

Fifth Judicial District Veterans Treatment Court

Peer Mentor Handbook



Twin Falls County, Idaho

Contact Information:

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Mission Statement

The mission of the 5th Judicial District Veterans Treatment Court Peer Mentoring program is for veterans to serve as mentors to fellow veterans who have entered the court system for various unlawful reasons. These peer mentors will provide a trusted individual the veteran participant can relate to and confide in to help support the veteran participant through their readjustment to a productive civilian life. The peer mentor will act as a mentor, advocate, and ally thereby restoring their sense of camaraderie and promoting the successful completion of their program.

The 5th Judicial District Veterans Treatment Court Peer Mentor Program

The 5th Judicial District Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) 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. Peer mentors provide advice, personal experiences, recommendations, and guidance to veteran participants. Many of our peer mentors are drawn from a number of veteran service organizations, the Twin Falls County community, and government organizations. Peer mentors include, but are not limited to, those who have served in peacetime, Vietnam, Desert Storm/Shield, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The peer mentor relationship promotes and fosters, through encouragement, a “can do” attitude in the veteran participant; the veteran participant becomes motivated to accomplish his or her goals in treatment, feels he/she is not alone, and knows the mentor and the court are there for them.

Experience has shown that veterans are more likely to respond more favorably with another veteran than with others who do not have similar experiences. It appears that when a veteran, who has found his/her way into the courts, is talking to another veteran, he/she would be more relaxed and less tense about their situation. It appears that these conversations between veterans are more on the level of peers rather than from a position of authority or professionalism.

This change in demeanor is seen as an opportunity to make a deeper impact on the lives of the veterans that come into the courts. Based on these observations it appears clear that peer mentors are an essential addition to the VTC team. It is anticipated that their active, supportive relationship maintained throughout treatment

will increase the likelihood that a veteran participant will remain in treatment and improve his/her chances for sobriety and law-abiding behavior.

Peer Mentoring Program Duties and Responsibilities

Veteran Mentor Coordinator

Essential to the coordination, maintenance, and success of the mentoring program is the Veteran Mentor Coordinator (VMC). The role of the VMC is to recruit, train, supervise, and coordinate peer mentors within the VTC program.

The VMC is responsible for recruiting potential mentors, screening candidates, and selecting individuals to become VTC peer mentors. The VMC will be responsible for training selected candidates in skills to facilitate a mentoring session and skills specific to the VTC program. The VMC will also be responsible for individual and group supervision as well as scheduling peer mentors to be present during the VTC proceedings. The VMC must also coordinate all activities with the Judge and the Veterans Treatment Court Coordinator (VTCC).

Duties and Responsibilities:

- 1) Recruit and train volunteer VTC Peer mentors.
- 2) Assist in the retention of volunteer mentors.
- 3) Organize and conduct training for volunteer mentors.
- 4) Assist in supervision of mentors.
- 5) Assist in the development of specialized training projects for the program.
- 6) Perform duties as assigned by the VTC Program Director and the VTC Judge.
- 7) Sustain and evolve the Veterans Treatment Court Peer Mentor program.

Veterans Treatment Court Peer Mentor

The role of the VTC peer mentor is to act as a coach, a guide, a role model, an advocate, and a support for the participant he/she is working with. The peer mentor is intended to encourage, guide, and support the veteran participant as he/she progresses through the court process. This will include listening to the concerns of the veteran participant and making general suggestions, assisting the veteran participant in determining what their needs are and supporting the veteran participant at a time when they may feel alone in a way that only another veteran can understand.

Duties and Responsibilities:

- 1) Meet with the veteran participant once a week for at least one hour.
- 2) Attend court sessions when scheduled.
- 3) Participate in and lead mentoring sessions with veteran participants when assigned by the VTC Judge.
- 4) Show compassion and be understanding of the difficulties veteran participants face.
- 5) Assist the veteran participants as much as possible to resolve his/her concerns around the court procedures as well as interactions with the Veterans Affairs (VA) system.
- 6) Be supportive and helpful to the other peer mentors within the program.

