a result of their military services. The program provides a second chance through a judicially-supervised, team-based approach to ensure participants receive treatment for underlying risk factors that contributed to their crime(s), including substance abuse, medical, and/or behavioral conditions. PTSD, traumatic brain injuries, and substance abuse all change the way the brain functions and impacts the ability of individuals to make responsible choices. Research has demonstrated that establishing a supportive, non-adversarial judicial relationship, employing progressive sanctions and incentives, and providing regular, meaningful involvement with a judge are significant factors leading to positive behavioral changes among offenders.

The Collin County Veterans Court program started in 2013 by the 296<sup>th</sup> District Court Judge in Collin County. Unfortunately, many smaller counties in the area do not possess the resources to manage a similar program, resulting in justice-involved veterans in those counties not receiving the treatment and support needed for recovery and restoration to their pre-combat lives. In an effort to meet the need, the program has expanded into four neighboring counties - Fannin, Grayson, Kaufman, Rockwall, with the endorsement and proclamation of each counties Commissioners Court and District Attorney's Office. Each county has a local interdisciplinary team, composed of a supervision/probation officer, veteran's service officer, defense attorney, prosecuting attorney, and law enforcement officer, which are led by the 296<sup>th</sup> District Court Judge (Judge John Roach, Jr. Resume included). The team reviews and discusses participants' progress and uses a coordinated strategy to help veterans recover. The funding will assist with the expansion of increasing the capacity of the waiting list which is at 25 and at times more of Veterans that are in need of assistance. The funding will assist with the expansion of an ever growing caseload and assist with influx of pending cases from the Covid-19 pandemic. Currently, the Court manages a caseload of 106 Veterans. As of December 2022, the Court has 25 applications pending and once approved by the respective District Attorney's Office the influx of cases will strain the current caseload.

Grant funding is requested for one contracted position, to serve veterans in all five counties. The Coordinator will serve as the primary point of contact for the VTC/OOG Grant. He/she will receive and review applications for program participation, coordinate opportunities for community outreach and program education, oversee program veterans, coordinate between the counties that have a waiting list, collect and maintain program data, and updates the programs policies and procedures to remain current with the best practices of a veterans treatment court. The grant will also fund counseling, drug and alcohol monitoring, indigent aid (housing) and life skills for Veterans. Much needed resources for these Veterans.

### **Problem Statement**

Describe the nature and scope of the underlying problem the proposed project will address.

More than 22 million men and women living in the US have served in the US military and according to the US Census Bureau 2021, 1,426,641 reside in Texas and 176,460 veterans reside in Collin County service area. Those numbers are expected to rise based on anecdotal evidence. Texas is considered the second state next to California that veterans move to and prefer to live in.

Community need in regard to Veteran services: Many of these veterans were deployed to engage in combat operations, spending long periods being hyper-vigilant in high stress situations. Combat zone duty can result in injuries both to

the body and psyche including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), orthopedic injury and/or amputations, which are all conditions that can derail emotional control and lead to interpersonal conflicts and/or other erratic behaviors resulting in job loss, divorce, and strained relationships. Unfortunately, decades of research had shown that veterans can have a difficult time of readjusting to civilian life and have been shown to have higher than normal prevalence of mental health and substance abuse issues, which frequently result in illegal, violent, and/or risky behaviors resulting in increased contact with the criminal justice system and incarceration.

A Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics study released showed that a higher percentage of detained veterans (60%) than nonveterans (44%) has been diagnosed with some form of mental disorder. Veterans need to be provided with educational and therapeutic services as alternatives to spiraling deeper into the criminal justice system. Unfortunately, many jails and prisons are unable to offer adequate mental health treatment to the incarcerated.

### **Supporting Data**

Provide supporting data for the Problem Statement. Data should be relevant to the project and its target group.

America's Veterans are in trouble...Each year roughly 200,000 service members transition out of the military, and while most reenter civilian life successfully, others struggle with drugs and alcohol addiction, PTSD, TBI, and homelessness (Time, Nov. 2022). For many, this post-service journey leads to a grim destination: the criminal justice system. One in three of the nation's 19 million veterans report having been arrested and jailed at least once, and more than 181,000 are behind bars. (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2022).

Currently, Texas has the second largest population of veterans, with 10% of the total prison population being veterans, many of whom are repeat offenders because of a failure to reintegrate after military service. Collin County alone has more than 41,918 veteran residents according to the US Census Bureau 2021 Quick Facts. While the number of veterans has increased in Collin County since 2010, the number of veterans jailed has increased as well by 385% over the same time period.

The number of veterans housed in the Collin County jail in 2010, 90 unduplicated; FY 2018: 437, FY 2019: 442, FY 2020: 553, FY2021: 671 and in FY2022: 690. On average, 30% of veterans are detained multiple times during the year.

