

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY VETERANS TREATMENT COURT

MENTOR PROGRAM HANDBOOK



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Table of Contents

Foreword

Mission Statement

I. Roles, Requirements, and Responsibilities of the VTC Mentor Program

A. Veteran Mentors.....

B. Veteran Mentor Coordinator

II. Recruitment Policy.....

III. Training Policy.....

IV. Assignment Policy.....

V. Documentation/Record Keeping.....

VI. Confidentiality.....

VII. Recognition/Awards

VIII. *Appendices (section pending; forms to be identified)*.....

Santa Barbara County Veterans Treatment Court Standards and Practices Manual

Foreword

As the veteran population in the United States continues to rise, so too do war-related illnesses which may contribute to an escalation in the use of alcohol and drugs, suicide attempts, arrests, incarcerations, homelessness, and despair. Realizing the need to serve the veteran population, the Santa Barbara County Superior Court cultivated a proactive response to these issues through the establishment of a specialized treatment court designed to meet the particularized needs of veterans. Through multi-agency collaboration and effort, the County's first Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) became operational in November 2011.

One unique and vital component to the success of the VTC is the Mentor Program. Volunteer mentors encourage, guide, and motivate veteran-participants to complete their program and secure appropriate treatment services for psychological and substance abuse conditions stemming from their military service. These volunteers are fellow veterans who have served in Vietnam, Korea, Operation Desert Shield, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Iraqi Freedom. It is believed that the supportive relationship that is developed as a result of their efforts will improve veteran-participants' chances for a full and complete recovery that will restore them to health, reduce recidivism, and increase community safety.

The VTC Mentor Program's primary goals are to ensure that:

- Fellow veterans receive the services they need to reach their full potential as productive members of society.
- Fellow veterans are able to navigate the Court system, treatment system, and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) system.
- The needs of fellow veterans are appropriately assessed and they are aided in their adjustment back to civilian life.

This handbook is designed to provide a general framework of the structure of the VTC Mentor Program in Santa Barbara County. It will serve to:

- Demonstrate methods in which volunteer mentors can support the Court.
- Provide an overview of techniques to be utilized to encourage a "can-do" attitude in the veteran, assess their needs, manage their care, and help them solve their issues.
- Ensure the participation of volunteer mentors who are dedicated and unwavering in their commitment to support their peers.

Mission Statement

The Mission of the Santa Barbara County VTC Mentor Program is aligned with that of the County's VTC, which is "to assist justice involved veterans and their families improve their quality of life through a collaborative effort among justice partners, community based organizations, and veterans' services, thereby enhancing public safety while leaving no veteran behind." Volunteer mentors will ensure that every veteran-participant receives the services they require by helping them navigate the system and by serving as a guide, advocate, and ally. To aid their fellow veterans, volunteer mentors will pursue these goals to the best of their abilities.

I. Roles, Requirements, and Responsibilities of the VTC Mentor Program

A. Veteran Mentors

The Santa Barbara County VTC Program is dependent upon cooperation and collaboration between the criminal justice system, the VA, and community based organizations to provide comprehensive treatment for veterans. In addition to these entities, the Court also relies on the VTC Mentor Program. Upon implementation of the VTC, it was immediately recognized that veterans responded more favorably to individuals who have served in the military and shared similar experiences. The conversations and interactions between the veteran mentor and veteran-participant occurred on the level of peers rather than from a position of authority. The change in demeanor of the veteran-participant transitioned to an opportunity to make a profound impact on his/her experience within the criminal justice system. Based on these observations, it became clear that veteran mentors were an essential part of the VTC and that the active maintenance of these supportive relationships throughout treatment would increase the likelihood that veteran-participants would remain in treatment; thus, improving their chances of sobriety and law-abiding behavior.

Volunteer mentors are veterans of the armed services who donate their time to assist the Court. They share personal experiences and provide advice, recommendations, and guidance to veterans involved with the legal system. Many mentors are drawn from a number of veterans' service and government organizations and these volunteers include, but are not limited to, men and women who served in Vietnam, Desert Storm/Shield, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Roles:

Mentors serve a variety of roles, including coach, facilitator, advocate, sponsor, role model, and supporter. Mentors understand the psychological war wounds from which the mentee suffers and the manner in which such will present challenges to his/her path to success. They observe veteran-participants and work with them to help set goals and action plans. One of the most important skills the mentor brings is his/her ability to be a good *listener*. The mentor's primary role is to *listen* to the concerns of the veteran-participant and to help that individual access what is needed. Mentors do not lecture the participant by imposing their personal values/beliefs; rather, they are tolerant and respectful of individual differences. They work to understand the mentee's belief system and encourage problem-solving.

