

INGHAM COUNTY VETERANS' TREATMENT COURT OVERVIEW

The 30th Circuit, 54A, 54B and 55th District Courts of Ingham County will establish, by local administrative order, the Ingham County Veterans' Treatment Court (ICVTC). It will be held at the 54B District Court. The ICVTC will integrate alcohol and drug treatment and mental health services with supervision of each Veteran's probationary case.

The ICVTC will promote sobriety, recovery and stability through a coordinated response to the Veteran's dependency on alcohol and other drugs and/or mental health issues. Realization of these goals requires a team approach. It includes the cooperation and collaboration of traditional partners found in drug and mental health treatment courts with the addition of Veterans Administration resources, support organizations for Veterans and families, and volunteer peer counselors—Veteran Mentors.

The target population will be persons with access to VA benefits with substance abuse and/or mental health issues. The target cases will include misdemeanors and selected lower severity felonies.

MISSION

Leave no Veteran behind.

VISION

Establish a specialty court which will identify those defendants who served or are serving in the United States Armed Forces to:

- coordinate services between the Court, Probation, Veterans' Administration and any service providers,
- provide Veteran Mentors to Veteran defendants,
- provide Probation monitoring and Court supervision twice monthly,
- coordinate feedback between the Court, Probation, Veterans' Administration and any service providers and
- treat the needs of the Veteran promptly and professionally.

PARTNERSHIPS

The ICVTC has developed partnerships throughout the criminal justice system and Veterans' system to consider and create this specialty court.

Courts

All the Circuit Court and District Court Judges of Ingham County, and/or key staff consisting of Court Administrators and Probation Officers have been actively involved in the planning and will be part of the execution of the ICVTC. In addition, planning team members have visited to date one of the seminal Veterans' Treatment Courts in Buffalo, NY, as well as specialty sobriety, drug and mental health courts in Lansing, Jackson, Kalamazoo and Oakland County. A wealth of materials, ideas and inspiration has been obtained. In addition, Judge Jordon attended a November MJI conference addressing multiple issues about specialty courts, and plans are under way to select a team to attend the February annual meeting of the Michigan Association of Drug

Court Professionals. A watchword for all the examples was summarized at the MJI Seminar as the CASE methodology—Copy And Steal Everything (and then adapt it to your own situation). In this regard, it cannot be overemphasized that the State Court Administrative Office, Region II and the office for specialty courts have played a key role, encouraging the plan, providing resources for the asking, and playing a key role in implementing the ICVTC.

Veterans Administration

A key partnership is with the Veterans Administration. Several groups have participated in planning sessions and committed time and resources to the Court. Staff from the Veteran's Hospital in Battle Creek have attended all planning meetings. Their commitment to determining eligibility of veterans, assessing needs, and following through with treatment stand at the core of the entire concept of the ICVTC. The VA Veterans Justice Officer who was part of the team visiting Buffalo will play a key role in the ongoing court operations. The Vet Center has assisted in planning, and will provide a valuable counseling resource.

The National Guard has been involved as well, assigning two JAG officers to all planning meetings, as well as sending one of them as part of the Buffalo team. Their existing partnership with Thomas M. Cooley Law School is expected to provide a source of Veteran Mentors and possibly an externship to serve as the dedicated prosecutorial official handling ICVTC cases.

MSU Veteran's groups are being contacted for Veteran Mentors, as well as other veterans' service organizations.

The Ingham County Veterans Affairs Office has expressed willingness to network on behalf of Veterans in the ICVTC.

Of special benefit have been the insights from the planning committee's representative from the Michigan Representative of the National Alliance on Mental Illness.

Treatment

Several area treatment agencies have been involved in the planning, including Community Mental Health, Mid-South Substance Abuse Services and other mental health agencies and advocates. They have provided valuable information and will continue to be involved.

Legal Community

The Ingham County Prosecutor's Office has been, and other prosecuting agencies will be, intimately involved with the planning and execution of each Veteran's entry into the ICVTC. Also involved with the planning and implementation are Ingham County law enforcement and representatives of the defense bar.

Community

Veteran Mentors will be recruited from the community-at-large. A 501(C)(3) corporation to allow for donations in support of ICVTC programs will be formed in the community as well. Also, the governmental units involved will be involved in implementation of the ICVTC. Inasmuch as a key feature of the program will typically involve plea agreements with no up-front

jail time, the positive economic impact of this feature is important to all governmental entities in Ingham County

COURT STRUCTURE

The current sessions of the ICVTC will be held the first Tuesday afternoons of each month, with early March as the target commencement date. Prior to commencement of the formal court session, staffing meetings will be held to address any necessary issues relating to Veterans coming before the Court that session. Present for each staffing will be the Judge, Probation Officers, Veteran Mentor Coordinator, Veterans Justice Outreach Officer, prosecution and defense attorney representative, and such other staff as may be advisable from time to time. Written progress reports and recommendations for each veteran will be available at least the day before each session, and will form the basis for the staffing discussions. Initially each veteran will report not less than once each month, with another report to his or her probation officer in person or by mail/e-mail as may be ordered. Frequencies may be altered depending on the Veteran's progress or lack thereof.

