

VETERANS ENHANCED TREATMENT COURT

Veterans Court - SPOKANE COUNTY



PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK

Revised July 2022

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I. DESCRIPTION

❖ What is Veterans Court?

Veterans Court is a therapeutic court program designed to provide a non-adversarial resolution process for Veterans who have committed misdemeanor offenses and have a military service-related diagnosis of either Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), or Military Sexual Trauma (MST). Referrals for potential participants that were also combat Veterans¹ will be given special priority.

Spokane County Veterans Court is a collaboration of numerous agencies: County District Court, the Veterans Administration (VA), the Public Defender's Office, the Prosecutor's Office, the Probation Department, and other community partners. These agencies, working together, have established a viable option for a select group of offenders whose needs are better met through treatment intervention rather than incarceration.

The mission of the Spokane County Veterans Court is to provide an interagency, collaborative, non-adversarial treatment strategy for Veterans involved in the criminal justice system while holding them accountable and reintegrating them

¹ A "combat Veteran" is defined in the Department of Veterans Affairs VHA Handbook.

into the community.

❖ **What are the goals of Veterans Court?**

- Introduce participants to an ongoing process of recovery designed to help them become stable, employed and substance-free while continuing mental health care through community/peer counseling groups and/or the VA.
- Increase community/public safety and awareness.
- Reduce participant contacts with the criminal justice system.
- Reduce costs associated with criminal case processing.
- Reduce re-arrest of participants.

❖ **Am I eligible?**

Veterans Court may² accept individuals with a confirmed military service-related diagnosis from the Department of Veterans Affairs of either Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) or Military Sexual Trauma (MST). Referrals for potential participants that were also Combat Veterans will be given special consideration/priority.

² ***Exclusions:*** Any prior convictions of serious violent offenses or sex offenses.

❖ **How does it work?**

Only those individuals whose cases are Spokane County misdemeanor or gross misdemeanor are eligible for acceptance into Veterans Court pending a review by the Veterans Court team. The Veterans Court team consists of the Judge, Prosecutor, Public Defender, Probation Officer, Veterans Court Coordinator, Veterans Justice Outreach Coordinator, and Spokane Veterans Forum representative and additional court staff

Felony reductions pled in District Court may be referred to the Veterans Court for probation monitoring, subject to a staffing review by the team.

All phases must be completed to graduate from Veterans Court. Each individual program is subject to change by the Veterans Court team consistent with the participant's progress through the phases. To advance to the next phase, all necessary tasks given by the treatment provider and the Veterans Court team must be completed. The following phase descriptions are not all inclusive. Each participant's progress through the program is based solely on their individual performance and compliance with the following phase requirements.

❖ Phase Outline

Phase 1 – Orientation and Engagement

2 Months

1. Attend court hearings bi-monthly (2x a month).
2. Random UAs at probation discretion.
3. Comply with getting all necessary evaluations and treatment/counseling services.
4. Attend all appointments with treatment providers and case managers as scheduled.
5. Take all medications as prescribed.
6. Comply with weekly mentor contact requirements.
7. Attend the Veterans Forum once a month.
8. Court fees payment plan must be established.
9. No new criminal law violations.

Phase 2 – Intensive Treatment

4 Months

1. Attend court hearings bi-monthly (2x a month).
2. Random UAs at probation discretion.
3. Attend all appointments with treatment providers and case managers as scheduled.
4. Take all medications as prescribed.
5. Comply with weekly Mentor contact requirements.
6. Attend the Veterans Forum once a month.
7. Court fees payment plan must be in good standing.
8. No new criminal law violations.

Phase 3 – Transition/Community Engagement

4 Months

1. Attend monthly court hearings.
2. Random UAs at probation discretion.
3. Attend all appointments with treatment providers and case managers as scheduled.
4. Take all medications as prescribed.
5. Comply with weekly Mentor contact requirements.
6. Attend the Veterans Forum once a month.
7. Court fees payment plan must be in good standing.
8. No new criminal law violations.
9. Involved with work/school/volunteer activities or have reasonable cause for dismissal from activities.

Phase 4 – Maintenance/Recovery Aftercare

2 Months – 1 year

1. Attend court hearings as needed or as determined by the Veterans Court. The frequency of your attendance at these hearings will be based on your previous success in Phases 1, 2 and 3.
2. Random UAs at probation discretion.
3. Attend all appointments with treatment providers and case managers as scheduled.
4. Take all medications as prescribed.
5. Comply with weekly Mentor contact requirements.
6. Attend the Veterans Forum once a month.
7. Court fees payment plan must be in good standing.
8. No new criminal law violations.