Mentors help the veteran-participant identify resources that might be helpful and encourage them to secure the services they need to resolve the challenges they encounter. Mentors encourage and applaud the veteran-participants' successes. They function as a support for the veteran-participant in a way that only fellow veterans can. The VTC Mentor Program thrives on the premise that behind every successful veteran participant, there is one elementary truth: *their mentor cares.*

While in Court, a mentor is assigned to a veteran-participant and subsequently discusses any ongoing problems or issues with the veteran-participant. They work to problem-solve existing issues that may be creating barriers. This relationship helps promote and foster, through

encouragement, a “can-do” attitude in the veteran. Through this process the veteran recognizes that they are not alone, and becomes confident that the mentor and the Court are there for them.

Requirements:

- Be a veteran of one of the branches of the United States Military, including the Army, Marine Corp, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, or their corresponding Reserve of Guard branches. He/she must have an Honorable Discharge.
- Complete and submit all application forms.
- Pass the mentor screening process, written application, personal interview, and background check.
- Complete the mentor orientation program and any additional training that may be required.
- Be in good standing with the law; not on active probation for the conviction of any crime (felony or misdemeanor). Have no felony or misdemeanor convictions within the past three (3) years and be able to pass a security background check.
- Agree to follow and abide by all policies and procedures of the *Santa Barbara County Veterans Treatment Court Standards and Practices Manual* and the VTC Mentor Program.
- Understand and support the VTC Mentor Program participant requirements, treatment plan and goals, and terms and conditions of probation, so as to assist the mentee with compliance to achieve success.
- Commit to the VTC Mentoring Program for a minimum period of one (1) year.
- Commit to at least four (4) hours a month of mentoring.

Duties and Responsibilities:

- Participate in and/or lead mentoring sessions, as assigned by the Veteran Mentor Coordinator.
- Attend all scheduled Court sessions with veteran-participant, unless excused by the Veteran Mentor Coordinator.
- Deliver support to the veteran-participant, provide clarification to any issues related to Court proceedings, and encourage compliance and ultimate success.
- Cooperate with and assist fellow VTC mentors, as well as other members of the VTC Team.
- Be honest and truthful with the veteran-participant, fellow VTC mentors, VTC Team members, and the Court at all times.
- Adhere to VTC policies and procedures.
- Log time and activities.
- Sign confidentiality agreement.
- Participate in training sessions throughout time of service.
- Remain knowledgeable of available community based resources and VA services.
- Be prepared to take immediate action to encourage the veteran-participant to contact suicide resources upon any indication of suicidal thoughts, attempts, or plans. Mentors are to keep current resource phone numbers on their person at all times, be prepared to dial 9-1-1, and ensure that they notify the VTC Mentor Coordinator, VTC Judicial Officer, and VTC Team members if they have any concerns that the veteran-participant

may be suicidal.

Rules:

- Act on the veteran-participant's interest, unless doing so would endanger him/her or others.
- Retain a professional demeanor at all times when representing the VTC and/or the VTC Mentor Program.
- Seek and secure approval from the mentor coordinator before initiating referrals to other agencies/organizations.
- Work with the mentor coordinator to resolve difficulties and/or conflicts.
- Confine role as veteran-mentor to the limits of training and competency.
- Maintain objective and professional standards in the relationship with the veteran-participant.
- Refrain from imposing personal values, lifestyle, or beliefs on the veteran-participant.
- Never promise idealistic, impractical, or better outcomes than can reasonably be expected.
- Do not exploit the veteran-participant or the relationship for agency or personal advantage.
- Do not become involved in any monetary business arrangements or commitments beyond those required for delivery of services or any other type of solicitation.
- Sexual relations or harassment of any kind will not be tolerated. Any reports of inappropriate behavior will be investigated and legal action may be initiated.
- Verbal abuse, physical abuse, or violence will not be tolerated. Violence or these types of abuse must be immediately reported to the mentor coordinator.
- Protect all information concerning the veteran-participant as confidential. Only provide personal information regarding the veteran-participant to people that he/she has identified on a signed release form.
- Encourage the veteran-participant to report knowledge of crimes or planned crimes to the appropriate law enforcement authorities.
- The veteran-participant must be informed that the mentor is obligated to report certain illegal or destructive behavior to the mentor coordinator or to the Deputy Probation Officer at the discretion of the mentor.
- In emergency situations, the mentor must contact the mental health crisis team or police and then the mentor coordinator. If the mentor is uncertain if action should be taken, he/she must consult with the mentor coordinator or Deputy Probation Officer. Only disclose information relevant to the situation.
- Unacceptable behaviors will not be tolerated while a veteran mentor is participating in the program. Because of the direct impact a mentor has on a veteran-participant, behaviors that are not aligned with the mission, vision, goals, and values of Santa Barbara County's VTC and the VTC Mentor Program are unacceptable and prohibited during Court proceedings and mentoring sessions.

