



# Dispatch from the Front Lines

The National Clearinghouse for Veterans Treatment Courts at the National Association of Drug Court Professionals

June 2012

## Veterans Treatment Courts Send Veterans Back to School

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Veterans Treatment Courts have emerged as a vital tool in the fight against veteran unemployment by connecting veterans to the education and training benefits offered by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

It is critical for Veterans Treatment Court personnel to be aware of the many VA education and training benefits available to veterans. Justice For Vets provides the following Dispatch to briefly summarize VA education and other federal benefits and instruct courts on connecting veterans to opportunities in higher education.

The majority of Americans who serve in the Armed Forces are strengthened by their military service. Attention to detail, self-discipline, problem-solving, teamwork and decision-making in stressful situations are qualities that make service members an invaluable part of the American workforce.

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However, some veterans have difficulty finding employment when they transition to civilian life because they struggle to translate their military experience into applicable job skills.

With the assistance of VA education benefits, veterans participating in Veterans Treatment Courts are attending higher education and vocational training institutions to learn new job skills to enter the workforce.

### Real Stories of Veterans in College due to Veterans Treatment Courts

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David is a two-tour Iraq combat Marine veteran and graduate of a Veterans Treatment Court. During his participation in the Veterans Treatment Court, he began using the Post 9-11 GI Bill at the local community college where he also advised other student veterans on the benefits for which they may qualify.

David later enrolled in a state university where he graduated with a degree in Health Science, focusing on Substance Abuse Counseling.

Emily is an Army Combat Medic veteran who currently participates in a Veterans Treatment Court. When Emily entered the court she was unemployed and not receiving any VA benefits or services. With the help of the court, she connected with the veterans program coordinator at her local community college. Emily began using the Montgomery GI Bill to pay for school, where she also works in the veterans office on campus in a VA work study program enrolling student veterans in classes.

## The Seven Types of VA Education Benefits

### *Montgomery GI Bill Active Duty (MGIB-AD) (Chapter 30)*

The MGIB-AD program provides up to 36 months of educational benefits to qualifying veterans. This benefit may be used for degree or certificate programs, flight training, apprenticeship/on-the-job training and correspondence courses. Remedial, deficiency and refresher courses may be approved under certain circumstances. Generally, benefits are payable up to 10 years following release from active duty.<sup>1</sup>

### *Post 9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33)*

The Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Act of 2008, otherwise known as Chapter 33, provides up to 36 months of educational benefits for qualifying veterans. This benefit may be used for graduate and undergraduate degrees, vocational/technical training, on-the-job training, flight training, correspondence training, licensing and national testing programs, entrepreneurship training and tutorial assistance. Generally, benefits are payable for up to 15 years following release from active duty.<sup>2</sup>

- Based on the veteran's length of service, veterans are entitled to a percentage of the following:

- Cost of tuition and fees, not to exceed the most expensive, in-state undergraduate program or the national cap (paid by the VA directly to the school)
- Monthly housing allowance equal to the basic allowance for housing at the E-5 with dependents rate for the zip code of the school the veteran is attending (paid to the veteran)
- Annual books/supplies stipend of up to \$1,000 per year (paid to the veteran)
- A one-time payment of \$500 can be paid to individuals relocating from rural areas<sup>3</sup>

### *Yellow Ribbon Program*

Currently, the Post 9/11 GI Bill tuition is capped at either the highest in-state undergraduate tuition rate or the national cap per credit. The veteran's tuition and fees may exceed these amounts if the veteran is attending a private school or is attending a public school as a nonresident student. Institutions of higher education may elect to participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program to make additional funds available for the veteran's education program without any additional charge to his/her GI Bill entitlement.

