

REGIONAL MUNICIPALITIES VETERANS' TREATMENT COURT (RMVTC)

A stylized, semi-transparent graphic of the American flag, featuring a blue field with white stars on the left and red and white stripes on the right, positioned behind the text.

New Participant Handbook

**Tucson City Court
103 East Alameda Street
Tucson, Arizona 85701
520-837-3603
Vetcourt.org**

A Brief Explanation

“The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war... shall be directly proportional to how they perceive the Veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation.” (George Washington)

The RMVTC was established as a rehabilitation/treatment court within the justice system to assist Veterans. It is a coordinated effort between the cities of Tucson, Oro Valley, Marana, South Tucson, Sahuarita, the US Attorneys' Office, and Pima County. The RMVTC partners with service providers including La Frontera, Old Pueblo Community Services, the Southern Arizona Veterans Administration Health Care System (SAVAHCS), Bridges, Rally Point Arizona, Center For Life Skills Development, Pay It Forward Tucson Inc., Purple Ribbon, and other community services providers.

RMVTC was made possible by the receipt of a federally funded grant. Tucson City Court applied for and was awarded a grant from the Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Coordinated by the Tucson City Court, RMVTC offers Veterans an alternative to jail, or other consequences, which would result from misdemeanor arrests and convictions within the participating municipalities.

The primary goals are to benefit from the program so that further criminal incidents do not occur, and to help Veterans recover from whatever circumstances brought their current situation about. All Veterans are eligible for the program in one form or another. Some may qualify to have their charges dismissed upon graduation, while others may enter the program on a post plea or post-conviction basis in order to take advantage of all counseling, therapy, classes, mentoring, and other services provided at no cost to participants of the program.

The program involves Veteran participation in court hearings and tailored treatment programs aimed at promoting healthy relationships, good communication, sobriety, anger management, responsibility, and self-sufficiency. The Veteran must agree to engage in assistance from SAVAHCS and/or other treatment providers working with the RMVTC. The treatment addresses issues such as PTSD, traumatic brain injury (TBI) in addition to rehabilitation, housing needs, employment assistance, anger management, healthy relationships, etc. All medical information is confidential and will be kept sealed. The Veteran's treatment plan progress is reviewed and monitored at least monthly during the RMVTC court sessions at Tucson City Court. All members of the RMVTC Team attend the RMVTC sessions.

For example, the University of Arizona's James E. Rogers College of Law provides legal support to our Veterans through its Veteran Advocacy Law Clinic. Additionally, Rally Point Arizona mentor coordinators are present in the courtroom to guide and inform eligible Veterans regarding the program and its requirements, and to assign volunteer mentors to each Veteran, upon acceptance, to help them go through the program. Also present in the courtroom, an Old Pueblo Community Services' Housing representative assists Veterans with housing resources and/or placement.

Comprehensive statistics are kept regarding all aspects of the RMVTC. The grant imposes requirements of all persons entering the RMVTC program, such as a Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) survey (completed during acceptance, six-months from acceptance, and at discharge), and random drug testing.

If a Veteran re-offends while in the program or fails to comply with the requirements of the program, the Court may require further treatment; or in the alternative may terminate a defendant from the program. All charges may remain either pending, or sentence may be imposed (depending on the status of the matter), and the veteran may be assigned to a regular court calendar for further proceedings. This is always a last resort.

RMVTC is **not** the time or place to argue about guilt or innocence, or to have a trial. It **is** a time and place to learn from the past and move forward in a healthier and more positive direction.

Some of the benefits of the program are:

- Treatment will be provided at no cost to the Veteran.
- Old “pending” cases are resolved based on participation in the program.
- The Veterans are no longer in the lifestyle that created these types of charges.
- Veterans with mental health and/or substance use, PTSD or TBI problems will receive treatment and become compliant with their treatment and treatment provider.
- Veterans regain a sense of belonging and camaraderie, and a sense of pride and self-worth.
- Veterans learn to change problem behaviors that lead to addiction, domestic violence, inability to keep a job or maintain housing.
- Veterans develop healthy relationships.
- Our community gains a person who follows the law, has a healthier lifestyle, and lives responsibly.
- The program also benefits the jail by providing reduced costs for housing inmates, creating space for more serious offenders, and reducing expenditures for medical and psychological treatment.

Since receiving its first grant in 2012 for expanded treatment and mentoring services, the Regional Municipalities Veterans Treatment Court (RMVTC) has enrolled more than 1,200 Veteran defendants, with a successful completion rate of 83%.



(Some of The RMVTC Team members at the annual SAMSHA Treatment Court Conference in 2021.)

Who Are We?