Each Veteran will be called by his or her Probation Officer, and the Judge will review with the Veteran and Probation Officer both positive and negative developments since the last court date. Once the review is completed and a new court date set, the Veteran will meet with his or her mentor privately. These interactions will be a significant of the peer-mentoring process, and will be documented in mentor log books, which are confidential and strictly for the use of the Veteran and the Veteran Mentor.

There will not be a single specified means for entry into the ICVTC. Any Judge who determines he or she has a possible candidate can start the process in motion. It must first be determined if the individual is a qualified veteran by way of the VA. A form with instructions to access this information will be provided to all courts, and will have to be faxed to the designated VA office. If the person shown to the possible referring court as possibly qualified, he or she must obtain a substance abuse/mental health assessment acceptable to the VA. This may be voluntarily accomplished, but it may be accomplished by means of a bond condition as well. While different procedures may be followed on a case by case basis in the referring court, ideally a qualified candidate the Judge wishes to refer should be scheduled for the next available Tuesday at 2:00 pm. At that session the choice of the Veteran to enter into the ICVTC would take place, and possibly a plea would be reached that day. If that did not happen, a subsequent date would be set. Upon such referral, the referring court would close its file as "transferred to ICVTC".

Following plea and sentencing, oversight within the ICVTC would take place physically in the 54B courthouse, and all fines and costs would be retained there. Any restitution would be paid as required.

Treatment

Adherence to treatment programs will be monitored as with any probation, albeit with more frequent reporting and more provider feedback. The bulk of treatment will be through VA programs or, if not available, VA partnerships with other agencies. Veterans with demonstrated needs may be able to obtain bus passes to make required appointments. It is also expected that

Veterans may be urged to access other veterans' benefits as needs arise, from housing, educational, job retraining, health care, and many others.

Veteran Mentors

Veteran Mentors will be recruited to serve as peer counselors to each Veteran in the ICVTC. Training will be accomplished initially by a variety of community presenters, with ongoing specialized training to be carried out at reasonable intervals. An organizational/recruiting meeting is currently scheduled for January 29, where the optimal date for the approximately 18 hours of training will be determined.

The goal of this program is to make sure no Veteran is left behind. Each Veteran Mentor will offer assistance, assess needs, and help the Veteran solve his or her problems. The Veteran Mentor will support the Veteran through his or her adjustment to civilian life, assist the Veteran to navigate through the court system, treatment and VA systems, and act as mentor, advocate and ally. A volunteer Veteran Mentor Coordinator will assist in coordinating Veteran Mentors within the ICVTC. The Coordinator will make necessary arrangements for periodic events to recognize the service of Veteran Mentors, and will also make recommendations for ongoing training programs.

COMMENCEMENT

The ICVTC will schedule commencements as part of its sessions as they are needed. The Veteran's Probation Officer, Veteran Mentor, key service provider(s) and family will all be invited to attend. Prior ICVTC participants will also be invited. Along with a certificate attesting the completion of all requirements of the ICVTC, each Veteran will be presented with a challenge coin to commemorate his or her success.

EVALUATION

The ICVTC will be evaluated annually. The State Court Administrative Office will assist in devising an appropriate form to be circulated to all partners. That agency will also work with ICVTC to devise appropriate data collection protocols.

Each Veteran who participates will be provided a questionnaire at the conclusion of his or her probation. This information will be added to the other responses for consideration at the annual review.

FUNDING

The 54B District Court will involve current employees and space to house the ICVTC. The 501(C)(3) Corporation, provisionally identified as Friends of the Ingham County Veterans' Treatment Court, will be a necessary source of funding for such things as graduation challenge coins, bus passes, training and written materials, etc.

CONCLUSION

The ICVTC is, and probably will remain, a work in progress. In these times of budget pressures, the possibility of grant funding must always be considered. However, if constraints of any grant would cripple the functioning of the ICVTC or hinder it from performing its mission, there will be a great deal of reluctance to participate in any such grant.

ATTACHMENTS

Attached for your consideration is an extensive description of the Buffalo Veterans' Treatment Court. Should anyone want any or all of our documents please email Judge Jordon at djordon@cityofeastlansing.com