9. Involved with work/school/volunteer activities or have reasonable cause for dismissal from activities.
10. Complete a graduation evaluation survey.

Phase 5 – Graduation

Participants are eligible for graduation once they have successfully completed all phases as outlined previously and the participant has participated in the program for a minimum of 12 months. Individual performance will be determined by the Veterans Court team. Family, friends, employers, counselors and sponsors of the participants are welcome to come to court and share in this joyous and life-affirming occasion. There will be a graduation ceremony at the final court appearance in which the participant will present their graduation letter and receive a certificate of Veterans Court completion and Quilt of Valor. The participant and mentor will also receive recognition at the final Veterans Forum meeting upon the participant presenting their graduation letter.

II. Frequently asked questions

❖ What are the benefits of Veterans Court?

There are three primary and several secondary benefits to the Veterans Court.

Primary:

- One month of probation is reduced for every forum attended, with a maximum of 12 months reduced.
- Possibility of reduction and/or dismissal of charges (for those who qualify).
- Availability of the Veterans Forum resources.

Secondary:

- Availability of Veterans Related Community Resources.
- Assistance with employment, housing, VA benefits and disability.
- Therapeutic approach rather than punitive (incarceration is used as a last resort).
- Camaraderie.

❖ What is the Veterans Forum?

The Spokane Veterans Forum (SVF) is a non-profit, all volunteer program that provides mentoring as well as educational, therapeutic, and life-enhancing services at no cost to military Veterans.

The SVF is a separate entity from the Veterans Court, designed to assemble and focus services in support of the Veterans during their court-ordered resolution process. The

referred Veteran is matched with a mentor, also a Veteran, who provides them support as they participate in the community program.

The SVF matches and trains the volunteer Veteran Mentors and reports regularly to the Veterans Court probation officers regarding individual progress and compliance for the court-ordered treatment reviews. Veterans are required to be in contact with their mentors on a weekly basis at a minimum and to attend the formal SVF meetings held monthly where they will share a meal together, experience fellowship and camaraderie, and attend classes on therapeutic topics and life skills.

The probation officers attend the forums to personally interact with the mentor and Veteran participants.

SVF also provides services through partnerships with Veterans groups, federal, State, and local governments, in addition to local businesses and non-profits in the Inland Northwest.

❖ **Forum Etiquette**

Attendance at the forum should be treated the same as court (See pg 18), except for eating and drinking, which is allowed at the forum. Remember, all forum staff and mentors are there voluntarily and in support of your success. To receive credit for attending the forum the participant must stay the

entire time. Treat staff, mentors, other participants, and the facilities with respect or they will be asked to leave. If a participant is asked to leave the forum, they:

- Will not receive credit for attendance
- Must have the judge's approval before being allowed to return

❖ **Team response to violations**

In the event of a violation, a hearing will be held where all pertinent information will be presented. The participant will have an opportunity to present their version of the alleged events and the Judge will then decide if the violation did or did not occur and impose sanctions if deemed necessary.

❖ **What sanctions are given?**

If the participant does not comply with their treatment program, misses mandatory meetings, Court hearings, probation appointments, or receives new criminal charges, fails to take biological tests³ as scheduled, relapses, or violates any other terms of their individual supervision plan, the judge will sanction their actions. Possible sanctions include:

- Admonishment

³ Biological tests include: Urinalysis, Blood Analysis, Portable Breath Test, or SCRAM

- Writing assignments
- Extended or loss of phase time
- Increased treatment requirements
- Geiger workcrew
- GPS/Electronic Home Monitoring
- Community service
- Jail time
- Termination

❖ **How do alcohol / drug screens work?**

If the participant is in treatment, the agency can require the participant to test at any time. Probation Officers can also require participants to test at their discretion regardless of the type of criminal charge. Any refusal or missed test will be considered a violation and a letter will be sent to the court for non-compliance.

❖ **While participating in Veterans Court, participants may not consume any alcohol, marijuana, or other illegal drugs at any time for any reason.**

Participants must be very careful not to ingest any substance containing alcohol, illegal drugs or non-prescribed drugs that may show positive results if tested. If participants are unsure if a product will result in a positive test for substances, it is the participant's responsibility to contact their probation officer for approval.