The RMVTC Team is an interdisciplinary team that includes the Judge, Court staff, the City of Tucson's Prosecutor, Defense Counsel including the City of Tucson's Public Defender's Office or privately retained counsel, and the University of Arizona's James E Rogers College of Law Veteran's Advocacy Clinic. Also, treatment providers such as the Veterans' Affairs Southern Arizona Health Care System, La Frontera, Old Pueblo Community Services, Bridges Counseling LLC, Center For Life Skills Development, Rally Point Arizona, Pay It Forward Tucson Inc., and other community providers, law enforcement, volunteer mentors coordinated by Rally Point Arizona, Southern Arizona Justice For Vets, and many other community partners who, together, work toward the recovery and success of each Veteran.



“Together We Can Do Great Things”

(From our courtroom wall.)

Court Team

Hon. Thaddeus Semon, Program Director, Magistrate, is an Air Force Veteran and spent his time in service as a JAG. He served in support of the War on Terror and Operation Enduring Freedom. He was stationed in Montgomery, Alabama and in Tucson, Arizona. He also deployed briefly in support of Operation New Horizons, a joint humanitarian mission. Since then, he has worked as an Assistant Attorney General as a trial attorney handling child abuse and neglect cases, as a Corporate General Counsel, did some time in private practice, and has been raising a family of eight children with his spouse of over 30 years. Judge Semon has been on the bench full time since 2017 and took over Veterans Court in March 2020 when Judge Pollard, the founding judge, retired.

Federico Jeannot, Program Coordinator, holds a Psychology degree and has worked in the court system for the past fourteen years in a variety of areas: public services, jail arraignments, and specialty courts, with a recent focus on grant management. He joins the RMVTC team eager to learn and to help Veterans achieve a healthier and more fulfilling life.

Savas Rivera, previous program coordinator and ongoing supporter, is an Air Force Combat Veteran and spent time overseas as a weather forecaster in support of special operations. He was stationed at Keesler, AFB, Joint Base Pearl Harbor- Hickam, and Davis Monthan AFB and deployed in support of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

The City Prosecutor's Office is essentially the gatekeeper for the program. They are responsible for reviewing all charges, and prospective participants, to determine if the veteran meets criteria for the RMVTC program. If eligible, the Prosecutor decides upon the conditions under which the veteran may join the program (such as diversion, conditional guilty/post-conviction diversion, or straight post-conviction plea basis. They attend all Treatment Court staff meetings and provide education to the public, including victims, as to the benefits of the RMVTC program to the community. Additionally, they keep the team apprised of any new charges the participants may incur while in the program and recommends sanctions or termination from the program.

The City's Public Defender's Office, if applicable, reviews plea forms and conditions with participants upon approval for admission to the RMVTC. They ensure the Veteran is fully cognizant of his/her rights and any waivers prior to entering the program. If the State files a motion to terminate a participant from the program, the attorney will apprise the participant of his/her rights, defend the action, and if the motion is granted, appear at sentencing with the participant. They are tasked with educating the defense bar and community regarding all aspects of RMVTC.

The University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law Veterans Advocacy Law Clinic consists of a Clinic Fellow, Supervising Attorneys, and law students. The students work under the supervision of a licensed attorney pursuant to Rule 39 of the Rules of the AZ Supreme Court. They provide legal advocacy/support to the majority of the Veterans appearing in Court. While these are not court-appointed, or retained, attorneys, the students help prepare the veterans for each of their hearings, answer questions and explain what any concerns may be, and help the Veterans as they address the court. Additionally, the clinic provides support and assistance regarding discharge upgrades, benefits, referrals, and community outreach.

- It should be noted that, in either event (whether represented by an attorney or utilizing the assistance of a law school advocate) charges will not be litigated; there will be no trial; nor will any evidence be challenged in any manner – the veteran agrees to participate in the program on a voluntary basis.



Treatment Providers

"Alone we can do so little; Together we can do so much."

—Helen Keller

SAVAHCS (The VA)

The VA is represented by a pair of Veteran Justice Outreach Specialists (VJOs). The VJO is assigned to facilitate services for the VA eligible participants in the program. Responsibilities include:

- Obtain a VA Release of Information from each participant to allow for the verbal confirmation of one's involvement in treatment, services, and programs through the VA. This information is only to be shared with professional team members of RMVTC.
- Serve as a liaison between the veteran participant, the RMVTC and SAVAHCS.
- Assist in determining VA eligibility status of veteran participants.
- Identify participant clinical needs and recommendations through clinical assessments.
- Assist eligible veterans to enroll in the VA healthcare system and provide linkage to other clinical services and programs.
- Attend RMVTC meetings, staffings, and court sessions while providing updated progress reports of all its participants engaged in VA programs.

