

VAU.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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VA Supports National Reentry Week

VA has a deep commitment to serving Veterans reentering the community from prison and jail. Reentry is a critically vulnerable time when VA services and supports can maintain continuity of medical, psychiatric, and substance abuse treatment, and help reentry Veterans avoid homelessness through direct homeless programs and benefit supports. Two key programs that support this effort are Healthcare for Reentry Veterans (HCRV) and Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO).

The United States Department of Justice (DOJ) has announced National Reentry Week to be held April 24-30, 2016, to highlight the importance of reentry from prison and jail in public safety and criminal justice reform. Reentry events will be coordinated at each Bureau of Prisons facility and each U.S. Attorney's Office.

What is the Veterans Justice Outreach Program?

The Veterans Justice Outreach Program is a VA-based initiative, partnered with local law enforcement and courts, to assist eligible Veterans with the treatment they need. The process begins with the identification of Veterans in the legal system. VA staff will work with the Veteran to find out if they are eligible for care. When found to be eligible, assessments for medical healthcare, mental health care, housing, and substance abuse treatment are completed. Treatment recommendations are based on the needs identified in the assessment. The Veteran, VJO representative, and appropriate court and law enforcement officials then set the conditions for what treatment options can be authorized and offered.

Mission:

The VJO Program's mission is to successfully habilitate Veterans through court-approved treatment programs which allow alternatives to the traditional criminal justice system, while providing the Veteran with the tools he or she will need in order to lead a productive and law-abiding lifestyle.

Goals:

- To reduce criminal behavior in Veterans by:
- Providing case management services
 - Evaluating for housing and other services

- Connecting Veterans with mental health, substance abuse, and health programs
- Assisting Veterans with developing coping skills and healthy lifestyles
- Establishing stable support systems in the community
- Connecting Veterans with community resources

The VJO Program currently has two full-time program coordinators in Saginaw at the VA and three part-time VJO Case Managers at the Community Based Outpatient Clinics in Alpena, Cadillac, and Gaylord. The program covers 35 counties from mid-Michigan to the Mackinac Bridge, and VJO staff have access to all jails in those counties. There are currently two treatment courts held in Saginaw and Genesee counties and three specialty courts in Clare, Isabella, and Tuscola counties. There are also Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) established with Isabella, Grand Traverse, Leelanau, Benzie, and Oscoda counties.

A Veteran who successfully completed the Genesee County Veterans Treatment Court Program submitted the following testimonial regarding the experience:

“I can’t speak for all Veterans but for me Veterans Court was such a positive experience I credit Judge Barkey, Mrs. Cherry, Kelly (Veterans Justice Outreach Coordinator) and all the mentors like mine whose name is Don. They saved my life.

I was a very troubled Veteran. I was self-destructive, harming myself and having suicidal thoughts daily. With that, I found myself in trouble with the law, the first time ever in my life. I went in to the Veterans Treatment Court, hating myself with no self-respect for who I thought I was or what I thought I had become. I knew I was being offered a gift for a second chance but I struggled if I deserved one for everyone I had hurt.

On the first day Judge Barkey explained to me what was expected and what would happen if I failed to meet the expectations. I wish I could write about all the people at this court who helped me and how they inspired me to succeed. They were there for me for the entire year but they are all still there supporting me and I have been gone for almost a year. The environment of the court is not cold as I feared it would be, instead it was warm and I was showed genuine care and concern. I had never experienced that before. I was mandated to attend treatment at the Saginaw VA and if I wasn’t mandated I would have never attended. I was glad that I went to the VA because I was given the help and so much more from their services. On days that I would be having a hard time I could always count on being able to talk to someone. Judge Barkey never hesitated to call a short recess to talk to me when she knew something was bothering me.

As I said before I could go on about what Veterans Court and everyone there means to me, but there would never be enough room in this article. I guess the easiest way to sum it up is a broken Vet who had nearly given up on everything came out knowing he had the power and strength to live a better life. I know you can’t change the past and maybe not heal all the hurt but you can move forward and make the next day better. I have a long road ahead of me. I have my good days and my bad days, however my good days outweigh my bad. I look forward to the future.

Just a word of advice, Veterans Court is not a get out of jail free card. It's set up for a Veteran that needs help, not a jail cell. This court is made for them to succeed. If a Veteran fails this court it is because they choose to not get the help they needed and it's their fault not the courts or the VA."

Signed,
From a Vet

"We continue to enhance our relationships with courts and community resources to assist as many Veterans as we can," states Eric Norman, Social Work Supervisor at the Aleda E. Lutz VA Medical Center.

"Since I began working for the VJO program, I've shared in the success and progress of many Veterans. We consistently see high rates of positive discharges from the program; Veterans who successfully engage in treatment and complete their legal obligations." stated Carly Huffman, Veterans Justice Outreach Coordinator.

The Aleda E. Lutz VAMC in Saginaw, Michigan operates an 81-bed skilled nursing and rehabilitation Community Living Center, with an additional 8-bed acute medicine and telemetry wing. It provides care to over 34,700 Veterans in a 35-county geographic area, from mid-Michigan to the Mackinac Bridge. Veterans also receive care at one of our nine VA Community Based Outpatient Clinics located throughout Michigan. More information about this VA can be found at www.saginaw.va.gov.

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