

2017 OEF/OIF Women Veterans Retreats
Counselor Packet

Dear Counselor or Therapist,

Thank you for taking an active role in referring participants to the 2017 OEF/OIF Women Veterans' Retreats. We are looking forward to working with your client, and hope that this will be a meaningful step in her recovery.

While these retreats are appropriate for most women veterans who are facing the challenges of reintegration and PTSD or lingering stress, there are some mental health issues that are beyond the scope of the retreat, and appropriate screening is very important for the safety of your client. We want to make sure that this experience will meet your client's needs, so please read this information carefully so that you can assess her readiness for the retreat at this point in her recovery. Please also read the information packet available to participants, so you have basic information about the retreats.

About the Women Veterans' Retreat

The Women Veterans Retreat is a way for women veterans to come back into community and relationships in a way that honors their war-zone experience, while also providing a bridge to the personal, interpersonal, and practical skills necessary for civilian life. A wide range of new and unfamiliar experiences will give each woman an opportunity to witness her strengths and capabilities, to observe the areas where her service continues to influence her relationships with the world, others, and herself, and to practice shifting the behaviors which are no longer serving her. There are many issues that can be explored during the retreat, but many common themes emerge, including trusting others, setting boundaries, giving and receiving support, staying present, staying true to one's self in relationships, managing PTSD and stress symptoms, and finding one's strength and competence.

Most activities will take place in subgroups of eight participants, two CenterPoint staff, and one Vet Center counseling support staff. Lead CenterPoint staff will have a Masters' Degree or PhD in counseling or psychology, and significant experience working with women and PTSD clients in the outdoors. CenterPoint staff operate under the program philosophy of the Conscious Choice Model. This model recognizes that while the process of stretching outside of one's 'comfort zone', and reconnecting with others, is important to recovery, it is essential that each woman have the right to determine the pace and direction of her own recovery. Staff will help each participant explore how she makes her choices, but will always support whatever degree of physical and emotional risk that each participant chooses for herself. CenterPoint staff and Vet Center support staff will be available for extra individual support as needed, on a continuous basis during the retreat period.

Activities will be structured to build core competencies in self-awareness, self-expression, interpersonal skills, and decision-making. These skills will then be used to address larger outcome goals, including stress management, trust building, development of personal and interpersonal confidence, and recovery from traumatic experience. Outdoor activities will include team-building initiatives, a low ropes course, and a high ropes course and/or climbing wall. Stress reduction tools of yoga, movement, meditation, and relaxation techniques will be taught each morning. Short walks, group discussions, journal writing, and other components will be scheduled into each day to help process and integrate the experience. All activities are adaptable for women of various physical abilities. Participants will be immersed in community, group activities, and informal engagement with peers and facilitators for the entire period of the retreat, day and evening. Weather permitting, most daytime activities, including discussions, will take place outdoors.

Mental Health Screening for the Women Veterans' Retreat

The retreat is meant to be a fun, empowering, and educational experience. However, addressing personal issues, living in close quarters with a group, spending time outdoors, and engaging in unfamiliar activities can be emotionally and mentally stressful at times. For this to be a positive experience for your client and for others in the group, it is essential that she have some degree of positive coping skills, some ability to manage uncomfortable internal states, and reasonable social skills. **It is important that she not be in immediate crisis,**

that there not be conditions that could compromise her safety in the outdoor environment, and that there not be patterns of behavior that would have a significant negative influence on group dynamics.

We are depending on you to screen for the following criteria:

Eligibility

- Deployed during OIF or OEF. Other service will be considered on a space available basis.
- Has been in counseling with a Vet Center counselor for at least three sessions, within the past six months, before applying. If you are a VA or private therapist, your client may stay in therapy with you, but will still need to complete this requirement. You may fill out this form, and give it to the VC counselor.

Personal Capacities

- Group appropriate.
 - Can be authentic and emotionally open in a group setting.
 - Has empathy for others.
 - Capable of working with personal issues in a group setting.
 - Has some degree of social skills and ability to relate with others.
 - Does not have characteristics of an Axis II Personality Disorder
- Internally motivated to attend (i.e. not attending to please someone else)
- Able to identify personal issues and to set clear personal intentions for the retreat
- At least a minimal degree of positive skills for coping with stress
- Has addressed substance/ alcohol abuse issues. Able to be abstinent from alcohol or drugs for at least one month prior to the retreat, during the retreat, and at least one month after the retreat

Mental Health Criteria

- No current suicidal ideation, or attempts within the past six months
- No current patterns of violent behavior toward others
- No current self-mutilation
- No psychotic symptoms within the past year
- No extreme dissociative symptoms
- No personality disorders or interpersonal patterns that could negatively impact group dynamics
- No inpatient psychiatric hospitalization within six months of retreat start
- If has a current eating disorder, able to refrain from active bulimia or anorexia during the retreat
- If taking (or recently stopped taking) psychiatric medication, has been on current medication and dosage for at least three months

Preparing Your Client for the Retreat

Your support, before and after the retreat, will be an important factor in your client's experience. Exploring the following questions with her prior to the retreat will help prepare her for the experience.