OPCS

Old Pueblo Community Services helps find and facilitate housing opportunities for homeless Veterans, including but not limited to Transitional Housing properties specifically for Veterans. They are also responsible for providing outpatient counseling services to Veterans with the goal of improving wellness by managing and/or reducing negative addiction and mental health symptoms while emphasizing each individual's strengths and abilities. They are committed to providing addiction counseling services that include up-to-date, proven practices during individual therapy sessions. Programs include Substance Use Counseling, Anger Management, Adult Responsibility, PTSD Counseling, and recovery housing.

La Frontera

La Frontera offers services to address the specific needs of Veterans involved with the criminal justice system. The goal is to prevent Veterans with current or outstanding misdemeanor charges, fines, and/or warrants from falling further into a life of crime by engaging them in rehabilitation and supportive services. Those services include behavioral health and mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment including Medically Assisted Treatment (MAT), relapse prevention, DUI education and counseling, Domestic Violence counseling, and recovery housing.

The Center for Life Skills Development, LLC.

The Center for Life Skills Development provides counseling for individuals, families, couples, and groups (in English and in Spanish). Services are provided in person, Telehealth via video, or telephone. Programs include trauma therapy, Domestic Violence counseling, Substance Use and Relapse Prevention counseling, Alcohol Awareness, DUI education and counseling, Anger Management, Adult Responsibility, Parenting, and specific programs for animal and shoplifting charges.

CFLSD specializes in:

- ✓ Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing **EMDR** – Therapy

- ✓ Traumatic Brain Injury **TBI** – Psychotherapy Treatment/ Psychoeducational Curriculum Based
- ✓ **Neuro Counseling** – Linking the brain to behaviors by using neuro plasticity techniques
- ✓ **Mental Health Evaluation – Reports** written for Superior and/or Family Conciliation Court to assist in developing: Legal Decision Making/ Parenting Time.
- ✓ **Revocation Packets** – for Motor Vehicle Department

Bridges Counseling LLC

One of Tucson’s leading, state-licensed outpatient clinics addressing domestic violence, DUI, and alcohol/drug abuse needs. They offer specialized expertise and services to provide Veterans the counseling and skills required to:

- ✓ Comply with court-ordered treatment
- ✓ Reconnect with self and improve relationships with loved ones
- ✓ Regain the confidence that comes from making conscious choices and decisions

Peer Support

“Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much”–Helen Keller

Rally Point Arizona, La Frontera

Rally Point Arizona is an initiative of La Frontera, and is really about Veterans helping Veterans and their families. The mentorship program is the heart of the RMVTC program. Each participant is assigned a mentor. The mentor is the participant’s first go-to person. Mentors provide the Veteran with a safe place to discuss things they may not feel comfortable discussing with their counselor or with the judge. Mentors provide resources and referrals for different community-based services and can help remove obstacles which are in the Veteran’s way to a successful graduation from RMVTC



Community Partners

Arizona@Work (DES)

Arizona@Work (Mr. Leonard Baer, DES) supports veterans by providing support programs that increase opportunities to obtain employment and job training in Arizona. Eligible veterans are entitled to receive priority services in job referrals and training, as well as other employment services. Veterans can receive help preparing their resume, obtaining clothing and tools for employment, help with job interview skills, and an advocate to help them through the employment application process.

Pay It Forward Tucson (PIF Tucson)

PIF Tucson is organized exclusively for charitable and educational purposes. It is a Veteran established organization where our community can come together as one in hopes of fulfilling the needs of low-income families and Veterans. Our mission is to complement the already established city, state, and county assistance, in a collaborative effort, with the hopes of eliminating hunger, homelessness, loss of basic human needs, and poverty with the use of donations, Volunteers, and resources.

Pay It Forward Tucson, Inc. is an exempt organization as described in Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code; EIN 81-4465853.

PIF Tucson has proudly served the Regional Municipalities Veterans' Treatment Court since 2016, providing countless hours of Community Service, Mentoring, and Financial Assistance, among other personalized services, to our Veterans going through the Vet Court Program. Some of the more specific objectives and purposes of our organization are:

- Provide assistance with basic needs (i.e., utilities, housing, moving, household goods, food, bus passes, etc.)
- Help individuals connect to and utilize other available community resources when needed
- Encourage and help facilitate random acts of kindness at home and abroad
- Provide a safe environment for at-risk youth utilizing second language education through the use of music
- Provide Mental Health First Aid classes to the community, teaching people how to identify, understand and respond to signs of mental illnesses and substance use disorders in our community
- Sponsor, host, and/or participate in events and activities that promote or that relate to our Mission

Southern Arizona Justice for Veterans (SAJV)

SAJV is a local non-profit 501-c-3 that covers critical gap funding for treatment necessary for Veteran participants. They cover the cost of required treatment for those Veterans who are ineligible for Veteran Benefits, ineligible for State Medicaid, or AHCCCS, and do not meet grant criteria. They consider each case individually and measure needs based on gross income and family size. They have been an incredible resource to RMVTC, enabling us to help ALL Veterans, not just those who qualify for the VA.



