



Dispatch from the Front Lines

The National Clearinghouse for Veterans Treatment Courts at the National Association of Drug Court Professionals

July 2012

Veterans Service Organizations in Veterans Treatment Courts *Coming to the Aid of their Fellow Veterans*

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Veterans Service Organizations (VSO) are key to the development and success of Veterans Treatment Courts across the nation. The following Dispatch is provided by Justice For Vets to inform Veterans Treatment Courts of the services and support provided by VSOs.

VSO Chapters, Detachments, and Posts are located in towns and cities across the nation and are within reach of every Veterans Treatment Court. They play a vital role in Veterans Treatment Courts and afford veterans in court the opportunity to interact with fellow veterans while being connected to the local, state and federal benefits and resources earned through military service. VSO Service Officers are key to this process.

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Service Officers are trained experts who provide free services and assist veterans with filing claims for disability compensation and pension from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), education benefits, Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E), health care and much more. Service Officers are not only located in Chapters, Detachments and Posts, but in VA Hospitals/Outpatient Clinics and/or VA Regional Offices. Veterans do not have to be a member of the VSO to receive help. Some Service Officers are accredited by the VA and can act as the legal advocate for the veterans disability claim throughout the process.

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A Service Officer Helping a Combat Veteran in Court

Many veterans who enter Veterans Treatment Courts are unaware of their eligibility for VA programs and services. Veterans often require additional assistance to enroll for benefits, in particular VA disability compensation. Service Officers provide veterans the valuable linkage and education necessary to ensure veterans receive the benefits they have earned.

Upon entering the Veterans Treatment Court, a two tour Iraq combat veteran began treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and substance abuse through the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), however he was not connected to the benefits he had earned through service.

With the help of a Veterans Service Organization Service Officer assigned to the court, the veteran filed for VA disability compensation and was awarded a disability rating of 60%. The veteran now receives \$1,064.00 a month, tax-free, which goes towards rent and other living expenses. With his disability rating in place, the veteran was eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) from the VA. He now attends college pursuing an undergraduate degree. The veteran also utilized the disability rating for state veterans services and even received a reduced fee for automobile registration and a reduction in property taxes.

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Service Officers Participating in Veterans Treatment Courts

Veterans Treatment Courts may use the following as a guide to work with Service Officers in court.

Role of Service Officers in Veterans Treatment Court

1. Provide orientation for Participants upon entry into the Veterans Treatment Court concerning local, state and federal benefits and services.
2. Provide ongoing education on local, state and federal benefits for Participants and dependents, including, but not limited to health, education, training, VA disability compensation and/or pension.
3. Advocate on behalf of the Participants with the Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA) and VHA regarding veterans' benefits, VA disability compensation, and/or pension.
4. Assist the Participants with completing initial VA disability compensation claims, current claims or appeals of denied claims.

Service Officer Duties and Responsibilities

1. Attend an initial orientation regarding Veterans Treatment Court and courtroom protocol.
2. Attend all Veterans Treatment Court sessions, when scheduled.
3. Participate and lead training sessions within the Veterans Treatment Court, as needed.
4. Directly assist Participants with filing VA disability compensation claims, answering questions about current claims and/or denied claims.
5. Advocate on behalf of the Participants interfacing in a professional manner with the VBA and VHA either in court or outside of court, as needed.
6. Be supportive and helpful to Participants in the Veterans Treatment Court.
7. Communicate to the Veterans Treatment Court the status of a Participants claim for VA disability compensation and/or pension.

Service Officer Requirements

1. Be accredited by VA to represent veterans in VA claims. See requirements in 38 Code of Federal Regulations 14.626-14.637.
2. Adhere to all of the Veterans Treatment Court program's policies and procedures.
3. Commit to participation for a length of service as required by the court.
4. Complete the required initial training as specified by the court prior to participation in the Veterans Treatment Court.
5. Participate in any required additional training as required by the court.

Veterans Service Organizations and Veterans Treatment Courts

Leaving No Veteran Behind

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Below is a list of some of the nationwide Veterans Service Organizations that may be located in your community:

American Legion

The American Legion was chartered and incorporated by Congress in 1919 as a Veterans Service Organization. It is the nation's largest Veterans Service Organization with 2.4 million members and 14,000 *Posts* worldwide. For more information and to locate a *Post*, visit www.legion.org.

