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Special Court Program Helping Vets With PTSD

Pilot Program Aimed At Helping Veterans With PTSD Who Have Committed Crimes

POSTED: 6:00 pm PST February 4, 2011

UPDATED: 7:09 pm PST February 4, 2011

SAN DIEGO -- A new pilot program is giving military veterans in San Diego the help they need in dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder.

"I go into the jails, meet with them, assess them and try to connect them with the court -- the veteran's treatment court -- to get them the treatment they really need," said Lezie Neusteter of the Veteran's Administration, part of a huge collaborative team trying to help veterans.

Veterans who have been diagnosed with PTSD and have not committed a sex offense, arson or a violent felony can be considered with three criteria in mind.

"One: the public is protected. Two: holding the military person accountable for the conduct that occurred [and] three: making sure they get the treatment they need," said Superior Court Judge Roger Krauel, a Vietnam veteran who help spearhead the pilot program.

"Most of the veterans who end up in court are acting out because they haven't been able to deal with the symptoms of PTSD and have avoided treatment," said Marilyn Cornell of Veteran's Village of San Diego.

There are 50 similar courts around the country patterned after one that started a few years ago in Buffalo, N.Y., which has yet to have a veteran become a repeat offender.

After an evaluation period, San Diego hopes it can make the pilot program permanent.

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