Participant Expectations

"Do more than belong: participate. Do more than care: help. Do more than believe: practice. Do more than be fair: be kind. Do more than forgive: forget. Do more than dream: work."

William Arthur Ward

"You get out of this program what you put into it, and honestly much, much more."

Graduate of RMVTC

Court Expectations

All participating Veterans:

- COMMUNICATE with the Court and Team what is going on with you
- Must be honest with the Team and their treatment providers
- Must abstain from illicit drug and alcohol use
- Must attend all scheduled court dates
- Must follow and complete all court orders
- Must update the court on any changes to contact information
- Must not commit any further acts of misconduct or lawlessness
- Must complete a Government Performance Results Act survey (GPRA) when fully accepted, six months into the program, and at program discharge
- Are subject to random drug and alcohol testing
- Can expect the program to last a minimum of six months

If a Veteran cannot appear at a scheduled hearing, it is their responsibility to communicate any such conflict with their case manager, counselor, and/or mentor.

If a Veteran is charged with any new violations, it is their responsibility to notify their case manager, counselor, and/or mentor as soon as possible.

Failure to meet any of the listed expectations may be grounds for sanction up to and including termination from the program.

Treatment Expectations

All participating Veterans:

- Must attend all treatment sessions or counseling sessions as scheduled
- Must be on time
- Must notify treatment provider **and** Mentor if unable to attend, and explain why
- Must be an **ACTIVE** participant in the sessions. It is not enough to attend only.
- Must actively engage and attempt to learn and understand
- Must be honest and forthcoming to allow clinical needs to be appropriately addressed
- Must keep private the things shared by other people in group sessions
- Must follow the recommendations set forth by treatment provider(s)

Mentorship Expectations

All participating Veterans:

- ✓ Must contact their Mentor a minimum of 6 hours per month
- ✓ Must have meaningful contact with Mentor, especially when things are going on you need support for
- ✓ Must attend at least one Friday Night Camaraderie Dinner per month (free meal, camaraderie, support, inspiration, and counts for two hours of mentor contact)
- ✓ Must follow all court orders regarding mentor contact
- ✓ Must communicate with Mentor regarding any problems/issues such as missing an appointment, etc.

RMVTC PROGRAM PHASES AND REQUIREMENTS

Conditional Acceptance (Month 0 to 1)

1. Attend initial court hearing
2. Meet with Rally Point Arizona (mentor program) for intake
3. Meet with assigned treatment provider for intake, assessment, and treatment planning
4. Meet with Law School for explanation of support/assistance
5. Receive and review Handbook
6. Ask all of your questions
7. Sign RMVTC Participant Agreement

Red Phase (Months 2-3)

1. Full acceptance into the RMVTC Program once the Conditional tasks are completed
 - a. Provide first baseline drug test
2. Attend Court every two weeks in person
3. Engage in your plan for treatment/classes/counseling/etc.
4. Fully connect with Mentor Program, Mentor assigned, maintain 6 hours of mentor contact per month
5. Attend Friday Night Dinners at least once per month
6. Drug test randomly
7. Address any housing needs
8. Complete required GPRA survey

White Phase (Months 3-4)

1. Focus on treatment and stabilization
2. Attend Court monthly in person (or more frequently if so ordered)
3. Attend treatment, counseling, and appointments with providers regularly as scheduled
 - a. Communicate immediately regarding any absences (to Provider and Mentor)
4. Consistent participation in Mentor program
 - a. 6 hours minimum of mentor contact per month
 - b. Attend at least 1 Friday Night Dinner per month
5. Ongoing progress toward sobriety
6. Ongoing progress towards responsible living and healthy relationships
7. Address any needs for PTSD, TBI, and other specialized treatment

Blue Phase (Months 4-5+)

1. Treatment Maintenance and Community/Prosocial Engagement
2. Attend Court monthly in person (or more frequently if so ordered)
3. Continue with regular treatment/class attendance without unexcused absences
4. Maintain requirements of Mentor Program
5. Engage in prosocial activities
6. No missed drug tests
7. Sustained progress with sobriety

Graduation (Month 6+)

1. Successfully completed treatment and benefitted from it
2. Satisfied court ordered financial obligations (payment plan, community service – at least have plan in place)
3. Has met Mentor Program requirements
4. Demonstrated ongoing progress as it relates to one's individual clinical needs
5. Demonstrated actual change so that no further criminal incidents will occur
6. Written a letter to the judge discussing the Veteran's experience in the RMVTC program
7. Attend Graduation Court Ceremony in person to receive award
8. Participate in GPRA survey required

