



Children in Veterans Treatment Court:

Invisible Children and Vital Services

The rationale

Since 2008, more than 100 Veterans Treatment Courts (VTC) have been established to serve returned veterans with problems with the criminal justice system. Few, if any of the VTCs provide services to the children of these veterans; most do not track whether veterans have children. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) data suggest that 43% of veterans have children.

The trauma experienced by many of these veterans, and the family effects of their arrest and possible incarceration obviously affect their children. Given the known effects of trauma on children of parents affected, a policy response has been suggested in which VTCs would work with state and local children-serving agencies to provide prevention and intervention services to these children. Working with the VA's staff of Veterans Justice Officers who perform liaison duty in the courts, children could be identified who may be affected by their parent's enrollment in VTCs. These children would be provided with appropriate services in the same way that the Children Affected by Methamphetamine (CAM) grant program effort expands services to children in family drug courts.

Serving children in drug courts is, as we have learned in other collaborative court work, a developmental process. Asking VTCs to provide these services from their current funding would be a big challenge without the funding for evidence-based services or for evaluation of the effectiveness of these services. An evolutionary approach would suggest taking gradual steps, moving first to:

- Count the kids, then
- Screen the kids, then
- Assess their needs, then
- Refer them to services by other providers who are partners of the VTC (not to try to do it in house with scarce VTC funds), then
- Monitor the outcomes of those services.

It may be possible to pursue the following steps in the direction of a pilot project of VTCs with a children and family component:

1. Develop this proposal in more depth and detail, drawing upon the guidelines and components of collaborative courts developed by NADCP and the National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare with OJJDP support.
2. Distribute copies of the background paper developed by CFF with assistance from the VA staff on the rationale for children of veterans needing services that the VA does not currently provide.
3. Disseminate a survey of all VTCs asking whether they count children, what % of veterans have children if they do, and assessing their interest in providing services to children in partnership with other agencies. The five stages of inclusion of children in VTCs described in the above bullets could be a basis for such a survey.
4. Using the results of the survey, select 3-5 pilot sites to receive technical; support from NADCP and NCSACW in developing a children and family component to their VTCs, using funding from available federal, state, local, and private sources.
5. Alternatively, select a state that wishes to develop a children and family component for multiple VTCs within that state.
6. Develop a self-assessment for VTCs interested in collaboration with other agencies to develop a children and family component to their VTC, along with an evaluation framework to enable tracking outcomes of such a project over time.
7. Working in conjunction with the pilot sites, develop a set of VTC guidelines for a children and family component that could guide further funding criteria.

Models of services could include

- Evidence Based Programs used in other courts, including CAM sites and other top-level FDCs, including Celebrating Families, Parent Child Interaction Therapy (OC Child Guidance Clinic model), Child-Parent Psychotherapy (Nebraska example), trauma assessment, Early Head Start for younger kids, and IDEA/CAPTA required assessments
- Models drawn from the literature of child welfare services to children of incarcerated parents
- Models drawn from the work of the National Center for Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), including the FOCUS program and other models

CFF welcomes comments on these initial proposals.