Schools that voluntarily enter into a Yellow Ribbon agreement with the VA, choose the amount of tuition and fees that will be contributed. The VA will match that amount and issue payment directly to the school, dollar-for-dollar.<sup>4</sup>

### *Montgomery GI Bill Selected Reserve (MGIB-SR) (Chapter 1606)*

This program may be available to members of the Selected Reserve. The Selected Reserve includes the Army Reserve, Navy Reserve, Air Force Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve and Coast Guard Reserve, the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard. This benefit may be used for degree and certificate programs, flight training, apprenticeship/on-the-job training and correspondence courses. Remedial, deficiency and refresher courses may be approved under certain circumstances.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Montgomery GI Bill Active Duty (MGIB-AD) U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. 2011. Veterans Benefit Administration. 6 Feb. 2012 [http://www.gibill.va.gov/benefits/montgomery\\_gi\\_bill/active\\_duty.html](http://www.gibill.va.gov/benefits/montgomery_gi_bill/active_duty.html)

<sup>2</sup>The Post – 9/11 GI Bill U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. 2012. Veterans Benefit Administration. 6 Feb. 2012 [http://www.gibill.va.gov/benefits/post\\_911\\_gibill/index.html](http://www.gibill.va.gov/benefits/post_911_gibill/index.html)

<sup>3</sup>U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs., The Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (2010), available at [http://www.gibill.va.gov/documents/pamphlets/ch33\\_pamphlet.pdf](http://www.gibill.va.gov/documents/pamphlets/ch33_pamphlet.pdf).

<sup>4</sup>U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs., The Post – 9/11 GI Bill Yellow Ribbon Program (2010), available at [http://www.gibill.va.gov/documents/pamphlets/Yellow\\_Ribbon\\_Pamphlet.pdf](http://www.gibill.va.gov/documents/pamphlets/Yellow_Ribbon_Pamphlet.pdf).

<sup>5</sup>Montgomery GI Bill-Selected Reserve (MGIB-SR) U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. 2011. Veterans Benefit Administration.

### ***Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP) (Chapter 1607)***

REAP (Chapter 1607 of title 10, U.S. Code) is an education program that provides up to 36 months of education benefits to members of the Selected Reserves, Individual Ready Reserve (IRR), and National Guard, who were called or ordered to active service in response to a war or national emergency as declared by the President or Congress. The reserve components consist of Army Reserve, Navy Reserve, Air Force Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, Coast Guard Reserve, and the Army National Guard, Air National Guard, Army IRR, Air Force IRR, Navy IRR, Coast Guard IRR and Marine Corps IRR.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP) (Chapter 32)***

Chapter 32, VEAP is available if the veteran first entered active duty service between January 1, 1977 and June 30, 1985 and elected to make contributions from his/her military pay to participate in this program. The veterans' contributions were matched at a ratio of 2:1 by the government. This benefit may be used for degree and certificate programs, flight training, apprenticeship/on-the-job training and correspondence courses. Remedial, deficiency and refresher courses may be approved under certain circumstances.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) (Chapter 31)***

Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment's (VR&E) mission is to help veterans with service-connected disabilities with a rating of at least 10 percent, or a memorandum rating of 20 percent or more, to prepare for, find, and keep suitable jobs. Some veterans in Veterans Treatment Courts suffer from service-connected conditions that prevent them from seeking or gaining employment. After the veteran receives a disability rating, they are eligible for programs such as VR&E. On-the-job training, apprenticeships, college, vocational, technical or business schools are paid for by this

program while the veteran receives supportive rehabilitation services such as case management and counseling.<sup>8</sup>

## **The Role of Veterans Treatment Courts**

### ***Connecting Veterans to the Education they have Earned***

Many veterans who enter Veterans Treatment Courts are eligible for VA education benefits such as the Montgomery GI Bill, Post 9/11 GI Bill or Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment. In addition, some states offer education benefits in addition to, or that supplement VA education benefits. For example, in Texas, the Hazelwood Act provides veterans with an education benefit of up to 150 hours of tuition and fee exemptions at state supported colleges and universities.<sup>9</sup>

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- Veterans Treatment Courts link veterans to education benefits by including representatives from the Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA) on the treatment court team. In addition, Veteran Mentors and representatives from Veterans Service Organizations and State Departments/Commissions of Veterans Affairs are generally present in court to assist.
- Veterans Treatment Courts establish direct contact with the veterans program coordinator located at the college/university to make referrals for veterans in court. Many institutions of higher education have veterans program coordinators

<sup>6</sup>U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs., Reserve Educational Assistance Program (REAP) (2005), available at [http://www.gibill.va.gov/documents/pamphlets/ch1607\\_pamphlet.pdf](http://www.gibill.va.gov/documents/pamphlets/ch1607_pamphlet.pdf).

