

Polk County Veterans' Docket Mentor Program



Mentor Handbook

Polk County Veterans' Docket

The Honorable David E. Stamey Jr., Presiding

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Mission and Vision	3
Why a Veterans' Docket?	4
What is a Veterans' Docket?	5
What is a Veteran Mentor?	6
What We Are Looking for in a Veteran Mentor	6
The Role and Duties of the Veteran Mentor	7
Veterans' Docket Court Appearances	8
Dress Code	9
Courtroom Behavior	10
How to apply to be a Volunteer Veteran Mentor	10
Veterans' Court Mentor Application	11

Polk County Veterans' Docket Mentor Program

Mission Statement

It is the mission of the Polk County Veterans' Volunteer Mentor Program to support each veteran coming before the Veterans' Docket in their readjustment to civilian life, serving as ally and comrade as they navigate the criminal justice and Veterans' Administration systems.



Vision Statement

“No Veteran Left Behind”

Why a Veterans' Docket?

Many Veterans' returning from military service in Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom find themselves facing unique personal challenges in their transition from war. Since 2001, 2.4 million active duty and reserve military personnel were deployed to war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Of this group, 30% or about 730,000 men and women will have a mental health condition requiring treatment as a result of their service. Studies show that 18.5% of all OEF/OIF Veterans' have post-traumatic stress disorder, major depression, or both PTSD and major depression. Other mental health disorders, such as anxiety, are estimated to affect 11.6% of those without PTSD or major depression. (National Council for Behavioral Health) The challenging legacy of the service given by these men and women is present in essentially every community.

With more than 1.5 million Veterans', Florida is the most veteran-friendly state in the nation. The state is estimated to have more than 50,000 Veterans' with a mental health condition. The vast majority of our Veterans' are law-abiding and productive citizens who have contributed to Florida's prosperity and proud heritage. They are stable, hard-working individuals dedicated to building a better home for themselves and their children.

However, military service is challenging, and war and hardship take their toll. Even for those who are spared the trauma of physical injury, the long and repetitive deployments, and the exposure to combat and related stresses can exact a price on mental health. For service members and their families, stressful environments, traumatic events, uncertainty, loneliness, and fear can alter lives and overwhelm coping mechanisms. Many are coming back with debilitating wounds— some that you can see, and some you can't. It is the hidden wounds that make reintegrating back into society painfully difficult.

Judges in the Tenth Judicial Circuit have observed an increase in justice-involved Veterans' in the criminal court. The behaviors that promoted survival in combat are problematic when transitioning home. For some, the only way to quiet the physical and psychological pain is with alcohol or illicit drugs. Their trauma results in problems with drug addiction and alcohol abuse, to outbursts of anger and violence at home or work, or to petty crimes and other reckless behaviors that have ended up in confrontations with law enforcement.

Although these Veterans' need support, they come home from war with a "warrior mentality" and consequently are reluctant to seek help. Some simply don't know about the

resources available to them. The Veterans' Docket within the Behavioral Health Court aspires to connect Veterans' with essential services available to them.

What is a Veterans' Docket?

The Tenth Judicial Circuit of Florida has established a Veterans' Docket in the Behavioral Health Court to hear veteran's cases coming before the Court, The Honorable Susan Barber, presiding. A Veterans' Docket is a court-supervised treatment program for Veterans' whose service-related mental health and substance abuse problems have contributed significantly to their charges before the Court.

This is a team effort between the Court, the Offices of the State Attorney and Public Defender, County Probation, and local law enforcement along with the Department of Veteran's Affairs (VA) and you, our Veteran Mentors. The Veterans' Docket connects Veterans' to various services and resources available to them associated with mental health, substance abuse, and other problems unique to the traumatic experience of war. Resources from the VA and VA Vet Centers include substance abuse and mental health counseling, readjustment counseling, job training, medical treatment, housing, and other assistance.

The Veterans' Docket may be a voluntary program or ordered as a condition of probation. This program requires a total commitment to remaining clean and sober. It also requires that each participant avoid any further criminal charges, and lead a law-abiding lifestyle. Unless sentenced to the Veterans' Docket, the consent of the prosecutor, defense counsel and the referring judge and/or the Veterans' Docket Judge is required.

