

Williamson County Veterans Treatment Court

VETERAN PEER MENTOR PROGRAM



“Leave No Veteran Behind and Honor Their Service”

Honorable Laura Barker, Presiding Judge, County Court at Law #2

Erin Lucas, Program Case Manager – (512) 943-1664

Tracie Dick, Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist – (512) 663-2746

Michael Carson, Veteran Mentor Coordinator – (713) 857-2942

Est. April 2016

Mission Statement for the Peer Mentor Program

The Mission of the Williamson County Veterans Treatment Court Peer Mentor Program is to make certain to the best of our abilities that no veteran is left behind. The Program strives to ensure that every participating Veteran in the Veterans Treatment Court has a fellow Veteran that acts as a mentor, advocate, and ally.

Goals of the Peer Mentor Program

To act as an ally and friend, and help fellow Veterans successfully readjust to civilian life. To help our fellow veterans receive the services they need to reach their full potential as productive members of society and to help our fellow veterans navigate the court, treatment, and the VA system.

Program Description

The Williamson County Veterans Treatment Court relies on cooperation and collaboration among the criminal justice system, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veteran service organizations, and community treatment agencies to provide comprehensive treatment for Veterans. In addition to these entities, the Court also relies on Peer Mentors. **Peer Mentors are veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces who volunteer their time to assist the Court, providing advice, personal experiences, recommendations, and guidance to Veterans.** Many of our Peer Mentors are drawn from several Veteran's Service Organizations, the local community, and government organizations. Peer Mentors include, but are not limited to, those who have served in peacetime, Vietnam, Desert Shield/Storm, and combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

By encouraging and empowering the Veteran to take the lead in solving their own problems, the Peer Mentor promotes and fosters a "can do" attitude in the Veteran, and the Veteran becomes motivated to accomplish his or her goals in treatment, feels that he or she is not alone, and knows that the mentor and the court team are there for them. Experience has shown that Veterans are more comfortable talking with and respond more favorably to other Veterans who have served and share similar experiences.

The conversation and interactions between the Peer Mentor and Veteran Participant are on the level of peers rather than from a position of authority. The change in demeanor of the Veteran Participant becomes an opportunity to make a profound impact on the Veterans who enter the Court. Based on our and other courts' observations, it has become clear that Peer Mentors are a critical part of the Williamson County Veterans Treatment Court. The active and supportive

relationships maintained throughout treatment increase the likelihood that a Veteran will remain in treatment and improve their chances of maintaining sobriety and law-abiding behavior.

Peer Mentor Duties

The Veteran Mentor acts as a coach, guide, role model, and advocate, who provides support for the veteran during the treatment program. This includes listening to the concerns of the veteran and making general suggestions, assisting the veteran to determine needs, and acting as a sounding board for the Veteran, especially when the Veteran may feel isolated.

The Veteran Mentor is not a therapist, counselor, treatment provider, legal advisor, probation officer or judge. It is important to stay between the lines. The mentor does not attend probation and treatment coordinator meetings, due to privacy rules and regulations.

The conversation and interaction between veteran and mentor are on the peer-to-peer level rather than one person possessing authority over another. The veteran's change of demeanor presents an opportunity for positive change while the treatment program progresses. Active and supportive relationships, maintained throughout treatment, will increase the likelihood that a Veteran will remain in treatment, and improve the chances of sobriety and law-abiding behavior.

The following are basic duties of the Veteran Mentor:

- a. **Attend court sessions when scheduled.** The mentor stands with the veteran during court appearances. The mentor does not speak for the veteran in Court.
- b. **Training is crucial and necessary for Veteran Mentors.** All prospective mentors must complete required initial training, or they will not be permitted to mentor during Docket proceedings.
- c. Participate in and lead mentoring sessions with the veteran. Meet with the veteran participant once a week and/or schedule a Zoom chat between court appearances.
- d. Be supportive and understanding of the difficulties other veterans are facing.
- e. Assist veterans as much as possible to resolve their concerns about the Court procedures.
- f. Assist veterans to access and navigate the Veterans Affairs system.
- g. Be supportive and helpful to other veteran mentors.
- h. Be an active listener and empathetic.
- i. Be tolerant and respectful of individual differences.
- j. Have thorough knowledge of community resources and services (the Court staff

- is a good source of knowledge for resources).
- k. Maintain required records of mentoring contacts and sessions.
 - l. Be aware of and maintain required privacy and confidentiality. **VETERAN MENTOR PROGRAM** confidentiality is an essential part of successful mentoring. Veterans need to know their sessions with a mentor are highly secure and confidential and are not shared with the judicial system.

