



NATIONAL COALITION *for* HOMELESS VETERANS

At Your Service

HVRP Grantee Best Practices

Connecting to Veteran Treatment Courts

One useful tool for helping justice-involved veterans is the Veterans' Treatment Court (VTC). These special courts are set up to address veterans with minor offenses, and to take into account issues experienced by many veterans such as service-related injuries, Traumatic Brain Injury, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and mental illness. The purpose of VTCs is to divert veterans from incarceration and towards treatment. HVRPs can work with local justice systems to establish a VTC if one does not exist in their area, and should educate both veterans and the legal system on this resource. VTCs work with homeless veterans, although most utilizing VTCs are not currently homeless.

By taking into account the exacerbating circumstances faced by many veterans, especially homeless veterans, VTCs offer many advantages over the regular court system. According to Rolanda Clements-Martin of Goodwill Industries of Houston, "If [veterans] work the program and work it one-hundred percent, some of them can even have the charges expunged after a certain timeframe."

Many VTCs also incorporate peer support programs according to Joe Sluszka of the Albany Housing Coalition. "The Albany Housing Coalition developed a Veterans Treatment Court in Albany County, working with the Albany County District Attorney, the judge, local veterans organizations. The role that we played was to bring to the court and to bring to that process, securing veterans who would volunteer to serve as mentors. [...] Once we began to do that, we were a part of the court process with the judge and social worker and looking at treatment plans, housing plans, employment plans, and resources through our organization that the judge could use as one of the alternatives."

VTCs can offer more flexible judgment and treatment plans for justice-involved veterans, involving the HVRP and other service providers as part of that treatment. "They invite the different agencies in the area to come to the court and let these veterans hear what we can offer them in the different areas of assistance provided by our agencies" said Darryl Harper of Career Recovery Resources. Flexible and alternative treatment plans can minimize stigma and lead to greater success in employment placement. Per Harper, "One of the veterans who's in our program, who went through the criminal justice system, has a lot of background in safety—has just been hired by a company in Houston. And now he's hiring our veterans and he's able to soften that background relationship with those companies to give our veterans a second chance."