Participating in the Polk County Veterans' Docket requires regular court appearances before the Honorable Susan Barber, and completion of an established treatment plan. Treatment begins at first appearance on the Veterans' Docket. Veterans' will be referred for an initial screening and evaluation conducted by the Veterans' Justice Outreach Specialist or staff from the assigned treatment agency. The treatment plan may require the following treatment modalities or therapeutic approaches:

- Outpatient Treatment
- Inpatient Treatment or Residential Treatment
- Halfway House or Transitional Housing Placement
- Regular and Random Drug Screening
- Individual/Group Counseling
- Educational/Didactic Programs
- Vocational/Employment Training
- Self-Help Groups

Behavioral Health Court case management staff will help Veterans' with other areas of the treatment plan, according to individual need. This may include:

- Educational/Skills Assessment
- Job Readiness Training
- Job Placement Services
- Family Counseling
- Life Skills Classes
- Public Assistance
- Recreation

Each veteran participant will be encouraged to meet with his or her mentor on a regular basis. Additionally each veteran participant will be expected to obtain and maintain employment or involvement in a vocational or educational program. The length of the Veterans' Docket Program will be determined by each veteran participant's progress— usually a period of one year.

What is a Veteran Mentor?

Webster's New World Dictionary defines mentor as:

1. A wise and loyal adviser
2. A teacher or coach

A veteran mentor guides and supports a veteran mentee through her or his program. *The mentor's role is not that of a clinical counselor.*

What we are looking for in each Veteran Mentor:

Qualifications

- ✓ Veteran of one of the branches of the United States military, including Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard or their respective reserve or National Guard branches
- ✓ Access to a computer with an e-mail address and a telephone contact number
- ✓ Willing and ready to mentor
- ✓ Active listener
- ✓ Positive attitude
- ✓ Tolerant and respectful of individual differences
- ✓ Knowledge of community resources and services
- ✓ Committed to mentor a minimum of one year, four to six hours per month

The Veterans' Docket Program values the camaraderie that exists among Veterans', and considers volunteer veteran mentors to be an essential part of the veteran participant's success in the program. Their interaction with each participant, particularly a supportive relationship that is maintained throughout the program, will increase the likelihood that the participant will remain in treatment. This relationship significantly improves the chances of success and sobriety for the veteran participant.

Veteran mentors share common life experiences with their veteran mentees. These shared experiences allow veteran mentors to engage participants by serving as a peer support and resource to them. Veteran mentors help veteran participants navigate the Court and maintain focus on treatment. Veteran participants are better served by having a peer support system that includes mentors who understand combat experience and the different aspects of military service.

Although veteran mentors are not counselors, they are able to assist and encourage their fellow Veterans' with a wide array of support. They support and encourage veteran mentees as they make decisions on housing, employment searches, job training, further education, transportation, and discharge status, to name a few.

Role of Veteran Mentors

Veteran mentors are volunteers responsible for serving as supporter, guide and confidant to veteran participants. Mentors should provide support as participants' progress through the Veterans' Docket and should feel comfortable working collaboratively to assist participants, and, where appropriate, their families in successfully completing the directives of the Court.

Duties of Volunteer Mentors:

1. Attend court sessions with veteran participants
2. Meet with participants after court to help them resolve any issues they may be experiencing
3. Each meeting should build on the participants' previous conversations
4. Meetings should be conducted in person when possible
5. Help refer participants to appropriate services where possible
6. Facilitate an understanding of courtroom procedures
7. Work collaboratively with the other mentors and the mentor coordinator through ongoing communications

8. Motivate participants utilizing a strengths-based approach by:
 - a) providing encouragement to participants by highlighting their strengths, talents, skills and knowledge
 - b) focusing on what they have done that has been successful, building on those successes
 - c) believing that participants have the potential to learn, grow and change
 - d) affording respect, support and understanding
9. Maintain federal confidentiality standards
10. Attend clinical and legal training programs supported or provided by the Veterans' Court; Mentors should attend an initial training session where topics may include Veterans' Court's policies and procedures, psychopharmacology, mental illness, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury.
11. Communicate with the mentor coordinator to resolve any issues regarding time commitments, resistant participants or unmanageable challenges. If a mentor fears for the safety of a participant or is concerned about a participant's behavior, the mentor should report any concerns to the mentor coordinator.
12. Maintain appropriate boundaries with participants
13. Confine your role as Veteran Mentor to the limits of your training and experience