Mentor Qualifications

The Veteran Mentor Coordinator assumes the majority responsibility for recruiting new mentors. The Williamson County Veterans Treatment Court Team, its collaborative partners, and current veteran mentors are strongly encouraged to refer highly respected and reputable veterans to the Veteran Mentor Program.

Each applicant for service as a Veteran Mentor shall meet the criteria outlined in this handbook. Extenuating circumstances may be reviewed at the discretion of the Veteran Mentor Coordinator. Unusual or negative circumstances may be submitted to the Judge for review.

Inquiry Policy

All inquiries about the Veteran Mentor Program and potential service as a mentor will be directed to the Veteran Mentor Coordinator.

Screening Process

Each prospective Veteran Mentor must complete the screening process. The Mentor Coordinator is responsible for this process. The decision to accept or reject an applicant will be made by the Veteran Mentor Coordinator, the Specialty Court Program Coordinator, and the Judge. The right to withhold or provide feedback to any applicant is solely at the discretion of the Mentor Coordinator, Specialty Court Program Coordinator, and the judge.

The Veteran Mentor Screening procedure will include, but not be limited to:

- 1– Completing a written application form.
- 2– Completing a personal interview by the Veteran Mentor Coordinator.
- 3– A positive background investigation from the Williamson County Attorney's Office.

Assignment Policy

The Veteran Mentor Coordinator will assign Veteran Mentors to a veteran at each Docket appearance. As particular mentors may not be available at each session, the Mentor

Coordinator will assign an available mentor to the veteran for that session. Whenever possible the Veteran Mentor Coordinator will assign mentors based on the following criteria:

1– Same branch of service.

2– Same era, war, or

campaign.3– Similar military specialties.

4– Specific skills of a Veteran Mentor that will benefit the Veteran.

5– Similar age, gender, or ethnicity.

6– Assigning a female mentor to a female veteran may facilitate discussion of traumatic experiences such as Military Sexual Trauma. Female mentors may be assigned to male veterans at the discretion of the Veteran Mentor Coordinator.

Assignment decisions may also consider the requests of the mentor or the veteran. The Veteran Mentor Coordinator reserves the authority to assign a particular mentor to a particular veteran.

Mentor Training Policy

Training is crucial for volunteer Mentors and initial training is especially important for prospective Mentors. All prospective Mentors must complete the required initial training, or they will not be able to Mentor during court proceedings. Training will include participation in a 2-hour orientation session. It may also include being paired with a senior Mentor, or the Mentor Coordinator, so that the conduct of the Mentorship is appropriate and effective. Additionally, ongoing training will be offered to mentors to be aware of the latest evidence-based practices for successful role modeling. Additional training can be located at www.justiceforvets.org/mentorcorps.

Peer Mentor Prohibitions

Unacceptable behaviors by Peer Mentors include:

- Engaging in any drug use, alcohol use, sexual activities (including sexual harassment), or any other unlawful activities with the participants.
- Exploiting a participant or the mentor/mentee relationship for agency or personal advantage.

- Accepting a fee, gratuity, or gift from a participant for the mentor's participation in the program.
- Inappropriately extending the boundaries of a mentor/mentee relationship, including lending money, loaning vehicles, providing housing.
- Making clinical recommendations, providing psychotherapy, or providing legal advice.

Peer Mentor Requirements

- Have a genuine concern for Veterans in the justice system.
- Be in good standing with the law.
- A veteran of one of the branches of the United States Armed Forces, including the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard or their corresponding Reserve and Guard components.
- Complete and submit a Peer Mentor application form.
- Be willing to submit to a background check (to be performed by the Williamson County Attorney's office).
- Adhere to the Williamson County Veterans Treatment Court Program's policies and procedures.
- Maintain contact with the participant for the duration of his or her participation in the Court.
- Complete initial training as specified by the court prior to being certified as a Peer Mentor by the Court.
- Participate in additional training that may be provided by the Court.
- Immediately notify the Peer Mentor Coordinator if the participant becomes suicidal or has an intention to harm others.
- Communicate with the Peer Mentor Coordinator regarding issues that could affect a participant's successful completion of the program, including knowledge of a participant's engagement in unlawful activities.