❖ **What if I relapse?**

Veterans Court does not allow the use of any alcohol, marijuana, or drugs unless prescribed by a physician; however, the court also recognizes that recovery is not always linear, and a recurrence is possible. Traditional court systems have placed emphasis on using incarceration as an immediate sanction for recurrences, while Veterans Court uses incarceration as a last resort unless you are dishonest or do not self-report your recurrence. Self-reporting does not mean the participant admits to using when questioned; self-reporting is informing probation before they get the information from another source. The severity of sanction for each recurrence all depends on the participant's honesty. If the participant lies or hides their recurrence and is caught, a harsher sanction may be imposed.

❖ **What if I have a serious medical condition?**

In general, if a participant has a serious medical condition, they will not be excluded from Veterans Court. The participant must be willing to fully disclose the condition and medical care to the treatment providers and Veterans Court team. If the participant is taking medication for the condition, they must continue to do so according to their primary care physician's directions. Although the Veterans Court team can be flexible and work around a medical condition, the participant must be able to engage in and complete treatment and forum attendance. The

participant must provide a copy of all prescriptions to probation and must advise the team of any changes in medications.

❖ **Can I use prescription medications?**

Participants are expected to be drug-free. If a participant's doctor prescribes mind-altering medication, the participant must sign a release of information for probation to verify and monitor the prescription for potential misuse.

❖ **What if I need to move, change roommates, or get a new job?**

Probation must be notified before an address or phone number change. In addition, probation must be informed immediately if a participant's job status changes in any way.

After notifying probation, the participant's mentor must also be notified.

❖ **What if I want to travel outside of Spokane County?**

If a participant needs to travel outside Spokane County, they must first contact their probation officer to request permission to leave. If it is a day trip, the request is usually approved, if there is advance notice. If it is an overnight trip the participant will need court permission and a trip permit from their probation officer.

❖ **What is the Therapeutic Track for Veterans Court?**

If a potential participant has a Domestic Violence criminal charge, they may be eligible for the Therapeutic Track within Veterans Court. This track removes the requirement of monthly Veterans Forum attendance. In lieu of attendance at the forum, the participant will be required to complete 36 hours of community service within their 12 month program. All other requirements of all phases are still applicable.

❖ **What if I have contact with Law Enforcement?**

All police contact must be reported to probation within 48 hours of contact. Police contact includes any situation in which police officers have asked the participant for their name, or occasions in which participants had to call the police. Police contact also includes instances where the police would want to talk to the participant, even if the participant fled the scene or were otherwise unavailable to speak with police.

The following instances also requires the participant to notify their probation officer (this list is not all inclusive):

- Party to a lawsuit
- Sought as a witness
- New arrests/citations
- Subject of an investigation
- Learns they have a warrant
- Receive a subpoena or a restraining order

III. RULES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

❖ CONFIDENTIALITY

The participant must sign a release of information which allows probation to give information to the team. The team consists of the Judge, Prosecutor, Public Defender, Probation Officer, Veterans Court Coordinator, Veterans Justice Outreach Coordinator, SVF representative, and additional court staff. Every participant's privacy is respected, and the team will make every effort to maintain confidentiality.

Confidentiality amongst participants is also essential to maintain the integrity of group therapy sessions. Nothing that is discussed within the confines of those meetings will leave those meetings. No information pertaining to another participant should be discussed outside of the group meetings or outside of the courtroom.

❖ FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS

Unless the participant can pay off all fines and fees within 30 business days of their arraignment, all court payments are to be paid to maintain good standing through PAR Acceptance Corp. Information regarding payments may be obtained from the court clerks.

If the criminal charge involved a property crime, the

participant will be required to pay the restitution that is owed to the victims of the crime. The amount of restitution, if any, will be determined at sentencing. Regular payments must be maintained on restitution fees in accordance with the court order.

❖ **COURT ATTENDANCE**

Attendance in court is mandatory on the dates the participant is ordered to appear by the judge. Participants must arrive at court at least five minutes before court begins and remain in the courtroom until the completion of court. The only exception to court attendance is if the participant's probation officer has pre-approved the absence.

If the participant is not present in court on the required days, a bench warrant may be issued. It is then the participant's responsibility to get the warrant quashed or turn themselves in. *If this does not happen, the participant will be arrested and remain in jail until their next Veterans Court appearance.*

❖ **COURTROOM BEHAVIOR**

Participants are expected to always maintain appropriate behavior in the courtroom and courthouse. This includes:

- Be on time.
- No chewing gum.
- No smoking in the courthouse.