Recognizing the increase in veterans facing felony charges in his District Court, Judge John Roach, Jr. implemented a Veterans Treatment Court in 2013, which has since grown to encompass over 5 counties assistance to contiguous counties for Veterans in need.

Facts on US veterans:

- 68% Alcohol and drug addiction.
- 45% Difficulty adjusting to civilian life.
- 66.9% was cited by court that they had history of mental health problems.
- Economic Disadvantages
- 61% reported difficulty paying their bills following discharge.
- 42% have trouble obtaining medical care.
- 98% incarcerated veterans in the US are male.
- 70% of incarcerated veterans are convicted of violent crimes.
- About 2 million times each year, people with serious mental illness are booked into jails (NAMI, 2022).
- The majority of male veterans in state (56%) and federal (53%) prison served in the Army.
- About 1 in 4 male veterans in state (28%) and 1 in 5 in federal (21%) prison were combat veterans.
- An estimated 74% of male veterans in state prison and 77% of those in federal received an honorable discharge or a general discharge under honorable conditions.
- Male veterans in state prison (26% were twice as likely as male non-veterans in state prison (12%) to be serving time for a violent sexual offense.
- 15.3% of U.S. Veterans experienced a mental illness in 2019 (31.3 million people) (NAMI, 2020).

- 8.4% of Active Component service members in the U.S. military experienced a mental health or substance use condition in 2019.
- 30% of military personnel deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan have mental health conditions (U.S. Dept. of Veteran Affairs, 2020).
- Over 20% of veterans return home with Traumatic Brain Injury and PTSD (U.S. Dept. of Veteran Affairs, 2020).

*United States Sentencing Commission*

*Bureau of Justice Statistics, Veterans in State and Federal Prisons, Laura M. Maruschak, Bureau of Justice Statistics*

### **Project Approach & Activities**

Describe the methodologies, approaches, and activities to be employed by the project. This should logically tie back to the Problem Statement.

The overall goal of the Veteran Treatment Court will be to move justice-involved veterans out of the traditional criminal justice process and into appropriate, individualized rehabilitative alternatives that improve mental health and successfully lead to community reintegration and criminal case resolution. The team will effectively address the many unique and significant needs of these veterans. The team will receive on-going training in order to assist the veterans achieve treatment goals.

The VTC team will consist of the following but not limited to:

- Judge
- Coordinator/Case Manager
- Treatment Provider

Once veterans have been screened, assessed, and approved for participation in this voluntary program, they promptly begin a treatment program that is specific to their needs. In addition to program team meetings, the program will involve drug and/or alcohol treatment, random drug testing, support group meetings, vocational or job counseling, educational classes, and community supervision. Many services will be provided by outside agencies, and veterans will be referred as needed.

The VTC program is an average of twelve (12) months with an extensive follow up. There are (4) levels/phases to the VTC program which will require frequent meetings with the Judge and team. Upon successful completion of the program, the case(s) are normally dismissed, expunged, or never filed.

The following will explain the phases in detail:

#### **Phase I**

The purpose of Phase I is to provide the most rigorous interventions into the veteran's life. Each veteran's needs are different.

The overall goal of Phase I is the veteran will demonstrate both a desire and an ability to participate in treatment, counseling, maintain medication compliance along with drug and alcohol abstinence.

The following Goals and Requirements must be met in Phase I before advancing to Phase II.

- Actively participate in probation supervision plan as developed by the Probation Officer.
- Actively participate in medical 90 day treatment plan and follow treatment recommendations as set up by Treatment Plan.
- Consistently attend established/approved support groups (AA) as directed.
- Attend VTC sessions as directed.
- Attend other VTC classes, appointments or functions as directed. (Employment, housing, finance, driver's license, wellness, etc.)

- Determine amount of fines/costs/restitution with PO.  
(If receiving income, establish payment plan and begin making payments)
- A minimum of two Probation Officer contacts per week is required. Contact method at PO discretion.
- Complete the Workbook Phase I assignments and any additional assignments as directed.
- Complete thirty (30) hours of Community Service.
- Comply with ALL weekly drug testing (minimum of 2).
- Ninety (90) consecutive days of sobriety.

## **Phase II**

The purpose of Phase II is to continue the treatment process from Phase I and to make treatment progress.

The primary focus of Phase II will be progression to stability from Phase I, the veteran is to continue and make gains/progress in treatment and counseling as indicated by treatment provider collaterals and progress notes.