Veterans Treatment Court Mentor Coordinator

The Veterans Treatment Court Mentor Coordinator is essential in maintaining the success of the Williamson County Veterans Treatment Court Mentor Program. The Veteran Mentor Coordinator is responsible for recruiting prospective Mentors, screening and selecting candidates, and educating them about Veterans Treatment Court in collaboration with the Program Case Manager. The Mentor Coordinator is also responsible for individual and group supervision as well as scheduling Mentors to be present during court proceedings. The Veteran Mentor Coordinator

also coordinates all activities with the court team staff, the Specialty Court Program Coordinator, and the Judge.

Mentor & Resource Coordinator Duties and Responsibilities

- ★ Recruit and train volunteer Veterans Treatment Court Mentors
- ★ Assist in the retention of Mentors
- ★ Organize and conduct training for Mentors
- ★ Assist in supervision of Mentors
- ★ Assist in developing specialized training projects
- ★ Collaborate with Specialty Court Program Coordinator and Judge
- ★ Sustain and evolve the Mentor Program

The Mentor Coordinator is a very important part of the WCVTC team, especially since all the Mentors have such close interaction with the veteran participants in the WCVTC program. This individual should be both a senior Mentor and a trusted member of the WCVTC team.

Knowledge of a Prospective Mentor's Negative History

Current Mentors with knowledge that a prospective Mentor has a negative history and/or background must communicate his or her knowledge or concerns to the Veteran Mentor Coordinator, the Specialty Court Program Coordinator, or the Judge. Withholding this information may jeopardize the integrity of the WCVTC Mentor Program, the Court, and/or the veteran participants.

Unacceptable Behavior Policy

Unacceptable behaviors will not be tolerated while a 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 the Veterans Treatment Court are unacceptable and prohibited.

Courtroom Etiquette and Proper Attire

A courtroom is a solemn place which represents the judicial branch of government, and a judge demands respect, whether it's federal, state, or local. The prosecution represents either the city or state prosecuting the veteran and they too should be treated with reverence and respect. This applies to both the Mentor and the WCVTC veteran participant. All members of the WCVTC Team, to include the Mentor, will be treated with the utmost respect.

Any WCVTC participant appearing before the court shall have the responsibility to act and speak to the Judge and all that are involved as representatives of the court with respect. In addition,

the WCVTC veteran participant should have respect for the courtroom process. When in court, it is suggested that the Mentor advise the WCVTC veteran participant of the following:

- ★ Arrive early and prepared.
- ★ Be honest, lying only leads to more problems.
- ★ Dress appropriately for court.
- ★ Address the Judge as “Your Honor”.

Peer Mentor Coordinator Contact Information

Name: Michael Carson

Phone: 713-857-2942

E-mail: Carson09112001@gmail.com

Please feel free to contact Mr. Carson with any questions, comments, or Peer Mentor referrals.

Peer Mentor Agreement

I, _____, attest that I am a Veteran of one of the branches of the United States Armed Forces, including the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, or their corresponding Reserve and Guard components.

To be a mentor in the Williamson County Veterans Treatment Court, I agree:

1. To adhere to the Williamson County Veterans Treatment Court Program's policies and procedures.
2. To complete initial training as specified by the Court.
3. To participate in additional training provided by the Court.
4. To maintain contact with the Veterans Treatment Court veteran participant for the duration of his/her participation in the Court.
5. Not to engage in any drug use, alcohol use, sexual activities (including harassment), or any other unlawful activities with the Veterans Treatment Court Veteran participant.
6. To notify the Veterans Treatment Court Mentor and Court Coordinator if the Veteran participant becomes suicidal or has an intention to harm others.

