



Veterans Treatment Courts: Serving Veterans in Need

Our Call of Duty at Home

2010 marks the ninth straight year of America at war. There are now more than 23 million U.S. veterans including 1.7 million and counting from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

These men and women shoulder the burden of safeguarding our freedom. 5,298 have paid the ultimate price and another 37,000 will forever bear the physical wounds of war. Americans are grateful for their service to this nation. But we must ensure our gratitude is extended to *all* veterans. We must not forget that one in six veterans from Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom suffers from a substance abuse challenge. One in five has symptoms of a mental disorder or cognitive impairment. Research continues to draw a link between substance abuse and combat related mental illness and unprecedented numbers of veterans are appearing in our courts to face charges stemming directly from these issues. Where do many end up? Today, an estimated 60% of the 140,000 veterans in prison have a substance abuse problem. And tonight, roughly 130,000 veterans will be homeless, 70% of whom suffer from a substance abuse and/or mental illness condition.

A Unique Solution - Action on Behalf of Veterans

The unique consequences of combat call for a unique solution. Twenty years ago, the Drug Court movement evolved out of the necessity for a solution-based approach to an influx of drug abusing offenders before the courts. Ten years ago, DWI Courts came on line to effectively address hardcore impaired drivers. Both models have demonstrative effects on substance abuse, crime and related consequences on the individual, family and community. In fact, Drug Courts and DWI Courts are the world's most successful, cost effective and scientifically validated tool to deal with substance abuse in the criminal justice system.



Judge Robert Russell, presiding judge of the Buffalo Drug Court and Buffalo Mental Health Court, created the nation's first Veterans Treatment Court in response to a growing number of veterans appearing on his dockets who were addicted to drugs and alcohol and suffering from mental illness. Unfortunately, this phenomenon is not unique to Buffalo. Immediately following the launch of the Buffalo Veterans Treatment Court, Judge Russell and his team were inundated by requests from courts around the country experiencing the same increases in cases involving veterans.

Building upon the infrastructure that exists within Drug Courts, Veterans Treatment Courts combine rigorous treatment and accountability for veterans facing incarceration. Veterans Treatment Courts are hybrid Drug and Mental Health Courts. They promote sobriety, recovery and stability through a coordinated response that involves collaboration with the traditional partners found in Drug and Mental Health Courts. In addition they involve the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs health care networks, the Veterans Benefits Administration, State Departments of Veterans Affairs, volunteer veteran mentors and veterans and veterans family support organizations. And they are proving successful. To date, none of the Buffalo Veterans Treatment Court's graduates have been rearrested.



Since the first Veterans Treatment Court opened its doors in early 2008, over twenty Veterans Treatment Courts have launched in fifteen states. Dozens more are being planned.

An Emergent Movement

The U.S. Congress has taken note of local collaboration taking place in Veterans Treatment Courts. NADCP was honored to work with members of the House and Senate to produce the bipartisan Services Education and Rehabilitation for Veterans (SERV) Act, which was introduced in Congress early this year. The SERV Act would provide funding for communities with existing Drug Courts that serve veterans or will establish new Veterans Treatment Courts. This critical legislation will be the key to providing the resources necessary to expand Veterans Treatment Courts throughout the country.

State legislatures are also taking action. Nevada and Texas have passed legislation calling for the statewide establishment of Veterans Treatment Courts. Colorado, Illinois and at least three others are following suit. Three states – California, Minnesota and New Hampshire- have passed legislation that permits judges to order treatment rather than prison in the case of veterans suffering from combat-related mental health disorders.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has made justice-involved veterans a major priority and established a national Veterans Justice Outreach program in 2009. The VA stands ready to take the model to scale and is training specialists to be involved directly

with the courts to ensure veterans are connected to the services to which they are entitled. The VA has also partnered with NADCP to develop critical curriculum for an eager Veterans' Treatment Court community.

The Surge – Bringing Veterans Treatment Court to all Veterans in Need

We are off to a great start, but we must do more. We ask much of our men and women in uniform and they ask little in return. We are ultimately responsible for ensuring that whatever effects they suffer in the mission of defending our nation will be treated.

NADCP's goal is to ensure that every veteran arrested with a substance abuse and/or mental health issues has access to a Veterans Treatment Court. All veterans in need should have the opportunity, not for incarceration, but for treatment and restoration.

NADCP's role in this new arena grows by the day. The need for major support from private sector partners is tremendous. NADCP needs significant support to launch a National Veterans Treatment Court Institute that would undertake a massive public awareness campaign; secure endorsements from the American Legion, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, the Home of the Brave and the Veterans of Foreign Wars; champion passage of the SERV Act; develop and champion numerous state authorization and/or appropriation bills; help the entire justice community gain better understanding of the struggle veterans experience upon return to civilian life after combat; and finally, learn how to establish Veterans Treatment Courts at the local level.



NADCP has been at the forefront of the Veterans Treatment Court movement from the very beginning. In addition to championing the SERV Act and recently testifying before the House Committee on Veterans Affairs, NADCP has established formal partnerships with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the U.S. Department of Justice

Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. In doing so, NADCP is about to name four national "Mentor Veterans Treatment Courts" that will serve as learning sites for hundreds of communities interested in planning a Veterans Treatment Court. NADCP will use these Mentor Courts as host sites to train new Veterans Treatment Courts.



NADCP is honored to have as its Senior Advisor on veterans and Veterans Treatment Courts General Barry R. McCaffrey (ret.). Before retiring as the youngest Four Star General in the U.S. Army and going on to serve as Director of the White House

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Office of National Drug Control Policy for President Clinton, General McCaffrey commanded the 24th Infantry Division during Operation Desert Storm. Under his command, the division conducted the "left hook" attack 370 km into Iraq. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal. In Operation Desert Storm he was known for his speed and boldness. During the course of his service in four tours in the Vietnam War he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross twice, the Purple Heart three times and the Silver Star twice.

In addition to enlisting General McCaffrey, NADCP has secured Brian Clubb as its full-time Project Director for Veterans Treatment Courts. Mr. Clubb is a twenty-two year veteran of the United States Marine Corps where he served as an Intelligence Officer, Scout-Sniper Platoon Commander, and Substance Abuse Control Officer. He received his law degree from the University of San Diego and previously worked as a Deputy Public Defender and private attorney in San Jose, CA where he represented clients in the Santa Clara County Drug and Mental Health Courts.

NADCP has obtained support for Veterans Treatment Courts from the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America and the National District Attorney's Association. And on Veterans Day last year, NADCP launched the Veterans Treatment Court Clearinghouse: the only site on the Web for Veterans Treatment Court news and resources. The Clearinghouse can be found on www.VeteransTreatmentCourt.com.