



Lycoming County Veterans Court



Mentor Program Mission Statement

The motto of the Mentor Program is: No One is Left Behind. Mentors are paired with a Veteran to provide support as they work through the Veterans Court program. Mentors are present as an ally and friend to assist Veterans through this difficult time. The shared experiences of the Mentors and Veterans are critical in assisting the Veterans regain control of their lives and successfully connect to and maintain treatment, leading to successful completion of the Lycoming County Veterans Court Program.

Why Veterans Court?

Some may wonder, why create a treatment court specific to veterans? Why not work with these individuals within the established drug and mental health treatment courts? There are many answers to these questions but perhaps the most significant reason is that veterans are a niche population with unique needs and they have earned unique benefits.

Service members have shared experiences, many that are not common among their non-military peers. Members of the military and veterans are a unique population, which calls for tailored care. Traditional community services may not be adequately suited to meet their needs. Service members and their families experience unique stressors as part of the military experience. Thus the delivery of high quality care for psychological health, including prevention, early intervention, and treatment, requires providers who are knowledgeable about and able to empathize with the military experience. Veterans also respond more favorably to other veterans in the court system.

Veterans Treatment Courts allow veterans to go through the treatment court process with people who are similarly situated and have common past experiences and needs. This type of court links individuals with service providers who either share or understand the unique experience of military service, military life, and the distinctive needs that may arise from that experience.

Lycoming County Veterans Court

The Lycoming County Veterans Court is under the leadership of President Judge Nancy L. Butts. The Mission driving the Veterans Court is to successfully habilitate veterans by diverting them from the traditional criminal justice system and providing them with the tools they need in order to lead a productive and law-abiding lifestyle. In hopes of achieving this goal, the program provides veterans suffering from substance abuse issues, alcoholism, mental health issues, and emotional disabilities with treatment, academic and vocational training, job skills, and placement services. The program provides further ancillary services to meet the distinctive needs of each individual participant, such as housing, transportation, medical, dental, and other supportive services.

Components of the Lycoming County Veterans Court

The Lycoming County Veterans Court operates similarly to other Lycoming County Specialty Courts, i.e., Drug Court, DUI Court, and Mental Health Court. The Veterans Court is a hybrid court combining DUI, Drug, and Mental Health Courts into one Veterans Court. The Lycoming County Veterans Court operates within specific guidelines that allow for the best possible outcome for the Veteran.

The Lycoming County Veterans Court features the operational standards which are adapted from the following components:

1. Integrates alcohol, drug treatment and mental health services with justice system case processing.
2. Uses a non-adversarial approach where prosecution and defense counsel promote public safety while protecting veteran participants' due process rights.
3. Identifies eligible participants early and promptly places them in the Veterans Court Program.
4. Provides access to a continuum of alcohol, drug, mental health and other related treatment and rehabilitation services.
5. Monitors abstinence through frequent alcohol and/or drug testing.
6. Responds to veteran participants' compliance through a coordinated strategy.
7. Maintains essential, ongoing judicial interaction with each veteran.
8. Measures achievement of program goals and gauges program effectiveness through monitoring and ongoing evaluation.
9. Continues interdisciplinary education and promotes effective Veterans Court planning, implementation and operations.
10. Forges partnerships among Veterans Court, Department of Veterans Affairs, public agencies, and community-based organizations to generate local support and enhance Veterans Court effectiveness.

Mentor Component

An essential component of the Veterans Court program is the "Mentor Program" where veteran mentors act as peer support to veteran participants. Veterans are better served by having a support system that includes veterans who understand combat experience and the different aspects of military service. Mentors participate in a supportive relationship with participants to increase the likelihood that they will remain in treatment, attain and manage sobriety, maintain

law-abiding behavior and successfully readjust to civilian life. The Mentor Program consists of a mentor coordinator and volunteer veteran mentors. Their roles, responsibilities, requirements and qualifications are discussed in the following sections.

Lycoming County Veterans Court Mentor Program

The Lycoming County Veterans Court relies on cooperation and collaboration between the criminal justice systems, the County Office of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Veterans Affairs (Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center) and community treatment agencies to provide comprehensive treatment for veterans. In addition to these entities, the Court also relies heavily on Peer Mentors. Peer Mentors are veterans who volunteer their time to assist veteran court participants. Peer Mentors are one part of the specialty court and provide advice, personal experiences, recommendations, and guidance (**not Counseling**) to veterans involved with the legal system. Peer Mentors include, but are not limited to, those who have served in Vietnam, Operation Desert Shield/Storm/Sabre, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom/New Dawn. While in court, a mentor is assigned to a veteran participant (offender) and discusses any ongoing problems or issues or interest (to the veteran participant). They work to problem-solve existing issues and bring to the attention of the Court any issues that the Court can assist in resolving. This relationship promotes and fosters, through encouragement, a “can do” attitude in the veteran; 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 are there for them.