<sup>7</sup>Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP) U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. 2011. Veterans Benefit Administration. 6 Feb. 2012 [http://www.gibill.va.gov/benefits/other\\_programs/veap.html](http://www.gibill.va.gov/benefits/other_programs/veap.html)

<sup>8</sup>Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. 2011. Veterans Benefit Administration. 6 Feb. 2012 <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/index.htm>

<sup>9</sup>Hazelwood Texas Veterans Commission. 2012. 6 Feb. 2012 <http://texas-veterans.com/education/hazelwood>

on campus who oversee the institutions' veterans office/department and are the first point of contact for veterans. Veteran program coordinators oversee services such as VA education benefits counseling, employment assistance, financial aid and tuition assistance, and/or registration and enrollment assistance. For those institutions of higher education that do not have a veterans program coordinator, the first point of contact on campus for veterans is the registrar's office, which assists with VA education benefits.<sup>10</sup>

- Veterans Treatment Court staff visit the college campus to explore what services and resources are offered to veterans. Colleges/universities may have centers for veterans on campus, career centers, guidance councilors, student veteran's organizations and services for students with learning disabilities. In addition, some institutions of higher education have the Veterans Upward Bound (VUB) Program, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The VUB Program is free and designed to help veterans refresh their academic skills to prepare for postsecondary education. The program provides assessment and enhancement of basic skills through counseling, mentoring, tutoring and academic instruction in the core subject areas.<sup>11</sup>

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*Through collaboration, Veterans Treatment Courts and institutions of higher education increase graduation rates, enrollment, and create educated, productive citizens out of those who would otherwise be incarcerated. To learn more about how Veterans Treatment Courts can connect veterans to higher education, visit [www.JusticeForVets.org](http://www.JusticeForVets.org).*

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## **For Veterans Treatment Courts**

Through collaboration, Veterans Treatment Courts and institutions of higher education increase graduation rates, enrollment, and

create educated, productive citizens out of those who would otherwise be incarcerated. To learn more about Veterans Treatment Courts and the benefits and services offered by the VA, visit [www.JusticeForVets.org](http://www.JusticeForVets.org).

## **About Justice For Vets**

In 2009, the National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP) launched Justice For Vets: The National Clearinghouse for Veterans Treatment Courts. Justice For Vets is exclusively committed to ensuring that veterans involved in the criminal justice system have access to Veterans Treatment Courts and the benefits, services and treatment they have earned. Since Justice For Vets was launched, the number of operational Veterans Treatment Courts has grown to over 90. Justice For Vets activities include advocating for federal Veterans Treatment Court funding, assisting with state legislation, training and technical assistance, public awareness, and building coalitions within the criminal justice, business, and Veterans Service Organization communities. Visit Justice For Vets online at [www.JusticeForVets.org](http://www.JusticeForVets.org).

## **About National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADCP)**

Since 1994, NADCP, a non-profit organization 501(c)(3) representing over 27,000 multi-disciplinary justice professionals and community leaders, has worked tirelessly at the national, state and local level to create and enhance Drug Courts. NADCP is recognized as the experts in the field of addiction and its intersection with the criminal justice system. In 1998, NADCP launched the National Drug Court Institute (NDCI). To date, NDCI has directly trained 65,440 Drug Court professionals from all fifty states and U.S. territories as well as sixteen other countries. Because of the breadth, quality and impact of NADCP, the Drug Court field has grown from fourteen programs in 1994 to 2,800 Drug Courts currently in operation. Visit NADCP online at [www.AllRise.org](http://www.AllRise.org).

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<sup>10</sup> American Council on Education. From Soldiers to Students; Easing the Transition of Service Members on Campus (2009), available at <http://www.acenet.edu/AM/Template.cfm?Section=HENA&Template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=33233>

<sup>11</sup> Veterans Upward Bound Program U.S. Department of Education. 2011. 8 Feb. 2012 <<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/triovub/index.html>>

## About Matt Stiner

Matt Stiner is the Director of Justice For Vets at NADCP. After receiving the Combat Action Ribbon for service in Iraq as a Marine, Stiner used VA Education benefits and the Harry S. Truman Scholarship to obtain a Masters in Public Administration from the University of Oklahoma. Stiner began his career in public service in the Tulsa Mayor's Office and then worked in the Tulsa Veterans Treatment Court.

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