Compensation:

- The VTC mentor is strictly an unpaid, volunteer position.

B. Veteran Mentor Coordinator: Duties & Responsibilities

The Veteran Mentor Coordinator is essential in maintaining the success of the VTC Mentor Program. He/she handle all of the administrative elements related to the VTC Mentor Program and serves as the liaison between the mentors, mentees, and the Courts, to some degree.

Roles:

The Mentor Coordinator is responsible for managing the VTC Mentor Program and for recruiting prospective mentors, screening candidates, selecting veteran mentors, orienting and training the selected candidates, and educating them about the VTC. He/she matches and recommends mentors for each veteran-participant. The Mentor Coordinator oversees individual and group supervision and schedules mentors to be present during Court proceedings.

Requirements:

- The Veteran Mentor Coordinator shall be a veteran of one of the branches of the United States Military, including the Army, Marine Corp, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, or their corresponding Reserve of Guard branches. He/she must have an Honorable Discharge.
- Be in good standing with the law; not on active probation for the conviction of any crime (felony or misdemeanor). Have no felony or misdemeanor convictions within the past three (3) years and be able to pass a security background check.
- Agree to follow and abide by all policies and procedures of the *Santa Barbara County Veterans Treatment Court Standards and Practices Manual* and the VTC Mentor Program.
- Understand and support the VTC Mentor Program participant requirements, treatment plan and goals, and terms and conditions of probation, so as to assist the mentee with compliance to achieve success.
- Commit to the VTC Mentoring Program for a minimum period of one (1) year.

Duties and Responsibilities:

The duties and responsibilities of the Mentor Coordinator are:

- Develop a VTC Mentor policy and procedure manual, training manual, and protocols. Final approval of all documents, policies and procedures must be obtained from County prior to finalization.
- Attend at least one (1) Court session per month. The Mentor Coordinator will schedule veteran mentors for Court appearances, as required.
- Organize and conduct County-approved training for volunteer Veteran Mentors.
- Participate in and lead mentoring sessions with veterans, as appropriate.
- Assist in the supervision of volunteer veteran mentors and ensure required compliance with all VTC policies and procedures.
- Actively recruit volunteer veteran mentors based on Santa Barbara County-approved Veteran Mentor guidelines. He/she will recruit, screen, train, supervise, and retain a minimum of 15 volunteer veteran mentors.
- Match mentors with veteran-participants.
- Work with mentors to resolve difficulties and/or conflicts.
- Develop specialized training projects.
- Ensure veterans receive as much assistance as possible to resolve any apprehension associated to Court procedures, as well as interactions with the VA system.

- Provide all mentors with current contact information for suicide prevention resources, keep them updated, and provide frequent contacts with mentors to ensure they understand the importance of using these resources in appropriate situations.
- Evolve and sustain the VTC Mentor Program

Rules:

The Veteran Mentor Coordinator will:

- Adhere to all VTC policies and procedures.
- Report to County any notable incidents occurring while veteran-participants are receiving services (i.e., physical confrontation, law violations, possession of any illegal drugs, paraphernalia, weapons, or other contraband), as well as any program refusals, failures, discharges, or disqualifications.
- Participate in meetings related to VTC and cooperate in any data collection efforts.
- Warrant that all volunteers have undergone a background and criminal records check (including California Department of Motor Vehicles check and Live Scan), training, work experience licenses, and are appropriately supervised. Volunteer may not commence services until the results of these checks have been received and the volunteer is deemed suitable for work by the County.
- Maintain the confidentiality of client records and/or client information.
- Act on the veteran-participant's interest, unless doing so would endanger him/her or others.
- Retain a professional demeanor at all times when representing the VTC and/or the VTC Mentor Program.
- Maintain objective and professional standards in the relationship with the veteran-participant.
- Refrain from imposing personal values, lifestyle, or beliefs on the veteran-participant.
- Never promise idealistic, impractical, or better outcomes than can reasonably be expected.
- Do not exploit the veteran-participant or the relationship for agency or personal advantage.
- Ensure that the veteran-participant is informed that the mentor is obligated to report certain illegal or destructive behavior to the mentor coordinator or to the Deputy Probation Officer at the discretion of the mentor.
- Report any incidences of inappropriate behavior (sexual relations, harassment, verbal abuse, physical abuse, or violence etc.).
- Encourage the veteran-participant to report knowledge of crimes or planned crimes to the appropriate law enforcement authorities.
- Ensure that mentors are aware that in emergency situations, they must contact the mental health crisis team or police and then the mentor coordinator. If the mentor is uncertain if action should be taken, he/she must consult with the mentor coordinator or Deputy Probation Officer. Only disclose information relevant to the situation.
- Unacceptable behaviors will not be tolerated while a Mentor Coordinator or the veteran mentors are participating in the program. Because of the direct impact a mentor has on a veteran-participant, behaviors that are not aligned with the mission, vision, goals, and values of Santa Barbara County's VTC and the VTC Mentor Program are unacceptable and prohibited during Court proceedings and mentoring sessions.

