

Albany Housing Coalition Inc.

Albany, New York



VETERANS JUSTICE INITIATIVES

VETTRAK

A Local community's response
to the needs of veterans in the court system of
upstate New York

"Halfway Home: Progress In The Plan To End Veterans Homelessness"
National Coalition For Homeless Veterans Annual Conference
Washington, DC
May 30 - June 1, 2012

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Veterans in the Criminal Justice System - 2004

- **Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics**
- Probation - 399,300
- Parole-Supervised Release - 75,000
- Local Jail - 72,600
- State Prison - 136,800
- Federal Prison - 19,300
- Total Correctional - 703,000
- Adults Arrested - 1,159,500

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

2000 Bureau of Justice Statistics Report

- 81% of all justice involved veterans had a substance abuse problem prior to incarceration.
- 35% were identified as suffering from alcohol dependency
- 23% were homeless at some point in the prior year
- 25% were identified as mentally ill.

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

WHAT ABOUT NOW?

- 25-35+% of current war veterans may have mental health conditions due to multiple deployments, Concussive shocks, PTSD, prior to service risk factors
- 1.64 million deployed in the last 11 years
- Many are not seeking treatment
- Some return with DOD medications

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

History of Veterans Courts

1989 - San Diego Stand Down Court

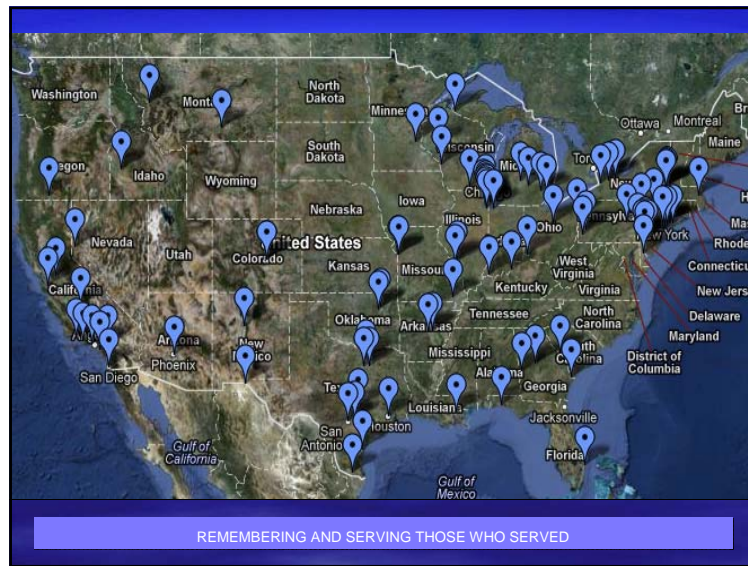
- Developed by Veterans Village of San Diego and Asst. Public Defender Steve Binder
- Municipal judges adjudicating misdemeanors
- This has evolved to a monthly “homeless court”
- Distinguishing characteristic
 - Established by Community Non-profit org.
 - peer-support driven (veterans helping veterans)

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

HISTORY ...

- 2008 - Buffalo Veterans Court (County)
 - Established by Judge Russell. Now hears all crimes in a discreet court
- 2009 - Rochester Veterans Court (County)
 - Veterans Outreach Center develops community mentor program
- 2009 - VA Veterans Justice Outreach Program Starts
- 2010 - 3rd Judicial District of NY VetTrak
 - 7 Counties + municipal courts
 - Albany Housing Coalition provides mentor program and treatment options

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED



REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Albany Housing Coalition Inc.

VHS VETERAN'S HOUSING AND SERVICES

**—Providing a Continuum of Care—
serving veterans and the community**

Housing:

- Affordable rentals to veterans and families of low to moderate income.
- Single Room Occupancy transitional and permanent housing for homeless veterans.
- Shelter Plus Care independent housing.
- Housing assistance for returning Iraq/Afghanistan war veterans.

Financial Case Management:

- Counseling and crisis intervention for veterans as needed.
- Outreach, case management and referral services for homeless & returned veterans.
- Outreach services to elderly home-based veterans.
- VetTrak court treatment program for veterans.

