

Know someone who would like to receive our free ECS Promising Practices e-newsletter?
Friends and colleagues can [subscribe here](#)

PROMISING PRACTICES



Veterans in the justice system are provided treatment and employment opportunities

By Sally R. Hammitt, LISW-S, veterans justice outreach specialist, and Christopher J. Chatfield, LISW-S, BCD, director, Community Outreach Division Cincinnati Veterans Affairs Medical Center

On any given day, veterans account for more than 9 percent of the individuals in United States jails and prisons. The U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice estimates 140,000 veterans are held in state and federal prisons.

To address these alarming statistics, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs is making a systemwide effort to ensure access to VA services for veterans who are in the justice system. Without intervention, these veterans are at high risk for homelessness, substance abuse, mental illness, and physical health problems.

Each VA medical center has designated a veterans justice outreach (VJO) specialist who is responsible for direct outreach, assessment, and case management for veterans in local courts and jails. VJO specialists ensure that eligible veterans can access mental health and substance abuse services as well as other VA services and benefits.

The recent [CARF](#) survey report for the [Cincinnati Veterans Affairs Medical Center](#) (VAMC) in Hamilton County, Ohio, commended the organization's treatment team and vocational supported employment team for being "instrumental in creating a specialized court for veterans guilty of felony

Brought to you by the ECS customer service unit at



Volume 8, Issue 4
April 2013

About the ECS Promising Practices newsletter series

An organization receiving exemplary recognition in its CARF survey report stands out because of its professional and strategic response to a service or business need. CARF presents these ECS Promising Practices articles to encourage dialogue among service providers and to offer examples of creative solutions for improving service quality.

Find current and past issues of ECS Promising Practices at:
www.carf.org/ecspromisingpractices

Issues are categorized by topic: Business Practices, Community Services, and Employment Services.

offenses. The system was designed through coordination between the justice department, the VAMC, lawyers who are veterans, court monitors, and veteran volunteers.”

The survey report explains, “The program requires veterans guilty of a felony charge to adhere to a strict schedule of rehabilitation, court appearances, and mentoring by volunteer veterans, and it has reduced the recidivism rate considerably. VAMC staff members provide evaluations, coordination of treatment, and supported employment services and appear in court on a weekly basis. They are an acting part of what the judge utilizes to determine if the veteran will remain in treatment or be sentenced to a full term. The coordinated response of treatment and the justice system encourages the veterans in a way that brings meaning to their lives and helps them increase the likelihood of solving the issues that may have led to their criminal behavior in lieu of incurring long-term incarceration and a felony record.”

In one year alone, 2,300 veterans in Hamilton County in southwestern Ohio were arrested. For several years, the Cincinnati VAMC and the county’s Pretrial Services had worked together to provide treatment for veterans in or being released from the Hamilton County Jail. Based on the strong community partnership formed by this collaboration, the Hamilton County, Ohio, Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) was launched in 2011 with a felony-level docket. The court was recently extended to handle misdemeanor-level cases.

VTCs are hybrid drug and mental health courts that use the drug court model to serve veterans who are struggling with addiction, serious mental illness, or co-occurring disorders. VTCs promote sobriety, recovery, and stability by coordinating the resources of traditional partners in drug and mental health courts with the additional resources of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, volunteer veteran mentors, and veterans’ service organizations. More than 100 VTCs are operational at present, and hundreds more are in the planning stages.

As the Hamilton County, Ohio, VTC grew, staff members realized a need for job assistance for veterans with criminal records and spotty work histories. That’s when the VA’s Homeless Veteran Supported Employment Program (HVSEP) began collaborating with the VTC to offer employment counseling and placement.

HVSEP is staffed by homeless or formerly homeless veterans who are trained in vocational rehabilitation counseling. To help break the cycle of recidivism in crime or homelessness,

HVSEP staff members work one-on-one with veterans to assist them in obtaining and maintaining full-time employment.

With assistance from a court system educated to the specific needs of veterans, peer mentors, VTC treatment, and guidance of HVSEP, veterans have the best opportunity to resume productive and independent lives.

The CARF survey report's commendation concluded, "With the mission of recovery in mind and the ultimate outcome of felony expungement, the veterans have a sense of self-pride and are not left alone during times of need."



Above: The Hamilton County, Ohio, VTC team participants are (left to right) Patrick Coburn (veteran), VTC mentor coordinator; Kieran Hurley, VTC coordinator; David Hickenlooper (veteran), prosecuting attorney; Debra Bosley (veteran), VTC probation officer; Honorable Ethna Cooper, VTC judge; Phyllis Walton, VTC court reporter; Andy Poli, VTC bailiff; Sally Hammitt, VA VJO specialist; and Kevin Szczublewski (veteran), VA HVSEP specialist. Not pictured but also part of the VTC team are Marcus Coleman (veteran), VTC defense attorney; Ryan Ruehle (veteran), VTC defense attorney; Jim Slattery (veteran), VTC defense attorney; and Greg Street, VTC case manager. (Photo by Sally R. Hammitt, Cincinnati VAMC.)

For more information about the Cincinnati Veterans Affairs Medical Center and the Hamilton County, Ohio, Veterans Treatment Court, call Denise A. Kerr, director of public affairs, VAMC and VISN 10, at (513) 487-6056. The Cincinnati website is at www.cincinnati.va.gov. Follow the Cincinnati VAMC on Facebook at www.facebook.com/CincinnatiVAMC.