



Strong Girls. Strong Women. Better World.

More Information 2012 OEF/OIF Women Veterans Retreats

March 17-22, New Mexico
August 18-23, Colorado
September 14-19, Connecticut

Eligibility

To be eligible for these retreats, women veterans must:

- Have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan during OIF or OEF
- Have been in counseling at a Vet Center or VA for at least three months

About the OEF/OIF Women Veterans' Retreats

These 6-day retreats are a powerful, energizing way for women who have experienced the human impact of being in a war zone to recover their personal strength and vitality. Participants may use this retreat to recover from whatever way they feel that the war has personally affected them, whether that is healing from combat stress, PTSD or MST, re-adjusting to civilian life, addressing other personal issues, or gaining practical everyday skills like financial know-how or enjoying the company of others who have been in similar circumstances.

In the aftermath of military service, many women find that their 'comfort zone' in the civilian world has become smaller, and that their lives have become constricted in one way or another. One's range of activities, self-expression, and ways of being with others and one's self can narrow in an effort to ensure safety and predictability. As a result, confidence in one's ability to negotiate relationships and unfamiliar situations can drop. These retreats provide an open and affirming forum for women to take steps toward the fuller life that they envision for themselves. The nourishing natural environment, and the support of others on a similar path, gives women on the recovery retreat a series of opportunities to recognize their strength and capabilities, and to practice new ways of managing unfamiliar situations and relationships. Each woman will bring unique issues, needs, and challenges to the retreat, and all participants will share the intention to stretch themselves in ways that are appropriate for them, and the intention to support others on a similar journey.

The path to growth and recovery almost always involves stretching outside of one's comfort zone, and it can sometimes feel awkward or uncomfortable. This 'stretch' will be different for each woman, but common themes that may emerge include trust, setting boundaries, asking for support, finding one's strength and competence, practicing positive 'self-talk', and staying present in the presence of fear. We feel strongly that each woman needs to be fully in charge of the degree of stretch that is appropriate for her. You will have complete choice about whether you participate in any activity, and to what degree. Your facilitators will help you explore your options, and provide education about how to make self-affirming choices. You will be asked to always follow safety protocols, but aside from that, you can trust that your facilitators will always

support your choices, and that you will never be pressured into doing something that does not feel right to you.

Are these retreats right for me?

First, you must meet the eligibility requirements listed above. It is also important that you have your own personal reason for coming, and some understanding of how your deployment is affecting you at this point in time. A desire to move forward, a willingness to stretch in order to do so, and an interest in connecting with other women veterans are also important. If you are unsure about why you want to come, it may be helpful to first talk to your counselor to identify the issues you are working on.

Schedule and Activities

24 to 30 women will participate on each retreat. Mealtimes and some parts of each day will be spent in a large group, but most of your time will be spent in a smaller group of eight to ten participants, two facilitators from The Women's Wilderness Institute, and one Vet Center counseling support staff. You can expect your facilitators to take on many different roles during the retreat, but their primary job is to ensure the physical and emotional safety of all participants, as well as to help your group create a non-judgmental atmosphere of mutual support and encouragement. They will teach tools for managing stress, connecting with people, and just dealing with life, and offer you with lots of opportunities to practice those things.

This retreat will provide you with a wide range of activities. Some will be educational, some will help you explore your vision for your life, some will teach nourishing practices that you can use for stress reduction, and some will offer opportunities for you to practice different ways of being with yourself, others, or unfamiliar situations.

You can expect each day to be full! Each morning will begin with an optional session of stretching, yoga, exercise, or other stress reduction practice. Each day will include outside group activities, discussions, and personal time for art-work, journal writing, or walking. You will have opportunities to do a high-ropes course, to do a 'forest solo', and to do a half-day hike or canoe excursion. See the sample schedule at the end of this packet. If you see something that is unappealing to you, remember that all activities are optional, with other options for those who choose not to participate in a particular activity.

About The Women's Wilderness Institute

The Women's Wilderness Institute, a non-profit organization, was established in 1997 with the mission of building courage, confidence, and leadership for girls and women, and was selected by the Department of Veterans' Affairs to provide this series of retreats for women veterans. TWWI facilitates wilderness- and facility-based courses and retreats, using a program philosophy that supports every participant in making self-affirming choices and discovering her innate strength and capability. The Women's Wilderness Institute is accredited by the Association for Experiential Education. More information is available at www.womenswilderness.org.