Counseling and Workshops:

- Pre-purchase homeownership and budget counseling.
- Rights & responsibilities for tenants & landlords.
- Budgeting, vocational and educational workshops for veterans in our housing.

Financial, Employment, Training, and Job:

- U.S. Dept. of Labor Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program
- Counseling, training, job development, and placement
- Linkage to area employers

Publications:

- The Affordable Rental List, a bi-monthly listing of apartments and houses distributed to over 250 agencies and walk-in individuals a month.

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES
An integrated approach to employment for homeless veterans.

CLAYTON AVE. HOSTELS
ARMY/NAVY
Transitional and permanent housing units, independent living with support services.

MILITARY PLAN'S CARE
Thirty One sections & structure for veterans moving into their own apartment. Monitoring with home visits by case management team.

COUNSELING SERVICES
for homelessness and homeownership.

SCATTERED SITE RENTALS
Affordable three bedroom apartments for families and veterans.

SENIOR VETERANS OUTREACH
Shelter services provided to Senior Veterans AT HOME.

CONNERY VETERANS HOME
Permanent residence for veterans. Affordable supportive housing for disabled veterans.

PEARL VETERINARY
• VetTrak court diversion

VETERAN CASE MANAGEMENT
and service coordination.

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Transitional The Vet House



- 28 room Per Diem
- Resident Council leadership
- Case management
- Linkages to health/employment services

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Independent Transitional 280 Clinton Ave.



- Shared Apartments
- 2 veterans per apartment
- Supportive Services

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Permanent Supportive Connors Veterans Home



- 12 room w. shared kitchen, baths, living areas
- Leadership Council
- Supportive services

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Raising Self-Esteem
With
Community Support



REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

AHC Veteran Services

- transitional housing / permanent, supportive housing
- 50 S+C vouchers
- U.S. DOL HVRP Employment Program
- Senior veterans outreach (City of Albany)
- Pro bono legal services for civil matters
- Pro bono wills and trusts
- Peer support program for returning veterans
- VetTrak

2009 RECIPIENT OF VA SEC. SHINSEKI SECRETARY'S
AWARD FOR OUTSTANDING SERVICE

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

The Treatment Court Premise

- The current needs of many veterans are related to their military service.
 - Many veterans use drugs as a way of numbing or decreasing their stress levels.
 - Some current illegal drug use stems from prescribed or shared drugs while in the field.
- Treatment, housing, employment - with Peer Support - can dramatically change attitudes, behaviors, and lifestyle for the long term.

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

FEATURES

1. integrate alcohol/drug treatment and mental health services with justice system processing
2. use a non-adversarial approach -promote public safety while protecting veteran participants' due process rights
3. identify eligible participants early and promptly place them in the Veterans Treatment Court
4. provide access to a continuum of alcohol, drug, mental health and other related treatment and rehabilitation services
5. monitor abstinence through frequent alcohol and other drug testing

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

FEATURES

7. maintain essential, ongoing judicial interaction with each veteran
8. measure achievement of program goals and gauge program effectiveness through monitoring and ongoing evaluation
9. continue interdisciplinary education and promote effective Veterans Treatment Court planning, implementation and operations
10. forge partnerships

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

HOW COURTS GET STARTED

- Partnerships among judge, DA, community veterans and organizations
- Some States Require authorizing legislation
- Lobbying/ recent PR - mostly by NADCP

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

MENTORS ARE THE KEY

- Veteran peer mentors engage and provide support to participants
- Veteran peer mentors provide cultural competency to the courts

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Mentor Coordinator Role

- Find appropriate mentors
- Match mentors with participants based on shared qualities and backgrounds to the greatest extent possible.
- Schedule the appropriate number of mentors needed for each court session.
- Act as a resource for the mentors
- Prepare Community Services Guide

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Mentor Coordinator

- Work with the Veterans Treatment Court staff to resolve issues and motivate participants through challenges.
- Maintain confidentiality standards.
- Maintain access to the mentor logbook or case management notes.
- recruit, screen and train new veteran mentors

