

State of Illinois
Bruce Rauner, Governor

Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority
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BRIDGES TO JUSTICE: A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT FOR ADULT DIVERSION PROGRAMS

Adult Redeploy Illinois



ICJIA

Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority

Lake County Adult Redeploy Illinois Veterans Treatment and Assistance Court

The Lake County Veterans Treatment and Assistance Court (VTAC) is a problem-solving court created in 2011 that helps justice-involved veterans improve their quality of life by addressing their criminogenic needs. Participants commit to 18 to 24 months of supervision, undergoing counseling and treatment for issues such as anger management, personal finance, and substance use. VTAC also offers a mentoring program. Participants voluntarily connect with a mentor for assistance in navigating the court process and adjusting to life in the community. In Lake County, ARI does not fund a standalone program, but instead since 2013 has funded components of VTAC and the other Lake County problem-solving courts.

Mentoring Program Overview

VTAC participants are matched with mentors that also are veterans. Although VTAC has a capacity of 40, an ideal court docket size is 25 to 30. There are typically nine to 12 active mentors at any given time, and each mentor works with two or three VTAC participants simultaneously. The program strives to match participants with mentors aligning with branch of service, combat experience, age, and gender.

Defining the Mentor's Role

The mentor's role includes advocate, friend, and ally. To prevent mentors from

SPOTLIGHT: Lake County

- Located in northeastern Illinois
- Population: 703,462
- Largest city: Waukegan, pop. 88,826
- Population per square mile: 316.6
- Comprised of 18 townships
- Median household income: \$45,465
- Poverty rate: 13.8%
- Total employer establishments: 6,649

taking on an accountability role, mentors are not included in VTAC staffing meetings. The intention is to help mentors avoid situations in which they would be faced with a decision to disclose a participant's negative behavior. It is important that the participants trust their mentor and that confidentiality is respected in the mentor-mentee relationship.

If mentors feel that they need to disclose problem behavior to VTAC staff, they can speak to the mentor program's co-coordinator who then reports the behavior to the treatment team for discussion on how to address the situation. The co-coordinator then follow up with the mentor to provide advice. VTAC administrators say maintaining a mentor training manual, providing regular trainings, and fostering ongoing communication

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At the beginning, I didn't talk much and I don't get out much, but now I talk to my mentor a lot. Now it works well for me. I had to get more phone minutes.

Lake County
Veteran's Treatment & Assistance Court
Participant

with mentors are key to helping mentors better understand and fully carry out their role.

Training Mentors

Mentors receive extensive training and support from VTAC. Mentors attend monthly meetings to participate in mentor-mentee matching processes, seek support, and offer input on the program. In addition, mentors participate in trainings through the county probation department on motivational interviewing, mental health first aid, trauma-informed treatment, and risk/need assessment tools. Additionally, mentors must shadow another mentor for a period of time before they are allowed to begin meeting with their mentee.

Mentor-Mentee Relationships

Mentors meet with participants in person on a monthly basis at a minimum

however many mentors and mentees communicate multiple times a week and meet in person on a weekly basis. In addition, VTAC schedules pro-social outings and activities open to all participants and their mentors, such as bowling and sporting events. These activities are often provided to VTAC for free or at a discounted rate by community organizations, VTAC team members, and businesses. Mentors also attend court hearings with participants.

VTAC alumni are encouraged to volunteer as mentors after graduation. However, before alumni are matched, they must have at least six months of post-graduation success. During these six months, alumni are encouraged to come to outings and VTAC monthly mentor meetings to stay connected with the court. This also helps VTAC staff support alumni's transition out of the court.

Benefits of a Mentoring Program

The mentoring program builds community support for VTAC and trust between the court and the community, all of which is vital to VTAC. Closely involving individual community members in VTAC's programming helps to create advocates in the community. This community support then helps VTAC participants and alumni feel a part of a community that understands and cares for them which can help inoculate against future unhealthy or criminal choices.