Health, and Fitness

These retreats are designed to accommodate a wide range of physical abilities and levels of health. The facilities are rustic, with unpaved paths between buildings and activity areas. You will be most comfortable if you can walk for short distances (up to five minutes) and be able to negotiate slightly uneven terrain. Some facilities may have hills or longer hikes to get to some activities, but participants who cannot manage that distance may be transported in most cases. All activities can be modified to accommodate individuals with physical disabilities. If you have a significant disability, or cannot walk uphill or for more than five minutes, let us know when you apply so we can choose the location that will be the easiest for you to negotiate.

Locations

Women's Wilderness Institute uses facilities around the country to host the Women Veteran Retreats. While the facilities serve other groups and populations, we bring our own staff and our own program. We will either have exclusive use of the facility, or will have our own private meeting areas.

We ask that you choose the location nearest to your residence, if possible.

Ghost Ranch Education and Retreat Center, New Mexico- March 17-22

Ghost Ranch is a beautiful facility located deep in the vast open space of the New Mexico desert. It is located in Abiquiu, about 2.5 hours from Albuquerque, in what is known as "Georgia O'Keefe country"- the area where she created her legendary art. There are high mesas, sandstone slickrock, and unusual rock formations.

www.ghostranch.org

100 Elk Outdoor Center, Colorado- August 18-23

Located near the town of Buena Vista, approximately two and a half hours from Denver, 100 Elk Outdoor Center is a peaceful, quiet location at the foot of the Rocky Mountains. 14,000' peaks rise behind the camp, and our cabin and meeting area looks out over a grass lawn and small lake. Tall ponderosa pines are scattered across the property, and for those who are up for it, there is a vigorous half-day hike to a high alpine lake.

www.100elk.org

Camp Jewell YMCA, Connecticut, September 14-19

Camp Jewell is a private conference facility on the shores of Triangle Lake, in the pastoral forested hills of northwestern Connecticut, just a few miles from the Appalachian Trail. Outdoor activities include canoeing on the lake, hiking, and viewing the beautiful fall colors of New England.

www.campjewell.org

Food and Lodging

Food will be served family-style, with healthy options to suit a variety of tastes. Please let us know on your registration form if you are vegetarian, or have any other food requirements or allergies, and we will do our best to accommodate you.

Lodging will be in cabins or lodges that are rustic but clean and comfortable. You can expect to share a room with one to three other people, and to have heat, indoor plumbing, and linens provided.

Transportation

You have two options for transportation to and from the retreat center. Please fill out the Transportation Plan form to let us know how you will be arriving, and to request a flight if you plan to arrive by air.

- 1) You may drive yourself directly to the retreat center. Directions will be provided in your acceptance packet.
- 2) If you are too close to fly but do not want to drive all the way to the retreat center, we will arrange a pickup at a Vet Center in a nearby urban area.
- 3) You may request a flight. A shuttle will take you from the airport to the retreat center. If you need transportation from your residence to your nearest airport, you may request transportation from your local Vet Center. Please allow all day on the first date of your

retreat, and again on the last day, for transportation, as we cannot guarantee travel times.

Drug and Alcohol Policy

Many women who are trying to cope with the after-effects of war turn to alcohol or drugs to ease their symptoms. While this is very common, it is important that you first address any addiction issues before going further in the recovery process. Alcohol, recreational drugs, or abuse of prescription medication will not be allowed during the retreat. If you are currently working with these issues, please discuss it with your counselor to make sure that the retreat is appropriate for you at this point in time. If you and your counselor decide that you are ready for the retreat, please develop a plan for abstinence for at least a month before, during, and after the retreat.

Smoking

All of the facilities that we use are non-smoking environments. We strongly suggest that if you are a smoker, you taper off in the weeks leading up to the retreat. If this does not work for you, at each facility you may be able to walk off of the property to smoke, but this is usually not very convenient. We'll send more details about the smoking policies at each retreat center in your acceptance packet.