The following Goals and Requirements must be met in Phase II before advancing to Phase III

- Actively participate in probation supervision plan as developed by the PO.
- Actively participate in medical 90 day treatment plan and follow treatment recommendations asset up by Treatment Team.
- Consistently attend established/approved support groups (AA) as directed.
- Attend VTC sessions as directed.
- Attend other VTC classes, appointments or functions as directed. (Employment, housing, finance, driver's license, wellness, etc.)
- Obtain full-time employment, begin full time student status or an approved combination. (If applying for and/or receiving full time disability additional Community Service hours, as directed by the Team, must be completed.)
- Obtain stable housing.
- Meet with PO to determine status of driver's license.
- Continue payment plan of fines/costs/restitution.
- A minimum of one Probation Officer contact per week is required. Contact method at PO discretion.
- Complete the Workbook Phase II assignments and any additional assignments as directed.
- Complete thirty (30) hours of Community Service.
- Comply with ALL weekly drug testing (minimum of 2).
- Ninety (90) consecutive days of sobriety.

## **Phase III**

The purpose of Phase III is to continue the treatment process from Phase II and to make treatment progress.

- Actively participate in probation supervision plan as developed by the PO.
- Actively participate in medical 90 day treatment plan and follow treatment recommendations as set up by Treatment team.
- Consistently attend established/approved support groups (AA) as directed.
- Attend VTC sessions as directed.
- Attend VTC classes, appointments or functions as directed. (Employment, housing, finance, driver's license, wellness, etc.)
- Maintain full-time employment, full-time student statue or an approved combination. (If applying for and/or receiving full time disability additional Community Service hours, as determined by the Team, must be completed.)
- Maintain stable housing.
- Review status of driver's license with PO.
- Continue payment plan of fines/costs/restitution.
- A minimum of one Probation Officer contact per week is required. Contact method at PO discretion.
- Complete the Workbook Phase III assignments and any additional assignments as directed.

- Complete thirty (30) hours of Community Service.
- Comply with ALL weekly drug testing (minimum of 2).
- Ninety (90) consecutive days of sobriety.

#### **Phase IV**

The purpose of Phase IV is for the veteran to reach sustained stability and to successfully complete any required treatment programs. The goal is to see a reduction in criminogenic needs.

- Actively participate in probation supervision plan as developed by the PO.
- Actively participate in medical 90 day treatment plan and follow treatment recommendation as set up by team.
- Consistently attend established/approved support groups (AA) as directed.
- Attend VTC sessions as directed.
- Attend other VTC classes, appointments or functions as directed. (Employment, housing, finance, driver's license, wellness, etc.)
- Maintain full-time employment, full time student status or an approved combination. (If applying for and/or receiving full time disability additional Community Service hours, as determined by the team, must be completed).
- Maintain stable housing.
- Review status of driver's license with PO.
- Continue payment plan of fines/costs/restitution.
- A minimum of one Probation Officer contact per week is required. Contact method at PO discretion.
- Complete the Workbook Phase 4 assignments and any additional assignments as directed.
- Complete the Graduation Assignment.
- Complete thirty (30) hours of Community Service.
- Comply with ALL weekly drug testing (minimum of 2).
- Ninety (90) consecutive days of sobriety; no new arrests for 90 days.

#### **Expectations**

**Confidentiality:** All treatment-related documents will be handled to ensure that the privacy and identity are protected. The participants/Veterans will be asked to sign consents to release information, which allows the VTC team to monitor the progress throughout the time in the program.

**Reporting Progress;** In order to provide support to the participant/Veteran we ask that the participant/Veteran be honest in reporting their progress at home, work, school and in the community. Their progress will also be monitored using a checklists at every level that will help guide their way through each phase of the program. The checklists will be their road map to program completion.

**Employment:** The veteran will need to work/be able to meet program responsibilities.

**Random Drug Testing:** the goal of the VTC program is to provide the veteran the support and tools needed to lead a clean and sober life. The veteran will be drug tested as directed. Their program progress will also be monitored through drug testing.

**Code of Conduct:** VTC will be expected to do the following when appearing at Court. Be Punctual and Provide Advance Notifications of Absences; Appropriate Dress/Attire; Language and Behavior; No Smoking or Weapons allowed.

The use of incentives, positive reinforcement, sanctions will be in place to encourage as well as support pro-social change.

## **Incentives**

Incentives will be given to veterans deserving of special recognition for achievements and/or progress while in the Veterans Treatment Court. Any member of the Treatment Team can make recommendations for incentives.

### **Examples of Incentives:**

- Judicial recognition
- Reduced court appearances
- Praise/Applause
- Excused from Court early
- Graduation certificates

## **Sanctions**

Sanctions can be either rehabilitative, punitive, or both. The Veterans Treatment Court follows a progressive sanction model and incorporates sanctions that are both punitive and rehabilitative in nature which include judicial sanctions, supervision sanctions, and therapeutic sanctions.