Signature

Date

Background Check Permission Form

Full Legal Name _____

SSN # _____ Date of Birth _____ Sex _____

I hereby allow the Williamson County Courts Programs to perform a background check, including:

- Criminal Records
- Volunteer Experience
- Military Service
- Personal References

I understand that all information collected during the background check will be kept confidential.

I understand that I do not have to agree to this background check, but refusal to do so may exclude me from consideration as a Veterans Court Peer Mentor.

I hereby also extend my permission to those individuals or organizations contacted for the purpose of this background check to give their full and honest evaluation of my suitability for the mentor position, and other such information as they deem appropriate to this role.

Signed _____

Date _____

Mentor Application

Personal Information

Date: _____

Full Name: _____

Street Address: _____ City: _____ State: ____ Zip: _____

Daytime Phone: _____ Evening Phone: _____

Email Address: _____

Emergency Contact: _____ Phone: _____

Past Volunteer Experience (include organization/agency and position)

Agency / Organization	Position/Responsibilities	Dates

A) Why do you want to volunteer with Veterans Treatment Court? _____

B) How would you like to help the Veterans Treatment Court? _____

C) What skills and experiences do you bring to mentoring? _____

D) What are you hoping to take away from volunteering with the Treatment Court mentor program?

Do you speak a language other than English? **Yes** **No**

If yes, list language(s): _____

Have you previously served as a mentor? **Yes No**

If yes, in what capacity and where? _____

Please circle the preferred docket: **2:00 pm** **4:00 pm**

References: Provide the name and phone number or e-mail address of two non-family references.

1. _____

2. _____

Military Experience

Branch of Service (check one): Army____Navy____Marines____Air Force____Coast Guard _____

Active-Duty____Reserve____Air National Guard____Army National Guard _____

Dates of Service: From:_____To: _____

Type of Discharge: _____

Have you served in a combat zone? Yes____No _____

If yes, in what combat zone did you serve? _____

What was your job in the Armed Forces? _____

What type of special training did you receive in the Armed Forces? _____

Criminal History

Background form submitted: _____

Have you ever been arrested and/or convicted of a crime? Yes _No_____

Date:_____Charge: _____

Do you have any pending criminal charges? Yes No ____

If yes, what charge(s)?_____

Email or provide completed application to:

Michael Carson at Carson09112001@gmail.com.

Mentor Checklist for Initial Meeting with Veteran

Veteran: _____ Mentor: _____

The initial meeting with the veteran is your first opportunity to set the stage for building a strong relationship. The veteran may be nervous, overwhelmed with his/her situation or simply confused. The mentor may be able to set him/her at ease thereby paving the way for an enthusiastic future for the veteran. The following are recommended items to cover during this meeting:

ACTION	YES	NO
Introduce yourself and welcome the veteran to the Court.		
Exchange contact information (phone number, email, etc.). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure the veteran knows you are available at any time to discuss issues. Explain to him/her that you will be in contact frequently to ensure he/she is OK and that he/she should call you on whatever frequency you establish (recommend daily at the onset). 		
Set the Veteran at ease. Talk about your military experience and encourage the Veteran to talk about his/hers.		
Be sincere and not judgmental. Ensure the veteran knows that you are here to assist him/her in navigating Court. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that he/she understands that you are not an officer of the Courts, you are a volunteer. Discussions with you are confidential. You do not report items discussed with the judge, probation, or other court officials. Exception is that, if the veteran mentions something that may cause harm to self or someone else, you have an obligation to report it. 		
Ensure the veteran understands that the court and associated appointments are a priority. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> He/she must attend the Court, treatment appointments, Probation appointments, etc. Encourage him/her to be on time for all appointments. Stress the importance of keeping the line of communication open with you and Probation. 		
Let the veteran know that you may be able to assist or direct him with issues, such as, transportation, daily living issues such as homelessness/food, medical/VA issues, and other situations that may arise. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are prohibited from loaning money to the veteran. 		
Ensure your veteran understands the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You do not provide legal advice. Encourage him/her to consult his/her attorney or court assigned defense attorney. You do not advocate for him/her with the judge or probation. You do not argue his/her case in any way. 		
Give the veteran a chance to ask any questions. If you do not have the answer, see the Mentor Program Coordinator for assistance.		