The Mentor Program has a Resource List which contains the names and phone numbers of professionals in the community where we can refer veterans for help. The Mentor does not solve these problems (housing, benefits, social services, etc.) but refers the veteran to professionals who can assist them. Veteran participants are likely to respond more favorably with another veteran than with others who have not served or who have not had similar experiences. Veterans feel relaxed and comfortable about their situation and circumstance when talking to a fellow veteran.

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 participants becomes an opportunity to make a profound impact on the lives of all veterans who enter the Court. We anticipate the Peer Mentors’ active and supportive

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

Peer Mentor Coordinator

The Mentoring Coordinator is essential in maintaining the success of the Peer Mentor Program. The role of the Mentor Coordinator is to recruit, train, supervise, and coordinate mentors. The Mentor Coordinator is responsible for recruiting prospective mentors, screening candidates, selecting peer mentors, training the selected candidates, and educating them about the Lycoming County Veterans Court. The Mentor Coordinator will also be responsible for individual and group supervision as well as scheduling mentors to be present during the Court's proceedings. The Mentor Coordinator will coordinate all activities with the Court team staff, Court Coordinator, and the Judge. The Mentor Coordinator may be a volunteer position.

Peer Mentor Coordinator Duties and Responsibilities

1. Recruit and train volunteer Veteran's Court 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 developing specialized training projects.
6. Perform duties as assigned by the Judge.
7. Sustain and grow the Peer Mentor Program.
8. Maintain "Mentor Log".

Peer Mentor Role Description

The Peer Mentor acts as a coach, a guide, a role model, and a part of the support network for the veteran participants. The mentor encourages, guides, and supports the veteran participant as they progress through the court process. This includes listening to the concerns of the veteran and making general suggestions, assisting the veteran to determine their needs, and acting as a support for the veteran, especially during this anxiety-provoking time. The Peer Mentor's coaching, guidance, and support will demonstrate the special understanding that only another veteran can provide. Again, the Mentor NEVER takes on the Role of a Counselor. WE are NOT qualified to do that.

Peer Mentor Duties and Responsibilities

- Attend court sessions when scheduled.
- Participate in and facilitate mentoring sessions with veterans when assigned by the Peer Mentor Coordinator.
- Be supportive and understanding of the difficulties that the veteran participants are facing.
- Assist the veterans as much as possible to resolve their concerns around the court procedures.
- Assist veterans on how to access and navigate the Veterans Affairs (VA) system and other systems.
- Be supportive and helpful to other Peer Mentors.
- Work respectfully and professionally with the veteran participant and other Peer Mentors.
- Use the mentor Log Book to make a note of each contact with veteran participants and the Resource list to refer vets to appropriate professionals (e.g. housing, social services, VA benefits, etc.) Remember, many times, another mentor might be that professional!

Peer Mentor Requirements

- Be a United States military veteran: Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, or their respective Reserve or National Guard branches with two years of service.
- Be a good standing and law-abiding citizen
- Have genuine concern for veterans in the legal system
- Complete the screening and vetting process
- Complete the required initial training
- Adhere to all Lycoming County Veterans Court policies and procedures
- Commit to participation for a minimum of one year and, to the extent they are able, to mentor their assigned participant until that participant graduates from the Court
- Have contact with the veteran for at least one hour each week
- Attend court sessions as scheduled
- Participate in additional trainings throughout his/her time of service in the Court
- Be ready to respond when needed in Court
- Notify the Veterans Court Mentor Coordinator or the Veterans Justice Outreach Specialist if the participant becomes suicidal, wants to harm others, or engages in unlawful activities.

Peer Mentor Desirable Qualities

- Active listener
- Empathetic
- Encouraging and supportive
- Tolerant and respectful of individual differences
- Knowledgeable of Veterans Affairs' services
- Knowledgeable of community resources and services.

Peer Mentor Program Recruitment Policies

The Mentor Coordinator assumes the majority of the responsibility for recruiting new mentors. The Lycoming County Veterans Court Interdisciplinary Team, its collaborative partners and current Peer Mentors are strongly encouraged to refer other highly respectable and reputable veterans to the Peer Mentor Program. Furthermore, the Lycoming County Veterans Court and current Peer Mentors are strongly encouraged to attend and host informational sessions and training for prospective mentors. Moreover, new Peer Mentors need experienced mentors currently active in the Court to help them quickly gain perspective and fully understand the depth and lasting positive impact of their participation and commitment.

Policy training, especially initial training for prospective mentors is crucial and necessary. All prospective mentors must complete the required initial training or they will not be able to mentor during court proceedings.

Training will include but not be limited to the following:

- Orientation.
- Observe several Court sessions.
- Shadow three mentoring sessions with three different mentors.
- Lead three mentoring sessions while being observed.
- Complete individual supervision with the Mentor Coordinator.
- Attend various training sessions arranged by the Mentor Coordinator.

It is the responsibility of the Mentor Coordinator to plan, develop, and deliver all training sessions with support from the Court team staff, current mentors, the Court Coordinator and the Judge.