### **Examples of Judicial Sanctions:**

- Increased contact with the Judge
- Jail Time

### **Examples of Supervision Sanctions:**

- Zero tolerance
- Reprimand
- Community service hours
- Increased contact with Coordinator and/or Court
- Return to previous Phase

### **Examples of Therapeutic Sanctions:**

- Essay assignment
- Address Judge/Peers in court
- Extension of time in Phase
- Increased individual counseling (needs to be authorized by Coordinator)

## **Capacity & Capabilities**

Describe the applicant organization's background as well as any organizational and staff capabilities and qualifications necessary to carry out this project using the approaches and activities provided above, including any essential collaborative partnerships.

All of the personnel on the VTC team not only have professional expertise in their field but also have (or will have) significant experience and understanding of veteran services and how this will manifest within the justice system.

VTC Treatment Team:

Judge: the Judge will conduct status hearings as ordered. The Judge will encourage the veteran to do well and stay on target. The Judge will hold the veteran accountable if they fail to comply with the program and/or requirements. The Judge will speak with the veteran and family (if necessary) to see how they are doing in treatment, at home, work, school, and in the community. They will also ask what the team can do for them and their family to keep them on track.

- Honorable John Roach Jr District Court

Coordinator/Case Manager: The coordinator/case manager will be responsible for monitoring the progress of applications pending, data entry, provide case management to the influx of cases received, coordinate meetings amongst staff members and report to the Judge as directed.

Treatment Provider: The Treatment Provider will establish and comprehensive, community-based treatment plan for the veteran and for the family pursuant to their mental health evaluation(s)/assessment(s). The treatment provider will also have a designee assigned to the VTC team. They will provide group, individual and family counseling sessions, and medication management services (if necessary). Program veterans will learn various coping skills on how to manage their emotions as well as ways to become free of drugs. The treatment provider will review the progress towards goals as well as provide weekly reports to the VTC team regarding progress towards treatment goals, attendance and participation, and provide insight to the team on how best to provide program veterans and families support for treatment compliance.

Collaborative Partnerships: The program has identified and developed relationships with local resources and organizations that provide ongoing support for the veterans.

The VTC Program has a strong partnership with the following but not limited to:

- US Department of Veterans Affairs
- Dallas Vet Center
- Green Path Financial Wellness
- Jake E's Riding Round Up
- Military Veteran Peer Network
- Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at Metrocare
- Texas Department of Public Safety
- Texas Legal Services Center

Successful completion of the program results in case dismissal and agreed expunction.

### **Performance Management**

Describe how the applicant organization will measure success for this project. Describe the overall goals, objectives, and strategies for this project and how the organization will collect, track, and maintain the relevant data needed to determine if the project is achieving these standards throughout the grant period.

Goal: Deliver services to veterans with cases in the criminal justice system

Objectives:

1. Ensure minimum of 80% of veterans seeking assistance will be served.
2. Demonstrate 10% increase yearly in veteran enrollment.
3. Graduate 10 from program.

Measures:

1. Provide assistance/services to 15 veterans (over the course of the grant).
2. Provide counseling and advocacy for 15 veterans (over the course of the grant).
3. Provide treatment referrals for 15 individuals (whether ultimately accepted into the VTC Program or not) (over the course of the grant and aftercare).
4. Assist 15 veterans with developing plans (over the course of the grant).

Client outcome measurements will be used to establish and evaluate the program's progress in achieving service goals. The Coordinator will analyze the outcomes and an action plan will be developed and implemented as needed to ensure that objectives will be met. Performance measurement/data will be collected, reported and submitted in a timely matter.

**Target Group**

Describe or list the agencies, individuals, or other groups to whom you expect to provide services, including any relevant data.

The program will accept veterans of the Armed Forces, including State and National Guard, who did not receive a dishonorable discharge and who are facing criminal charges (misdemeanor or felony) in Texas. Eligibility for program participation is ultimately determined upon completion of a complete classification evaluation by team.

To be eligible, veterans must not have been dishonorably discharged or convicted of violent or sexual offenses and should have a mental health diagnosis such as (but not limited to) anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), or substance abuse/addiction, determined by assessment to be caused or exacerbated by their military service.

**Evidence-Based Practices**- Describe the research or evidence that led the applicant to select the methods, approach, and activities described above. Where possible, cite specific research, evidence, or published best/promising practices model used as the basis for the project's design. If the project approach and activities described above are not based on existing evidence, the applicant must describe why they believe the method to be promising.

The VTC Program recognizes the importance in incorporating current theory, best practice, and evidence-based service delivery. As such, the program will maintain an updated knowledge base through research and training, informally reviews the program on a continual basis, and formally reviews the program annually, changes are made as needed.

The following are a few of the therapeutic evidence-based service models which may be used:

- Group therapy
- Substance abuse
- Support System
- Family Treatment
- Treatment Planning (ongoing treatment)
- Alternative therapies (art therapy, music therapy, community service projects, etc.)
- Family Treatment Court Best Practice Standards (NADCP)