Compensation:

Veteran Mentor Coordinator services will be delivered and compensated as per contractual agreement.

II. Recruitment Policy

The Veteran Mentor Coordinator assumes the majority of the responsibility for recruiting new mentors. The VTC team, its collaborative partners, and current veteran mentors are strongly encouraged to refer highly respectable and reputable veterans to the Veteran Mentor Program. Additionally, VTC team members and veteran mentors are strongly encouraged to attend and host informational sessions and training for perspective mentors.

All inquiries about participating as a veteran mentor are to be directed to the Veteran Mentor Coordinator. The Veteran Mentor Coordinator will respond to any prospective mentor inquiries within two (2) weeks.

Each veteran mentor must meet the eligibility criteria outlined to participate in the program. Extenuating circumstances may be reviewed at the discretion of the Veteran Mentor Coordinator.

Current veteran mentors with knowledge of any prospective mentor's history or background that may jeopardize the integrity of the Volunteer Mentor Program, the VTC, and the Veteran participants, must communicate their knowledge or concerns to the Volunteer Mentor Coordinator, the Project Director, or the Judge.

Each prospective volunteer veteran mentor must undergo a screening process. The Volunteer Mentor Coordinator is responsible for conducting the screening and the applicant may also be interviewed by the VTC team. The decision to accept or deny an applicant will be made by the Mentor Coordinator, the Project Director, and the Judge. Feedback regarding the prospective mentor's denial may or may not be given. The right to withhold or give feedback is solely at the discretion of the Mentor Coordinator, Project Director, and Judge.

The volunteer mentor screening procedure will include, but not be limited to, the submission of a written application form and the completion of a personal interview.

III. Training Policy

Training is crucial and necessary for volunteer mentors and initial training/orientation is especially crucial for mentors. All mentors must complete the required training or they will not be able to mentor during Court proceedings. Training will include, but not be limited to, the following:

- Attend confidentiality training session
- Observe several Court sessions
- Shadow three (3) mentoring sessions with three (3) different mentors
- Lead three (3) mentoring sessions while being observed

- Complete the observation forms
- Complete individual supervision with the Mentor Coordinator

IV. Assignment Policy

The Volunteer Mentor Coordinator will assign mentors to a veteran participant at each Court appearance. Whenever possible, the Volunteer Mentor Coordinator will assign mentors based on the following criteria:

- Previous sessions where a mentor was assigned to a particular veteran participant.
- Same branch of service; for example, Air Force-to-Air Force, Marine-to-Marine, etc.
- Same war time era; for example, Vietnam to Vietnam, Iraq to Iraq, etc.
- Match the skills of a mentor to those being sought or needed by a veteran participant.
- Similar age/gender/ethnicity.

Additionally, the Volunteer Mentor Coordinator will take into consideration the request of the volunteer mentor or veteran-participant. The Volunteer Mentor Coordinator reserves the right to assign a mentor to a veteran participant as seen fit.

V. Documentation/Record Keeping

During Court proceedings, each contact between the mentor and the veteran participant will be documented in the veteran mentor log by the veteran mentor. The veteran mentor log is kept in a binder and has the name of each veteran participant on each binder.

- The mentor will take the assigned veteran participant's binder with them during any mentoring session.
- The mentor will document the mentoring session in the mentor log.
- Documentation of all mentoring sessions is necessary and mandatory.
- The mentor will not promise any outcome for a veteran participant.
- After the mentoring session has been documented, the volunteer mentor will put the mentor log back in the appropriate place.
- The Mentor Coordinator, Project Director, Court staff, or the Judge will lock the log in a safe and secure place, where it will remain whenever Court is not in session

VI. Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an essential piece of successful mentoring. Veteran participants need to know that their mentoring session is secured and confidential. Veteran mentor training will include a

mandatory confidentiality training.

VII. Recognition/Awards

At least once a year, all mentors will be recognized for their role in the VTC. The Veteran Mentor Coordinator is responsible for planning and implementing recognition activities. Some possible recognition activities include:

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

VIII. Appendices *(section pending)*