While meeting with participants, mentors should not:

- make clinical recommendations
- give legal advice
- push your personal values, lifestyle or beliefs on your veteran mentee
- provide psychotherapy
- utilize a stern or harsh approach
- inappropriately extend the boundaries of their relationship

Veterans' Docket Court Appearances

Veteran participants will be required to appear in court on a regular basis. At each court appearance, the Veterans' Docket Judge will have been given a progress report prepared by the treatment team regarding the veteran participant's progress on his or her treatment plan, and compliance with any ongoing probation.

The Judge may ask the veteran participant questions about his/her progress, and discuss any specific problems the participant may be experiencing. In the event of violations, i.e., missed or positive drug screens, failure to attend counseling, failure to meet with a mentor, or failure to attend self-help meetings, the Judge may impose sanctions. Repeated violations of the program's expectations and failure to progress satisfactorily may result in termination from the program.

Failure to appear in court on the date and time scheduled may result in a warrant being issued for the veteran participant's arrest. If a participant cannot appear in court as scheduled, the Probation Officer and Veterans' Docket Coordinator must be notified as soon as possible.

Veteran participants are responsible to attend the following:

- Weekly appearances at the Veterans' Docket
- Weekly meetings with a Veteran Mentor
- Random Drug Screens
- Weekly self-help meetings
- Group and Individual Counseling

Dress Code

There is a dress code for mentors and veteran participants attending court or class sessions, meeting with any team members at any location including, but not limited to, the Courthouse, Probation, veteran participant's home, or appearing in court before the Veterans' Docket Judge, and at drug testing facilities. The dress code is as follows:

- No article of clothing bearing any alcohol or drug advertisement or message
- No sexually explicit or tight clothing
- Shirts and shoes must be worn at all times
- No do rags may be worn
- No sleeveless shirts/ tank tops or backless shirts
- Pants must fit and be worn properly
- Tops of pants must meet bottoms of shirts (no bare skin)

Courtroom Behavior

Veteran Docket participants are expected to maintain appropriate behavior at all times in the courtroom and courthouse. This includes:

- No talking in the courtroom
- No sleeping in the courtroom
- No eating or drinking in the courtroom
- No gum chewing
- Be on time and do not leave during the hearing except for emergencies
- beepers and cell phones must be turned off
- Appropriate dress is necessary

How to apply to be a Volunteer Veteran Mentor

- ✓ complete a mentor application form (attached)
- ✓ provide a valid DD214 or DD215
- ✓ willing to submit to a background check, if requested

Questions to ask yourself before you decide to become a veteran mentor:

1. Do I enjoy working with others and sharing my time, knowledge and skills?
2. Do I have the time to devote to veteran mentee court visits over the next 12 months?
3. Can I maintain a professional relationship with an individual who may become a friend?

Veterans' Court Mentor Application

Date: _____

Last Name: _____ First Name: _____

Address: _____

E-mail: _____

Phone 1: _____ Phone 2: _____

Branch of Military Service: _____ Length of Service: _____

Type of Discharge: _____

Employer: _____ Position: _____

Please circle the days you are available to mentor: M T W TH F

Time Available: _____

Do you speak a language other than English?

If yes, list languages: _____

Have you previously served as a mentor?

If yes, in what capacity and where? _____

Are you willing to submit to a background investigation? _____

How did you learn about the Mentor Program?

What does being a mentor mean to you? _____

What skills and experiences do you bring to the mentoring program that will be helpful to the Veterans' in the program and the other mentors?

What are you hoping to take away from volunteering with the Veterans' Court mentoring program?



Mentors will be expected to participate in court observation, attend ongoing training and be supervised by a mentor coordinator.