How to Apply

Retreats will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis, so we suggest sending your application in as soon as possible. Final deadlines for retreats are as follows:

March retreat- February 10
August retreat- July 13
September retreat- August 10

Fill out the registration form, medical form, assumption of risk form, and transportation plan in the Application packet. Return this to your Vet Center counselor. If you have questions about the enrollment process you may contact Lori Mathews, Enrollment Coordinator at TWWI, at lori@womenswilderness.org . If you have questions about the retreat itself, you may contact Laura Tyson, Director of Veterans Programs, at laura@womenswilderness.org .

Feedback from Participants 2011 Women Veterans Retreats

"Just to see so many other women just like me was just amazing, and so burden-relieving."

"I am not alone, and people do care about what I do and are interested in my life. The diverse group helped me to come out of my shell."

"I have learned to breathe and relax for the first time in my life. I now know different ways to calm down, focus and center myself, and know that its okay to work on me. The BASE-R concept that was taught was AMAZING and will be used all the time."

"I have learned to trust; I have felt an unconditional acceptance and engagement with fellow vets that I have not had, especially in the military."

"This was the best I have seen in group interactive learning."

"Attending this retreat made me realize that I am not alone with my PTSD. My anger does not control me, I can control it any way I feel fit to."

"I have learned more about myself- that I can face my fears and have the courage to continue on being strong. I learned how to love again."

"The staff was really helpful in teaching me how to laugh again, how to socialize, and how to let go. I've learned true friendship again and how to trust and accept support from those who care. That was next to impossible for me before."

"You will see how the world still moves and life is worth healing thru. There are others out there just like you- you are not alone."

"I learned what it really meant to serve our country- a re-ignition of patriotism and pride in self for going to war."

"I learned that I can keep my inner peace regardless of what is going on. I learned to forgive myself and others."

"All of the problem solving activities really brought the group together. That's where I learned that just because you try to solve an issue one way and it doesn't work, that its ok to try another way instead of giving up."

"I learned to love myself and be less critical. I learned that I am not alone. I am not broken. I am off-course, but I can come back."

"I can be myself and that's okay. I can take care of myself first and its good to be real."

"The BASE-R really helped. I was able to take a step back, relax, then try to do or say in a positive way."

"I learned that I can still be all the characteristics of what I liked about being a soldier, even though I can't be a soldier any more."

"I learned new methods of de-escalating my anxiety. I saw that as we opened up and let our guard down, the stress load that was being carried was lightened."

"I learned to release stress in different ways. I understand that I have a long way to go, but now I have a direction to go in."

"The stress management skills, tension release exercises, and methods of thinking about ourselves are useful tools for helping me get through my days at a time in my life when I'm very confused about what I should be doing now and what the future holds for me. I now have new, more positive ways to channel my fear, negative thoughts, apprehension, and depression."

Sample Schedule- Women Veterans Retreat

Note: This is just a sample schedule! The actual schedule for your retreat will be different in some ways, although the same topics will be covered.

Pre-breakfast and after-dinner activities are optional, and all activities are adaptable to meet different physical and personal needs.

	Day One	Day Two	Day Three	Day Four	Day Five	Day Six
7:00- 8:00		Yoga	Walking Meditation	Yoga	Yoga and Meditation	Pack
8:00-9:00		Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast
9:00-12:00		Outdoor Activities- Team building, communication skills.	Give Stress a Rest Part II: Tension Release Exercises. Trust-building activities.	Outdoor Options- Hiking, Canoeing, Writing, or Discussion Groups	"What's Next in My Life?" - Visioning and Goal Setting	9:30 DEPARTURE
12:00-1:00		Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Picnic Lunch	
1:00-5:00	4:00 ARRIVAL	Give Stress a Rest Part I: The biology of PTSD and a self-regulation model.	Outdoor Activities- Conflict Resolution and Communication Skills	High Ropes Course	Solo and Final Small Groups	
		3:00- 5:00 Outdoor Activities	4-5 Money and Happiness- How to Have Both	4:00-5:00 Hot Topics		
5:00-6:00	Introductions, Welcome	Open Time	Open Time	Open Time	Open Time	
6:00-7:30	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	
7:30-9:00	Setting Intentions and Goals	Sleeping Tips. Art Project	Games	Movement	Celebration Ceremony	