- In what ways is her war zone experience currently showing up in her relationship with others, with herself, and in situations she is currently facing?
- What patterns is she ready to practice shifting? (Examples: setting boundaries, asking for support, practicing positive self-talk, self-expression, taking healthy risks, reaching out to others, etc.)
- Are there symptoms of PTSD or stress that she wants to practice managing?
- If she is currently using alcohol or drugs, please work with her to come up with an abstinence plan, starting now, and for a minimum sober period of one month prior, during, and one month after the retreat. Please assess her ability to comply with this plan, prior to applying, and notify us prior to the retreat if she is unable to remain sober.

Please complete the attached Counseling Questionnaire and return it, along with your client's paperwork, as soon as possible. **Please fax all application materials to Dawn Brown, RCS Continental District, at 303-860-7614.** You may contact Maureen with questions about eligibility at dawn.brown5@va.gov or 303-577-5205. You are welcome to contact me at laura@centerpointretreats.org or 720-226-3718, with questions about mental health screening or retreat activities, or if there are issues about your client that you would like to discuss.

Sincerely,



Laura Tyson, M.A.
Program Director, CenterPoint Retreats

**Counseling Questionnaire
OEF/OIF Women Veterans' Retreats**

Please FAX this questionnaire, with your client's application packet, to Dawn Brown, 303-860-7614.

Client Name _____
 Is this client currently in counseling with you? _____
 If YES: Length of therapy _____ Approximate number of sessions _____
 If NO: When terminated? _____ Approximate number of sessions _____
 Location and approximate dates of deployment: _____

I. Basic Criteria for Acceptance

We may contact you for further information if you check yes to any of these conditions.

	YES	NO
1. Currently suicidal and/or suicide gesture or attempt within past 6 months.		
2. Psychotic symptoms in the past year, i.e. hallucinations, delusions, impaired sense of reality		
3. Major depressive episode unresolved within past 60 days.		
4. Inpatient psychiatric hospitalization within past 6 months.		
5. Self mutilating behavior within past 3 months.		
6. Alcohol abuse or chemically dependent, and unlikely to abstain for month prior to retreat.		
7. Active anorexia or bulimia, and unlikely to refrain from ED behavior during retreat.		
8. Actively physically aggressive towards others.		
9. Personality Disorder, or traits consistent with diagnostic criteria		
11. Stopped or started new psychiatric medication within past 3 months.		

Additional information for any items checked "yes": _____

II. What would you most like to see your client get out of this experience?

III. Conditions Requiring Background Information

If a "yes" response is indicated, please answer the related questions.

Circle YES or NO

- YES NO** 1. History of Eating Disorder
 a. Describe past and current eating behavior.

 b. Frequency and most recent episode.

YES **NO** 2. History of Alcohol or Chemical Dependency
a. Describe previous and current drug/ alcohol use.

b. Drug(s) of choice?

c. If your client has an abstinence plan for one month prior and during the retreat, what coping skills will she be using to abstain during this period of time?

YES **NO** 3. Suicidal Ideation Within Past 6 Months
a. Describe nature of ideation.

b. Frequency and most recent occurrence.

c. What have been the precipitating factors?

d. In your estimation, how serious is the nature of the ideation?

e. Is client currently experiencing suicidal ideation?

YES **NO** 4. History of Suicide Gesture or Attempt
a. List date(s) of gestures or attempts. Was hospitalization required?

b. What factors would be likely to trigger another gesture or attempt?

c. In your estimation, how lethal was this gesture or attempt?

YES **NO** 5. Currently Depressed
a. Symptoms.

b. Is client currently on medication?

YES **NO** 6. Psychiatric Hospitalizations within past 5 years.

a. Date of admission and length of stay

b. Precipitating factors.

c. Diagnosis

YES **NO** 7. Poor Anger Management

a. Give specific examples of current behavior that demonstrates inability to manage anger effectively.

b. Does client have a history of being verbally or physically abusive toward peers? If yes, please describe.

YES **NO** 8. PTSD

a. Describe current PTSD symptoms.

b. What are typical triggers?

c. Does client have intense episodes of hyperarousal, intrusive memories, or shutting down? If so, is she able to come back to present on her own? What helps her get grounded?

YES **NO** 9. Psychotropic Medication

Medication

Dosage and Frequency

How Long Taken

Side Effect

YES NO

11. Difficult Interpersonal Behavior

a. Does client have patterns of behavior that could pose a significant safety risk in an outdoor setting?

b. Does client have patterns of behavior that could significantly and negatively effect group dynamics?

YES NO

12. Traumatic Brain Injury

a. Does client have symptoms of traumatic brain injury? What are her primary symptoms?

b. Is there anything that would make it easier for her to follow instructions and understand the curriculum?

III. Other Issues and Behaviors

Are there any other issues or behaviors that we should know about? Consider what would be important for retreat staff to know in order to work most effectively with your client, as well as issues that could affect your client's physical and emotional safety and the safety of the group.

Signature

Date

Name _____

Vet Center Location or Counseling Office Address

Phone _____

Email _____

Please feel free to contact Laura Tyson, MA, Program Director, at laura@centerpointretreats.org , or 720-226-3718, if you would like to discuss any of the items on this questionnaire. If you have questions about eligibility, you may contact Dawn Brown at dawn.brown5@va.gov or 303-577-5205. Thank you!