- No talking while court is in session.
- No eating or drinking in the courtroom.
- Turn off cell phones or they will be confiscated.
- Do not leave the courtroom (restroom breaks are allowed).
- Appropriate dress is necessary; button up collared shirts are required.
 - The following clothing items are not allowed:
Sunglasses, hats, provocative clothing, shorts, or any clothing that may be deemed offensive.

❖ **WHAT IS THE RESOURCE ROOM AND THE CLOTHES/SUPPLY CLOSET?**

All participants will have access to the clothes/supply closet. The closet provides free clothing, winter coats, gloves, beanies, scarves, boots, socks, underwear, towels, sheets, blankets and personal hygiene items. If a participant is in need of clothing or other personal items, please contact one of our case managers.

All participants will have access to our resource room. We currently have two computers with internet access to assist participants with job searches, filling out job applications online, creating resumes, cover letters or other employment and educational needs. If a participant does not have access to a computer or internet and they would like to utilize our research room, please contact one of our case managers.

A Letter from a Veterans Court Mentor:

Background:

US Army, active duty, M1A1 tank crewman. Reserves, combat engineer and went into the Drill Sergeant school. Participated in Desert Storm with the 1st Infantry Division. I ride with and have been a longtime member of the Combat Vet Riders, holding officer positions including president.

I had joined the military before graduating high school, I was on a bad path and the recruiter said they would feed me well in the Army, I was hooked. When leaving the military I was disenchanted, wanting to forget and leave that chapter behind. The civilian world was a very different place when I came back to it, people's concerns were trivial, they were consumed with small things while I carried anger, ferocity and demons inside, it was easier to put on camouflage and blend in with the herd than even try to talk to someone. In time I learned that chapter in my life never gets erased, never goes away, the camaraderie, the brotherhood and simple understanding was missing. It was time to come back to where I came from and help others that also feel alone in a world that doesn't get it. We are not as alone as we feel, there are many just like us.

Why I became a mentor:

Having been down the same road as so many that are

coming back home, I know the hazards, the problems, the feeling of isolation. Having brushes with the law myself, it's very easy to sympathize with the hard adjustment and defiant attitude towards a system that seems uncaring to your situation.

It's very easy to find yourself in a hole only to find yourself digging deeper without an end in sight. I know this because I have stood before these very same judges and probation officers without help.

Another issue that is heartbreaking is the sheer amount of warriors coming home from battle to lose a war within themselves, self-destructing and becoming a statistic. This is not a fitting end to the lives of those that gave so much for their country. If there was a way to help just one it would be worth it.

Hearing about the Vets Court program it was easy to become enthusiastic about being involved. This program has proven to be helpful for so many, the Veteran in trouble, the tax payers, the families and especially myself.

The mentor's role through the process:

Mentors are not cops, judges, juries, probation officers or executioners. The mentor's role is to act as a coach, a cheerleader, a friendly voice of reason, a soft shoulder to talk

with, or a firm shoulder when you need that motivation. We extend our hand and will be involved in your lives, to what degree you decide, we can talk every day or once a week, whatever you need from us. We are there to point you in the right directions when the system becomes an overwhelming maze. This is not about you or me, it's about us as a team, battles, working one step at a time to succeed together. We won't do more work than you to get you to success but can promise this, we will not fail you and I can safely speak for the judges, the probation officers and everyone else involved in the program when I say that we all want nothing more than for you to succeed.

This becomes bigger than a simple obligation or contract for either of us, this can become a journey where lifelong bonds are formed. Many years from now you can rest assured that someone has your back, you can call on us for anything and we will be there, it's as simple as that.

-Marshall Cockrill

IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION

Therapeutic Court Coordinator

o Hans Horstketter (509) 477-2283

Email: HHorstketter@spokanecounty.org

Veterans Court Coordinator/Probation Officer 2

o Tom Squires (509) 477-6471

Email: tasquires@spokanecounty.org

Veterans Court Judicial Assistant

o Kiara Segura (509) 477-2924

County Clerk

o (509) 477-2211

Veterans Forum Mentor Coordinator

o Jerry Gutman (425) 785-5052

Email: jerrygutman@gmail.com

VA Representatives

o Substance Abuse Director: (509) 434-7000 x
6287

- Veterans Justice Outreach Coordinator:

Doug Fender (509) 434-7390

Vet Center OEF/OIF Adjustment Coordinator

- Joe Dumlao (509) 444-8387

County Veterans Services Director

- Cat Nichols (509) 477-4498

Email: CNichols@spokanecounty.org

Notes:
