

**Retreat Information**  
**2019-2020 OEF/OIF Women Veterans Retreats**  
October 18-23, 2019 Southern California  
April 5- 10, 2020 Southern California  
June 7-12, 2020 Maine

**Eligibility**

To be eligible for these retreats, women veterans must:

- Have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan during OIF or OEF
- Currently be in counseling, and have attended at least three sessions at a Vet Center during the previous six months. If you are seeing a VA or private counselor, you may keep your current counselor, but you will need to be seen at a Vet Center for intake, for at least one session, to make sure the retreat is a good fit at this time. The Vet Center counselor will likely want to speak with your current therapist. Please contact us if you need help expediting this process.
- Fill out an application packet
- Have your counselor fill out the Counseling Questionnaire. If you have a private or VA counselor, he/she may fill out the questionnaire and give it to your Vet Center counselor.

**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, building better relationships, or addressing other personal issues.

The 2019-2020 series of retreats is an extension of the successful series of retreats offered to OEF/OIF women veterans since 2011. Over 300 veterans have been served on those retreats, with the majority reporting lasting positive changes in stress symptoms and general well being as a result of participating in the retreat.

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 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 stress or anxiety. 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 and how you might use the retreat to move forward with those.

### **Schedule and Activities**

24 women veterans 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 participants with two facilitators from CenterPoint Retreats and one Vet Center counselor 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 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 a session of gentle yoga and mindfulness practices, suitable for all body types and levels of experience. 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 an optional half-day hike or canoe excursion. See the sample schedule at the end of this packet. In general, you should come with the intention of participating fully. However, if you see something that is unappealing to you, remember that you will always have the choice to decline participating in any given activity.

### **About CenterPoint Retreats**

CenterPoint Retreats was founded to serve the growing numbers of women veterans who are committed to their full recovery from stressful and/or traumatic experience. At CenterPoint we believe that women veterans are inherently strong, compassionate, resourceful, and capable of full recovery from stressful or traumatic experience. We believe that in the same way that a difficult experience or life circumstances can have lasting impact on one's life, a deeply positive experience of safety, connection, and nourishment can also have a lifelong impact.

## **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 ten 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 ten minutes, let us know when you apply so we can choose the location that will be the easiest for you to negotiate.

## **Locations**

CenterPoint uses different facilities around the country to host the Women Veteran Retreats. While the facilities also serve other groups and populations, we bring our own staff and our own program, and have our own private meeting and sleeping areas. In most cases will have exclusive use of the facility. Some facilities are owned by religious groups, but CenterPoint Retreats are not religiously focused.

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

### Camp Stevens, California, October 18-23, 2019

Camp Stevens is an outdoor education and retreat center located in the mountains just east of San Diego, California, in a peaceful setting of forests, meadows, and hiking trails. The land includes two acres of organic gardens and orchards.

[www.campstevens.org](http://www.campstevens.org)

### Camp Stevens, California, April 5-10, 2020

Camp Stevens is an outdoor education and retreat center located in the mountains just east of San Diego, California, in a peaceful setting of forests, meadows, and hiking trails. The land includes two acres of organic gardens and orchards.

[www.campstevens.org](http://www.campstevens.org)

### Camp Mataponi, Maine- June 7-12, 2020

Camp Mataponi is located on the shores of Sebago Lake, in the gently rolling woods of central Maine. It has been a traditional girls camp for over 100 years, and offers crisp green lawns, a sandy beach, and canoeing on the beautiful lake.

[www.campmataponi.com](http://www.campmataponi.com)

## **Food and Lodging**

Food will include 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 two to three other people, and to have heat, indoor plumbing, and linens provided. Each of the facilities have bunk beds, but you will be spread out enough that everyone can have a bottom bunk.

## **Transportation**

You have three 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 request a flight from an airport near your residence. A chartered bus will take you from the airport to the retreat center. Please allow all day on the first date of your

retreat, and again on the last day, for transportation, as you may need to leave your house early in the morning and return at night on the final day.

- 2) You may drive yourself directly to the retreat center. Directions will be provided.
- 3) If you are too close to fly but do not want to drive all the way to the retreat center, we may be able to arrange a pickup for you in a nearby area.

### **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 that you can commit to for at least a month before, during, and a month after the retreat.

### **Smoking**

All of the facilities that we use are non-smoking environments, but have agreed to make arrangements for people who need to smoke. At each facility you will be able to walk off of the property or to a designated smoking area to smoke, but this is sometimes not very convenient. We suggest that if you are a smoker, you taper down gradually, in the weeks leading up to the retreat, so that you don't have to miss too much.

### **How to Apply**

Your chances of being accepted on a retreat will increase if you submit your application as soon as possible.

To apply, fill out the registration form, medical form, assumption of risk form, and transportation plan in the Application packet. (This is available at [www.centerpointretreats.org](http://www.centerpointretreats.org) )

Return this to your Vet Center counselor, who will fill out the Counseling Questionnaire (also available on the website), and scan and email or fax the whole packet in to the email address or number in the Counseling Questionnaire. If you have a private or VA counselor, he or she may fill out the form and give it to your Vet Center counselor, who will fax in the whole packet. If you have questions about the enrollment process, or about the retreat itself, you may contact Tiffany Higgins, Program Director at [tiffany@veteranspath.org](mailto:tiffany@veteranspath.org).

## Feedback from Previous Participants

*“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.”*

*“At a point in my life I thought my life did not matter, the group taught me to love myself and that I do matter.”*

*“I learned not to apologize for who I am and what I feel, and that it's ok to open up and trust myself and other people.”*

*“I learned to love. Love myself, love others, and learn that it's ok to let go and really feel.”*

*“The group leaders and activities, along with an amazing group of women, led me in ways I never expected to an opening and release in myself.”*

*“It was an absolutely eye opening, amazing experience. I learned tools for tension release, breathing, conflict resolution, plus much more.”*

*“I learned that kindness matters, and about feeling safe and communicating our needs for boundaries.”*

*“The retreat was very well planned- it flowed well from activity to activity.”*

*“The sincere compassion of these women truly helped me express myself and learn additional skills.”*

*“This retreat taught me to ground my emotions and to start to feel myself again.”*

*“I learned that genuine connections with others and friendships are possible.”*

*“I learned that it can be safe to let walls down and share with others.”*

*“I learned that I am a good person that deserves love, not loathing.”*

*“The staff helped me acknowledge that I am worth something.”*

*“I learned a different pattern of thinking, and learned to accept my flaws.”*

*“I learned to become more vulnerable, understanding, and to take care of myself.”*

*“I learned that my feelings are normal and I am not crazy. Being with other women who experienced a lot of the same things made me realize for the first time that I am not alone.”*

*“I left with a foundation of courage, knowing that I can go away confident and that I can continue to heal and repair my life.”*

*“I have learned to love myself and let go of guilt and shame.”*

*“I learned how the brain works and why I have reacted in ways that I have. I have learned tools that help me calm down when I become activated. I learned that other women are very caring and genuine and kind.”*

### Sample Schedule

*Note: This is just a sample schedule! The schedule at your retreat may be slightly different, but the same things will be covered. All activities can be modified to suit any level of fitness or ability.*

	Day One	Day Two	Day Three	Day Four	Day Five	Day Six
7:00-8:00		Mindfulness Practices: Gentle Yoga, Meditation, Walking	Mindfulness Practices: Gentle Yoga, Meditation, Walking	Mindfulness Practices: Gentle Yoga, Meditation, Walking	Mindfulness Practices: Gentle Yoga, Meditation, Walking	Pack
8:00-9:00		Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast	Breakfast
9:00-12:00		Outdoor Activities- Building Community	9:00 - 10:30 Outdoor Activities- Building Trust	Play Morning Options: Hiking, Canoeing, Journalling, Personal Time	9:00-9:45 Money and Happiness	9:15 DEPARTURE
			10:30- 12:00 Give Stress a Rest: Tension Release Exercises	10:30-12:00 Hot Topics	9:45- 12:00 What's Next? Developing Your Personal Mission	
12:00-1:00		Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Sack Lunch	
1:00-5:00	4:00 ARRIVAL	1:00- 3:00 The Biology of Stress and PTSD. And What to Do About It! Introducing The Three Bs	1:00- 5:00 Small Groups- Outdoor Activities, Discussion, Conflict Resolution Skills	1:00-3:00 Ropes Course or Climbing Wall	1-4 Solo and Final Small Groups	
	4:30-5:30 Welcome	3:00- 5:00 Outdoor Activities- Practicing The Three Bs		3:00-5:00 Group Process and Discussion	4-5 Final Large Group Gathering	
5:00-6:00		Open Time	Open Time	Open Time	Open Time	
6:00-7:00	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	
7:00-7:30	Large Group Gathering	Open Time	Open Time	Open Time	Open Time	
7:30-8:30	Setting Intentions	Laughter is the Best Medicine Sleeping Tips	Give Stress a Rest: HeartMath Neurofeedback.	Movement	Celebration Ceremony	

Small Groups  
Large Group