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

What It Takes To Be a Mentor

- 1. Active listening skills
- 2. Ability to Clarify issues
- 3. Support, trust, raise self-esteem
- 4. Ability to see positive outcomes
- 5. Confidentiality and judgement
- 6. Knowledge of local professional services
- 7. Ability to recognize boundaries



REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Mentor Role

- Create a relationship of trust with the veteran
- Appear in court with the veteran
- Meet or talk with participants to assist in resolving their issues.
- Work collaboratively with the other mentors and the mentor coordinator.
- Motivate participants utilizing a strengths-based approach
- Assist court treatment personnel

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Mentor Screening

- DD214
- Background Check
- Cooperative Nature
- Ability to recognize boundaries
- Ability to appear in court on scheduled dates

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

CONFIDENTIALITY

- Mentor is a resource to the veteran and to the court team
 - Information the veteran shares with the mentor is disclosed only when it is perceived that physical harm may occur or a law has been broken
 - Information discussed during court team meetings is generally not shared with the veteran. The mentor may share options that are discussed

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Mentor No-No's

- Do not make clinical recommendations
- Do not give legal advice
- Do not provide psychotherapy
- Do not utilize a stern approach
- Do not inappropriately extend the boundaries of the relationship

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Peer Support is

NOT

- Mental Health Therapy
- Disease Diagnosis
- Legal Assistance

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Elements that Work

- Raise self-esteem
- Establish trust
- Give Hope

- Self esteem...trust...hope...

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

2 PEER SUPPORT MODELS

- In-house to the court using veteran volunteers. Directed by the court
- Community – driven
 - Non-profit veteran organization drives the set up, mentor training, mentoring, and coordination of resources

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

AHC'S VETERANS COMMUNITY ADVOCACY PROGRAM

- Homelessness Prevention
 - By addressing stress behaviors such as alcohol / substance abuse, domestic violence, depression, financial difficulties
 - By creating veteran success models for family, career, individual behaviors and healthcare

RESULT: Independent life in the Community

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

VCAP FEATURES

- Serves as a community-based point of contact for direct service and access to services
- Targets addressing at-risk behaviors and seeks to fully integrate the veteran back home with wrap-around services
- Intervention and treatment now to reduce / eliminate stressors and the effects and consequences of PTSD behaviors - Save a Life, Save A Family, Save a Career
- Act now to prevent loss of family, friends, employment, housing.

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

VCAP GOALS

- Prevent the downward spiral that leads to homelessness.
- Give the returning veterans - especially the young men and women who are starting out in life -an equal playing field for success in their lives
- Put the Albany Housing Coalition's homeless housing for veterans program out of business

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

The All-Important Response

- Raise Self-esteem
- Establish Trust
- Communicate Hope
- Insist on responsibility

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Why VetTrak?

- Anecdotal reports from local county sheriffs about recently returned veterans
 - Reckless driving / speeding
 - DWI
 - Domestic calls
 - Bar disturbances

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

VetTrak

A PEER MENTORING COURT TREATMENT MODEL

- Recognizes that a veteran's behavior may be the result of a military cause that needs treatment. It is a symptom that can be treated.
- Requires responsibility and follow-through.
- Successfully helps re-integrate the veteran into his/her community.

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

What is VetTrak

- VetTrak is a non-profit, veterans-driven, community-based veterans court model
- VetTrak is a track of existing county drug courts. (It is not a separate court.)
- It operates in 7 county courts that comprise the 3rd Judicial District of NYS

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

- VetTrak was designed as a track of existing courts
 - To eliminate the costs and personnel a new court would require
 - To speed up implementation
 - To use existing drug treatment court personnel
 - To serve as a potential model for veterans courts across NYS

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

How VetTrak Got Started

- Discussions among a DA, county judge, VA
- VA issues with confidentiality arose
- We were brought in by the DA to help resolve the issues
- We developed a model that used the VA's VJO person as resource to the court and lobbied VA to increase the VJO from 10% employee to 100%.

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Getting Started ...