Requirements:

- 1) Have a genuine concern for veterans in the legal system.
- 2) Be in good standing with the law.
- 3) Be a veteran of one of the branches of the United States Military, including the Army, Marine Corp, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, or their corresponding Reserve or Guard branches.
- 4) Adhere to all of the 5th Judicial District VTC program policies and procedures.
- 5) Commit to program veteran participation for a minimum of (1) year or until the VTC veteran participant graduates.
- 6) Complete required training, as specified by the court, prior to participation in the VTC Peer Mentor program.
- 7) Participate in any required additional training as required by the VTC.
- 8) Visit with the VTC veteran participant(s) for at least one (1) hour each week.
- 9) Do not engage in any drug use, alcohol use, sexual activities, or any other unlawful activities with the VTC veteran participant(s).
- 10) Notify the VTCC if the VTC veteran participant becomes suicidal, wants to harm others, or engages in unlawful activities.

Desirable Qualities:

- 1) Active listener.
- 2) Empathetic.
- 3) Encouraging and supportive.
- 4) Tolerant and respectful of individual differences.
- 5) Knowledge of community resources and services.

Peer Mentoring Program Policies

Recruitment Policy

The VMC assumes the majority of the responsibility for recruiting new peer mentors. The VTC team members, its collaborative partners, and current peer mentors are strongly encouraged to refer highly respectable and reputable veterans to the 5th Judicial District VTC Peer Mentor program. Additionally, VTC team members and VTC peer mentors are strongly encouraged to attend and host informational sessions and training for perspective peer mentors.

Inquiry Policy

All inquiries concerning participation in the peer mentoring program, outside of an informational session or sharing the application and information sheet, are directed to the VMC. It will be the responsibility of the VMC to contact any prospective peer mentors.

Eligibility Policy

Each peer mentor must meet the eligibility criteria in order to participate in the program. Extenuating circumstances may be reviewed at the discretion of the VTCC.

Screening Policy

Each potential VTC peer mentor must complete the screening procedure. The VMC will be responsible for walking each applicant through the screening procedure. This procedure will include completing a written application form and a personal interview.

The VMC will submit background check authorizations for applicants to the VTCC for a check of Idaho State records. The decision to accept or reject an applicant will be made by the VTCC, the VTC Judge, and the VTC team members. Any and all records will be kept confidential and maintained by the VTCC.

The VTC peer mentor screening procedure will include, but not be limited to:

- 1) Completing a written application form.
- 2) Completing a personal interview.
- 3) Completing a background check.

Training Policy

All VTC peer mentors must complete the required initial training procedures.

This procedure will include:

- 1) Observe several court sessions.
- 2) Shadow three peer mentoring sessions with three different peer mentors.
- 3) Lead three peer mentoring sessions while being observed.
- 4) Discuss/lead peer mentoring sessions and observation forms.
- 5) Complete individual supervision with the VMC.

Matching Policy

The VMC will match VTC peer mentors and veteran participants at each court appearance. As peer mentors are not always present at each court session, the VMC will have to match the available VTC peer mentors with the veteran participants in need.

Whenever possible the VMC will make matches based on the following criteria:

- 1) Combat or non-combat experience.
- 2) Male for male and female for female.
- 3) Branch of service.
- 4) Specific skill of a peer mentor matched to the need of a veteran participant.
- 5) Similar age/gender/ethnicity.

The VMC will also take into consideration the requests of the peer mentors and veteran participants, alike, in making matches.

Record-Keeping Policy

Each contact between VTC peer mentor and veteran participant is documented in the VTC peer mentoring log which will be updated at each court appearance by the peer mentor.

Confidentiality Policy

VTC peer mentors training will include a mandatory confidentiality workshop.

Instructions on Federal and State confidentiality policy will be reviewed including but not limited to:

- 1) What information should be kept confidential, who has access to confidential materials, what confidential information can be used for, how it will be kept confidential, and the limits of confidentiality.
- 2) In addition, guidelines will be reviewed specific to what information should be included and should not be included in the VTC peer mentor log as well as how information about the peer mentors will be protected.

Unacceptable Behavior Policy

It is the policy of the 5th Judicial District VTC program that unacceptable behaviors by a VTC peer mentor will not be tolerated while participating in the program. Behaviors that do not match with the mission, vision, goals, or values of the VTC program will be considered unacceptable and are prohibited during court proceedings and mentoring sessions. Any unacceptable behavior, as determined by the VTCC, the VTC Judge, or the VTC team members, will result in a warning and/or disciplinary action including suspension or termination from the program.

Transporting of Veteran Participants using Personal Owned Vehicles

VTC peer mentors will provide the VMC with a photocopy of their current driver's license and insurance coverage along with a signed vehicle use agreement.