AMVETS

AMVETS (American Veterans) is the first World War II veterans organization to be chartered by Congress. AMVETS has 180,000 members encompassing 1,150 *Posts* across the nation.

For more information and to locate a *Post*, visit www.amvets.org.

Disabled American Veterans

Disabled American Veterans was founded in 1920 by veterans returning from World War I and was congressionally chartered in 1932. Disabled American Veterans has a membership of 1.2 million with 52 State level Departments and 1,499 *Chapters* across the world. For more information and to locate a *Chapter*, visit www.dav.org.

Marine Corps League

The Marine Corps League was founded in 1923 and has a current membership of more than 76,000 men and women encompassing *Detachments* across the country. The Marine Corps League is the only federally chartered Marine Corps veterans organization in the U.S. For more information and to locate a *Detachment*, visit www.mcleague.org.

National Association for Black Veterans

The National Association for Black Veterans (NABVETs) was established in 1973 and recognized by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in 1998 as a national Veterans Service Organization. NABVETs has over 60 *Chapters* located across the U.S. with hundreds of members. For more information and to locate a *Chapter*, visit www.nabvets.org.

Veterans of Foreign Wars

Veterans of Foreign Wars was founded in 1914 and is a congressionally chartered Veterans Service Organization. Veterans of Foreign Wars has a membership of 1.6 million with 8,000 *Posts* worldwide. For more information and to locate a *Post*, visit www.vfw.org.

Vietnam Veterans of America

Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) was founded in 1978 and is the only congressionally chartered national Vietnam veterans organization. VVA has over 65,000 members with 650 *Chapters* located across the nation, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Guam. This organization is exclusively dedicated to Vietnam-era veterans and their families. For more information and to locate a *Chapter*, visit www.vva.org.

For Veterans Treatment Courts

Since the beginning of the nation's first Veterans Treatment Courts, Veterans Service Organizations have provided valuable support and resources for these life saving programs. For more information concerning Veterans Service Organizations and their role in a Veterans Treatment Court visit www.JusticeForVets.org.

About Justice For Vets

In 2009, the National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP) launched Justice For Vets: The National Clearinghouse for Veterans Treatment Courts. Justice For Vets is exclusively committed to ensuring that veterans involved in the criminal justice system have access to Veterans Treatment Courts and the benefits, services and treatment they have earned. Since Justice For Vets was launched the number of operational Veterans Treatment Courts has grown to over 80. Justice For Vets activities include advocating for federal Veterans Treatment Court funding, assisting with state legislation, training and technical assistance, public awareness, and building coalitions within the criminal justice, business, and Veterans Service Organization communities. Visit Justice For Vets online at www.JusticeForVets.org.

About National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP)

Since 1994, NADCP, a non-profit organization 501(c)(3) representing over 27,000 multi-disciplinary justice professionals and community leaders, has worked tirelessly at the national, state and local level to create and enhance Drug Courts. NADCP is recognized as the experts in the field of addiction and its intersection with the criminal justice system. In 1998, NADCP launched the National Drug Court Institute (NDCI). To date, NDCI has directly trained 65,440 Drug Court professionals from all fifty states and U.S. territories as well as sixteen other countries. Because of the breadth, quality and impact of NADCP, the Drug Court field has grown from fourteen programs in 1994 to 2,800 Drug Courts currently in operation. Visit NADCP online at www.AllRise.org.

About Matt Stiner

Matt Stiner is the Director of Justice For Vets at NADCP. After receiving the Combat Action Ribbon for service in Iraq as a Marine, Stiner used VA Education benefits and the Harry S. Truman Scholarship to obtain a Masters in Public Administration from the University of Oklahoma. Stiner began his career in public service in the Tulsa Mayor's Office and then worked in the Tulsa Veterans Treatment Court.

Justice For Vets wishes to acknowledge those who have contributed to this publication – Chris Deutsch, NADCP Director of Communications, Vanessa Cunningham, NDCI Research Coordinator and Nejla Routsong, NADCP Online Marketing Specialist.



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