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FEATURED

A PHOENIX RISES

for Female Veterans
in Washington, NC

BEAUTY TIPS, TRAVEL IDEAS,
AND MUCH MORE INSIDE!

A PHOENIX RISES

for Female Veterans in Washington, NC

By Robert Greene Sands, PhD CEO Pamlico Rose



In North Carolina's Inner Banks, on the Pamlico River, there is a phoenix rising from the ash of history to help female Veterans through the struggles of transition and reintegration. The mythical Greek bird rose from the ashes of its own fiery death to face renewal. And like the phoenix, the Rose Haven Center of Healing offers female Veterans a safe haven and a temporary refuge from life's sudden squalls, or perhaps sanctuary from the daily or frequent effects of trauma.

The statistics are alarming and highlight the dangers that face female Veterans during their transition and reintegration. Now 17% of the military force, female Veterans are twice as likely to develop PTSD than male Veterans. Within this group, 71% experience some form of Military Sexual Trauma (MST), including harassment. Over 20% of female Veterans who served in Iraq/Afghanistan experienced PTSD and this number will only rise as time reveals the effects of trauma. As women integrate at higher rates into roles that place them in the front line of combat, Iraq and Afghanistan female

Veterans have already been exposed to hostile situations in urban warfare.

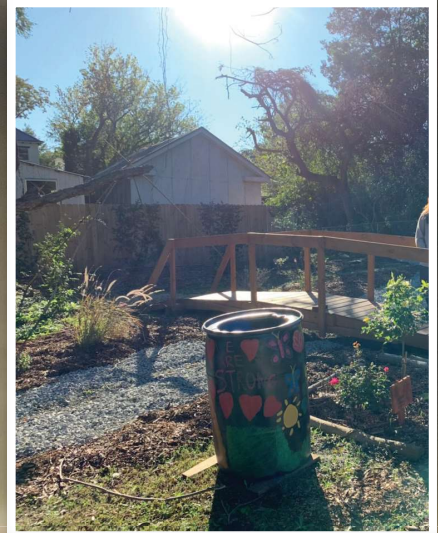
The stories that personalize the numbers are heart-wrenching. The rates of depression, joblessness, and homelessness are on the rise for female Veterans, and yet, the most telling indicator to some are the stories that emerge from the growing number of suicides, where female Veterans take their lives at rates six times higher than non-Veteran females and for younger Veterans at a rate 12 times as high as their non-Veteran age counterpart.

Rose Haven is an endeavor of Pamlico Rose, a Washington, NC nonprofit whose focus is to advance holistic and integrated wellness and resilience programs, or Total Life Fitness (TLF), to help female Veterans overcome the effects of trauma, such as anxiety, stress, and addiction and ease the struggle of the post-military service transition to civilian life, including social and community reintegration. Two efforts build this life fitness, an ongoing program of multiday TLF retreats (the next retreat is March 6-8 followed by an art-themed

retreat April 3-5) and a three-month residential reintegration and resilience program for female Veterans in the latter stages of recovery from substance abuse coming soon.

Just three years ago, empty and forgotten lots surrounded the run-down vacant house and barn at 219 E. 3rd Street in Washington, NC. An urban jungle of trees suffocated by vines and wildly overgrown shrubs kept the structures prisoner. Today, the phoenix is well on its way to flight, a healing landscape celebrates its liberation. The Center is nestled within Washington's Historic District and is anchored by an 1892 farmhouse and adjacent barn surrounded by meditation and produce gardens. Like the female Veterans seeking renewal of mind, body, and soul, the farmhouse is nearing the end of its own journey of restoration, one soon shared by the barn.

All Veterans struggle with leaving the military and becoming a civilian. For many carrying with them the memory of trauma and the seeds of anxiety, stress, and



depression, and for more than a few, PTSD, the return to a previous life is difficult. For female Veterans, often invisible to a society that equates military service with male Veterans, it is a different and more difficult reintegration. Many are single parents and when their service is over, readjustment not only effects them but their children.

Finding a “band of brothers” who have survived combat plays a critical role for male Veterans suffering from trauma. Often finding a support group for female Veterans can be difficult due to the smaller number who served. In addition, many female Veterans choose not to self-identify or associate with other Veterans due to the negative impact of their service experience that often includes MST.

Lastly, for a variety of reasons such as lack of awareness of VA eligibility and/or services for females, only about one-fourth of eligible female Veterans seek health care at or through the VA. Other

reasons involve the perceived connection with their past military service, lack of childcare, and gender sensitivity.

Female Veterans deal not only with anxiety and stress related to their service, but the many challenges and uncertainty of reintegration exacerbating their distress. Engaging a whole health/wellness approach can help to reduce and manage anxiety and stress levels, build resilience, and help one “get through” the frequent squalls formed by past military trauma. Living fit can also cut the risk of physical health problems that can occur over time through living with heightened levels of anxiety and stress, thereby enabling better coping with the social and economic inequities found in a female Veteran’s reintegration.

Rose Haven offers female Veterans a “life” fitness and wellness center, a gymnasium for the mind and soul as well as the body. Living Fit for those suffering from the

effects of trauma starts with the acceptance that healing is a holistic and integrated lifestyle. This approach depends on meaningful and persistent attention to activities and events that engage skills such as mindfulness, being in the moment, that promote healthy living beyond the traditional focus on treating physical ailments and illness.

The concept of a center of healing dedicated to female Veterans had as its foundation the innate and emotional attachment to nature that makes us uniquely human, a perspective espoused by evolutionary biologist E. O. Wilson. Increasingly, research and our own experiences show that just being in the natural environment, complete with its unique sounds, smells, feel, and colors, and teaming with the diversity of life, engages mindfulness while promoting a connection with a larger world beyond the self. Both are at the core of wellness and important to building resilience. Moving through



nature enhances this connection and activities that feature repetitive patterns of movement dedicated to tasks that include the outdoors prolongs and intensifies mindful moments.

Rose Haven's healing landscape of produce and meditation gardens and an open-air barn with walkways, paths, raised garden beds accessible to all abilities, offers that ancient nature/human connection. The Center provides a dedicated space for female Veterans and opportunity to build life fitness through activities that promote mindfulness and transcendence, such as yoga, meditation, and gardening. Also included are activities such as artmaking and woodworking, both mindful and creative, allowing opportunities for self-expression that is critical in dealing with

trauma memories. In addition, through its retreats and coming residential program, the Center brings female Veterans together to begin the process of building community, another important ingredient in wellness and building resilience.

In time, Rose Haven will extend its healing and restorative powers to the larger community and offer classes in gardening and woodworking to local Veterans and community members. Today, in addition to the retreats, Veteran and other community members volunteer and help grow and sustain the gardens and Rose Haven has hosted special events open to the greater community.

For Veterans and others, Rose Haven Center of Healing fosters the restorative powers of nature, creates a space to engage

transcendence—connecting to something greater than self, to affirm we are not alone and to provide meaning to our lives—and the opportunity to tap into the power of human movement to heal.

For more information on Pamlico Rose, Rose Haven or its program, visit the website at www.pamlicorose.org or contact Robert at:

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