- We developed the mentor program using Buffalo and Rochester as a resource
- We secured local foundation support to hire a mentor coordinator.
- The program concept went to the District judge for approval
- He named the new court VetTrak and declared it instituted throughout his district of 7 counties on Law Day 2010

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Kick-starting the 7 courts

- The district judge arranged for us to initiate the court personnel in each county
- We secured and trained mentors
- We outreached to the county jail and probation personnel
- We provided the courts with local treatment resource options

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Who Are the Court Players?

- The veteran with a felony or misdemeanor charge
- County drug court judge (felonies) or city court judge (misdemeanors)
- Drug Court Treatment team
- District Attorney

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

More Court Players

- Defendant's counsel
- Albany Housing Coalition's VetTrak Coordinator / mentor
- VA VJO (Veterans Justice Outreach) worker
- Select community treatment providers / Vet Center

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Who is eligible for VetTrak?

- Any veteran with a non-violent offense who is willing to:
 - Sign a contract with the court
 - Accept advice of a veteran mentor
 - Follow through on treatment requirements
 - Anger mgmt AA mtgs VA counseling
 - Vet Center counseling drug treatment
 - Employment Housing

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Elements of VetTrak

- Court – ordered assessment of the defendant's needs by a community provider and/or VA
- Court – ordered treatment / counseling
- Volunteer vets to support/mentor the vet
- Coordinated weekly communication between service provider(s) and the court
- Addressing all needs: housing, employment, healthcare

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Putting the Pieces Together

- Veterans are referred by the jail, law enforcement, community folks for DA approval
- The court's Treatment Coordinator asks for an assessment, typically provided by VA through VJO, or a community provider when time is of the essence.
- AHC's VetTrak Coordinator is also notified to help link a mentor
- Vet's assessment is reviewed by court coordinator to determine eligibility and by our coordinator to develop a course of action.

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Putting the Pieces Together

- Vet signs a contract with the court.
- Vet appears in court with his / her mentor. Options are put forth for treatment, housing, employment, benefits.
- Vet is monitored by the court and the mentor.
- Weekly the treatment providers submit progress to the court
- Veteran appears in court (usually) weekly where progress is discussed.

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

HOW WELL IS IT WORKING?

- Our experience with court team employees
- Our experience with the judges
- Our experience finding and retaining mentors
- Our experience with the veterans

- A success story

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Adding civil matters to the mix

- * Partnership with regional Legal Aid Society to resolve child support, drivers license, other issues
 - Provides volunteer veteran attorneys
 - Albany Law School students assist with research, doc preparation, etc.
- * Pro bono law firm commits to preparing wills and trusts on a long-term basis

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

STARTING A COURT

- Seek out and discuss your idea with potential mentors – Vietnam era veterans are valuable
- Visit justiceforvets.com and arm yourself with the need - and the successes - a veterans treatment court can produce
- Meet with your DA and county drug court judge
- Offer to train and coordinate mentors and act as resource to engage VA and other local treatment providers
- Engage local support - for the idea and to raise \$

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED



www.JusticeForVets.org

A COMBAT VETERANS SHARES HIS EXPERIENCE
WITH THE ROCHESTER, NY VETERANS COURT -
6 MIN. VIDEO

<http://www.justiceforvets.org/stefanovic-speech>

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

VETERANS JUSTICE RESOURCES

National Association of Drug Court Professionals

– www.nadcp.org

– www.justiceforvets.org/resources

■ Veterans Administration

– <http://www.va.gov/homeless/VJO.asp>

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Court Diversion Programs

- Buffalo Veterans Court
www.buffaloveteranscourt.org/
- Rochester Veterans Court
www.nycourts.gov/courts/7jd/vet/
- 3rd. Judicial District of NYS - VetTrak
[B.blanchard @ahcvets.org](mailto:B.blanchard@ahcvets.org)

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED

Questions ?



A Program of the Albany Housing Coalition

278 Clinton Ave., Albany, NY 12110
518-465-5251
www.ahcvets.org

Presenters

Joe Sluszka

jsluszka@ahcvets.org

Bryon Koshgarian

b.koshgarian@ahcvets.org

REMEMBERING AND SERVING THOSE WHO SERVED