

VETERANS' MENTORING PROGRAM

A Veterans' Court “Alternative”



Leave No Veteran Behind

YOU WANT TO HELP VETERANS IN THE COURT SYSTEM. WHICH ROUTE SHOULD YOU TAKE?

- A Veterans' Court
- A mentor program
- Both

IT DEPENDS ON THE SIZE OF YOUR COUNTY, COURT SYSTEM AND CASELOAD

- How many judges are in your county?
- How many adult cases do you have per year?
- What is your veteran population in the court system?

WOULD THE AREA'S VETERANS SUPPORT SUCH A PROGRAM?

Without the support of the veteran community and veterans who are willing to volunteer to help other veterans, a mentor program can not be successful

GET SUPPORT WITHIN THE COUNTY CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

- Judges
- District Attorney
- Public Defender
- Magisterial District Judges
- Pretrial Services
- Probation

GAUGE VETERAN SUPPORT IN YOUR COMMUNITY

- Disseminate information about the program to local media outlets.
- Speak to your local veterans groups.

WHO WILL ADMINISTER THE PROGRAM?

- Lehigh County decided on a team approach and established a Veterans' Mentoring Program Steering Committee.
- Members include the District Attorney's Office, Lehigh Valley Pretrial Services, Adult Probation and Parole, Veterans' Affairs Office, Drug and Alcohol and Mental Health, Public Defender's Office, Assigned VJO

STEERING COMMITTEE

Weekly meetings include:

- Prepared agenda
- Review of new mentee and mentor applications
- Discussion of old and new business
- Minutes emailed to committee members after meetings

PREPARATION OF NECESSARY DOCUMENTS, ETC.

- Brochure that describes the program
- Application to be a mentor
- Application for mentee who wants a mentor
- Mentor agreement
- Mentee agreement
- Resource guide for mentors and committee members
- Mentor log so mentor can report progress of contacts with mentees.

PREPARATION OF ADDITIONAL OPTIONAL ITEMS

- Brochure display to be placed in locations throughout the criminal justice system
- Certificate of accomplishment
- Challenge coin
- Marketing and promotional materials

REACHING OUT INTO THE COMMUNITY

- Steering Committee members speak to various organizations in the community, attend veterans' information fairs and participate in veterans' events
- Hand out brochures, applications, and stress eagles to promote the program at community events.

MENTOR APPLICATION PROCESS

- When the District Attorney's Office receives applications from potential mentors, the applications are distributed to all members of the Steering Committee.
- Interview is scheduled, and committee members facilitate.
- Interview results are discussed at committee meetings, and the decision is made to accept or deny.
- Applicant is notified of result.
- Training is scheduled.

RECEIPT OF APPLICATIONS FOR MENTOR AND ASSIGNING MENTORS

- Receipt of application and DD-214 (proof of honorable discharge)
- Conduct a criminal background check to determine if the applicant is appropriate for a mentor. Note: a criminal history does not disqualify a candidate.
- If qualified, a mentor is assigned a mentee

MENTOR TRAINING IS NECESSARY

- Minimum of four hours
- The difference between a mentor and a friend
- How to develop trust
- Active listening
- Listening for results
- Setting good boundaries
- Confidentiality
- How to recognize a crisis
- Problem solving

TRAINING DAY

- Four-hour classroom training.
- Trainer provides training materials
- A Resource Guide is provided to each mentor
- Review Statement of Understanding and Agreement
- Complete forms for the prison so mentors have permission to visit mentees who are incarcerated
- Tour of the local prison so mentors are familiar with procedures for visiting incarcerated mentees (optional)

BUILDING A MENTOR TEAM

- Schedule socials to bring mentors together so they can meet each other, trade stories and offers suggestions.
- Plan and hold veteran forums to recognize the contributions of the mentors, to bring together various agencies that work with veterans, and keep the public informed.

Mentee Application Process

- When the District Attorney's Office receives applications from potential mentors, the applications are distributed to all members of the Steering Committee.
- Interview is done by Pretrial Services and Probation
- Interview results are discussed at committee meetings, and the decision is made to accept or deny.
- Applicant is notified of result.

Pairing Mentors and Mentees

- This is not exact science.
- Considerations include:
 - Temperament of mentor and potential mentee
 - Crime committed
 - Branch of service
 - Combat experience
 - Age
 - Gender

PROGRESS OF MENTEE

- Mentors are required to email or call committee members to give updates on their work with mentees and the progress mentees are making.
- The Steering Committee discusses mentee progress at each meeting and intervenes only if assistance is required.
- Intervention occurs in order to expedite medical appointments through the VA, to give assistance with and information about housing, health care, jobs.

DETERMINING SUCCESS

Mentee success is determined by the following:

- ✓ Obtaining and keeping jobs
- ✓ Furthering their educations
- ✓ Obtaining certifications for jobs
- ✓ Meeting all conditions of probation and parole or house arrest, including paying costs and fines and completing Alcohol Highway Safe Driving Courses
- ✓ Staying arrest free and drug and alcohol free
- ✓ Attending anger management and counseling sessions
- ✓ Repairing damaged relationships with spouses, children or parents
- ✓ Knowing when they need help and obtaining services

RECOGNITION OF MENTEES' ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Mentees receive a certificate of accomplishment and a “challenge” coin from the program and their mentors.
- The certificate recognizes their accomplishments and completion of the program.
- The coin acknowledges exceptional behavior and effort by the mentee. Not all mentees receive one at the end of the program.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- As the program and community awareness of the program grows, so does the network of support.
- Local businesses may provide grant money to aid with the expense of holding socials and forums.
- Grant money can also pay for training, printing of brochures, challenge coins, posters and stress eagles if you choose to have them.

ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE THAT THE PROGRAM WORKS

- Since 2011, the program has a less than 20% recidivism rate.
- Mentees who are not disabled have obtained and kept jobs
- Mentees have enrolled in community college courses
- Mentees have applied for certifications in specialized fields
- Mentees have reunited with family members from whom they had been estranged
- They have gotten the help they need from the VA and social service agencies
- They have stopped drinking alcohol and using drugs

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

- During a hearing in Lehigh County Court, a judge asked one of the mentees, *“What is it about your mentor’s involvement in your life that you think has made a difference?”*

The mentee replied, *“The way we interact. He understands a lot of what I go through and my feelings. We can relate about a lot of things.”*

In Their Own Words...

Thanks to the mentoring program and especially my mentor, my life is much different and much better than it was a year ago. I am close to my family, I have a support system, and I am living the right way. I wake up early every morning eager for what the day might bring, instead of fearing it. I am thankful for simple things like working in the garage, cutting grass, friends, and the dignity of drawing a steady paycheck.

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY OF LEHIGH COUNTY VETERANS' MENTORING PROGRAM



Leave No Veteran Behind