Screening Policy

Each prospective Peer Mentor must complete a screening process. The Mentor Coordinator is responsible for conducting the screening process and will ensure that each prospective mentor is properly screened. The decision to accept or deny an applicant will be made by the Mentor Coordinator, the Court Coordinator or the Judge.

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

- Completing a written application form.
- Complete Unified Judicial System Mentor Training module and obtain certificate.
This may be found at: <http://www.pacourts.us/judicial-administration/court-programs/veterans-courts/volunteer-veteran-mentor-training-program>
- Applying for a State Police Criminal Background Check at:
<https://www.psp.pa.gov/pages/request-a-criminal-history-record.aspx>
- Complete an interview (upon successful completion of background checks).
- Agree to other vetting processes as may be required. A criminal record is not an automatic disqualifier; each individual Peer Mentor's application will be evaluated using the requirements on page nine and the following guidelines:
- Are there any misdemeanor criminal convictions in the past 24 months?
- For Lycoming County Veterans Court graduates: have graduated from the program at least six months prior to applying to be a Peer Mentor and have no misdemeanor convictions since graduation.
- Are there any felony criminal convictions in the past 24 months?
- For Lycoming County Veterans Court graduates, have graduated from the program at least six months prior to applying to be a Peer Mentor and have no convictions since graduation.
- Have no felony sexual assault and no child sexual assault convictions.
- Sign a confidentiality agreement.

Assignment Policy

The Mentor Coordinator may assign mentors to a veteran participant at each court appearance. As mentors are not always present at each court session, the Mentor Coordinator may assign any available mentor to the participating veteran. *Whenever possible the Mentor Coordinator will assign mentors to participating veteran based on but not limited to the following criteria:*

- Previous sessions where the mentor was assigned to a particular participating veteran.
- Same branch of service, for example, Army-to-Army, Marine-to-Marine, etc.
- Same War time era, for example, Vietnam to Vietnam and Iraq to Iraq.
- Specific skill of a mentor needed by veteran participant to be successful.
- Similar age/gender/ethnicity.

In addition, the Mentor Coordinator will also take into consideration the request of the mentor or veteran participant. The Mentor Coordinator reserves the right to assign a mentor to a veteran participant as seen fit.

Documentation and Record Keeping Policy

During Court proceedings, each contact between the mentor and the veteran participant is documented in the Veteran Mentor Log. The Veteran Mentor Log is kept in individual folders and has the name of each veteran participant on the folder. When assigned to a particular veteran participant, the mentor will pick up the assigned veteran participant's folder and take it with them during any interaction. Upon completion of their interaction, the mentor will document their interaction in the Log. Documentation on each interaction is necessary and mandatory. In the event that a veteran participant discloses information that the mentor is uncomfortable with or is uneasy about, for example committing another crime, harm to one's self or others, etc., the mentor will strongly encourage the veteran to disclose the same information to the Judge. If the veteran participant does not want to disclose the information to the Judge, the mentor will document and disclose the information to the Mentor Coordinator or the Court Coordinator. In instances where safety of the veteran participant or someone else is in question, for example, the veteran participant verbalizes suicide or is planning to harm someone; the mentor is required to disclose the information to the Mentor Coordinator, Court Coordinator and the Judge immediately.

When the interaction has been properly documented, the mentor will put the Log back where they picked it up. The Mentor Coordinator will lock the Logs in a safe and secure place. In addition, when court is not in session, the Log is always kept in a locked, safe and secured place.

Unacceptable Behavior Policy

It is the policy of the Lycoming County Veterans Court that unacceptable behaviors will not be tolerated while a mentor is participating in the program. Because of the sensitivity and the direct impact, a mentor has on a veteran participant; the zero-tolerance rule is in effect at all times. Behaviors that are not aligned with the mission, vision, goals or values of the Lycoming County Veterans Court are unacceptable and prohibited during court proceedings and mentoring sessions. This policy also governs interactions that a mentor and participating veteran may have outside the Court. Any unacceptable behavior by a mentor will result in termination from the Peer Mentor Program.

Boundaries

1. Use common sense when interacting with a justice-involved participant (mentee).
2. If you are a health, human services, behavioral, treatment, legal etc. professional, you may not practice that profession while mentoring.
3. Do not invite justice-involved participants to live with you.
4. Do not sign for, or co-sign, any financial instrument (loan, bail, bond, etc.) on behalf of the justice-involved participant. Do not loan money to a mentee.
5. Do not socialize with a justice-involved participant at any place that would put the participant at risk of addiction relapse or criminal activity.
6. If you are unsure, check with the Mentor Coordinator.

Recognition and Awards

At least once a year all mentors will be recognized for their role in the Veterans Court. The Mentor Coordinator is responsible for planning and implementing recognition activities.

Lycoming County Veterans Court Team Members

Court of Common Pleas:

President Judge Nancy L. Butts
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Court Administration:

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