Recognition and Awards

At least once a year, all peer mentors will be recognized for their role in the 5th Judicial District VTC program. The VMC is responsible for planning and implementing recognition activities.

Possible recognition activities include:

- 1) An annual recognition event.
 - a. VTC peer mentors are recognized for their length of service to the peer mentoring program and/or utilizing outstanding peer mentors in the recruitment and training of new peer mentors.

Goals of the Veterans Treatment Court Mentoring Program

- ✓ Help our fellow veteran participants receive the services they need to reach their full potential as productive members of society.
- ✓ Help our fellow veteran participants navigate the court system, treatment system, and VA system.
- ✓ Assess the needs of our fellow veteran participants and help them adjust back to civilian life.

Thank You for Your Service!

What does being a mentor mean to you?

What are your reasons for wanting to participate in the Veterans Treatment Court Peer Mentoring program?

What skills and experiences do you bring to the peer mentor program which will be helpful to you, other peer mentors, and the veteran participants in the program?

What is your current occupation?

What are your interests, hobbies and skills?

Previous volunteer experience:

References (Please provide name, address, and phone/email of three non-family members who can provide references on your ability to perform this position):

- 1. _____

- 2. _____

- 3. _____

Print Full Name

Date

Signature of Applicant

BACKGROUND CHECK AUTHORIZATION

Please read this form carefully and sign in the space provided below. Your written authorization is **REQUIRED** for the completion of the application process.

I, _____, hereby authorize the Twin Falls County, the 5th Judicial District Veterans Treatment Court, and the Department of Veterans Affairs to investigate my background and qualifications for purpose of evaluating whether I am qualified for the volunteer position for which I am applying. I hereby consent to a criminal background check and release of any information and/or records held by any public agency, branch of the military, law enforcement office, business, employer, or other institution for the purpose of evaluating my character and fitness for this position. I understand that I may withhold my consent and that in such case, the application process is terminated and an investigation will not take place.

Print Full Name

Date

Signature of Applicant

Date of Birth: ____/____/____

Driver's License Number and State: _____

Social Security Number: _____

5th Judicial District Veterans Treatment Court Peer Mentor Agreement

I, _____, agree to the following to be a volunteer peer mentor in the 5th Judicial District Veterans Treatment Court.

- I am a veteran of one of the branches of the United States Armed Forces or their corresponding Reserve and Guard Branches.
- I will adhere to all of the 5th Judicial District Veterans Treatment Court programs policies and procedures.
- I commit to participation for a minimum of one (1) year or until the 5th Judicial District Veterans Treatment Court veteran participant graduates.
- I will complete required training, as specified by the court, prior to participation in the 5th Judicial District Veterans Treatment Court Peer Mentor program.
- I will participate in any required additional training as required by the 5th Judicial District Veterans Treatment Court.
- I will visit with the 5th Judicial District Veterans Treatment Court veteran participant(s) for at least one (1) hour each week.
- I will not engage in drug use, alcohol use, sexual activities or any other unlawful activities with the 5th Judicial District Veterans Treatment Court veteran participant(s).
- I will notify 5th Judicial District Veterans Treatment Court Coordinator if the Veterans Treatment Court veteran participant becomes suicidal, wants to harm others, or engages in unlawful activities.

Print Full Name

Date

Signature of Applicant

Vehicle Use Agreement

Instructions: All Veterans Treatment Court peer mentor volunteers who use their personal vehicle for Veterans Treatment Court mentor business must complete this form. Peer mentors who do not attest to proof of current personal vehicle liability insurance will be prohibited from driving their personal vehicles for peer mentor-related business. If any information provided on this form should change, it is the peer mentors' responsibility to complete and submit an updated form. Original copies of the Vehicle Use Agreement will be maintained in the 5th Judicial District Veterans Treatment Court Coordinators office.

Peer Mentor Agreement:

I, _____, acknowledge that I have received and read the 5th Judicial District Veterans Treatment Court peer mentor handbook, as well as, the Veterans Treatment Court policies and procedures outlined within the handbook. I understand the concerns and agree to comply with the policy. Failure to comply is considered a violation of the Veterans Treatment Court peer mentor program.

Name: _____

Address: _____

DOB: _____

DL #/State: _____

Auto Insurance Company: _____

Auto Insurance Policy #: _____

Print Full Name

Date

Signature of Applicant