

Report on Warrior Songs Creative Arts Retreat:

March 22nd – 26th, 2023

Franciscan Renewal Center, Scottsdale, AZ

Group Demographics – Who was served?

Fourteen Women veterans who survived military sexual assault participated in the March 2023 retreat. They represented the Army, Air Force, Marines, and Navy. The veterans had served in Iraq, Afghanistan, and military bases around the world. Their ages ranged from 34 – 74, and combined, they provided a total of 83 years of military service. Two of the veteran attendees were from Arizona. The other Twelve were from California x3, Indiana, Idaho, Montana, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Washington x2. There were six facilitators staffing the retreat, three of whom were veterans. Two were combat veterans. One of the veteran staff was an MST survivor, while three of the staff were civilian sexual assault survivors. Three facilitators were either retired or active therapists.

Warrior Songs Retreat Model – How were the veterans served?

The Warrior Songs model is committed to removing all barriers, with the intention of assisting veterans who attend retreats to do so with ease, and with no financial cost involved. The retreat was completely free to the veterans who attended, including all travel expenses. The Scottsdale retreat took place March 22-26, 2023 at the Franciscan Renewal Center. Comfortable rooms with private bathrooms were available to all attendees and meals were nutritious and hearty. Veterans were welcomed upon arrival Wednesday afternoon and quickly introduced to other attendees. The first evening included a brief overview and art activity to facilitate introductions and the building of a safe and trusting container.

Nearly every veteran attendee spoke of their personal isolation and struggling with anxiety, describing how they needed to push beyond that in order to show up for the retreat. Two veterans who had signed up could not make the retreat due to illness or anxiety. Several reported arriving desperate for connection. The first two full days of the retreat were spent creating art in response to guided activities specifically designed to help participants enter the depths of their trauma and to express



resulting feelings through their creations. Topics covered included: life before trauma, the sexual assault that resulted in MST, how the symptoms of MST interfere with one's life, and how to integrate the experience and trauma and move forward. Each participant had many opportunities to share and process their story. Staff was always available to veterans who became triggered, and needed one on one processing time.



On the 3rd day, the group transitioned to activities which focused on moving forward and using strengths and tools available to them as they continue the healing journey. The final exercise involved each person setting post retreat personal goals using the insights and discoveries necessary in leading a more connected and integrated life. Our "Body and Mind" staff members are trained in meditation and relaxation work presented informative sessions following each module. These included education on

Post Traumatic Growth and helpful, yoga for women, and practical ways to decrease anxiety and hypervigilance using different breathing and relaxation techniques. Participants reported these techniques as an important piece of the retreat.

Saturday evening public event – Trauma Transformed – The Art and Story of Women Veterans:

An underlying, but ongoing goal during the retreat was the group working toward a Saturday afternoon community presentation where veterans shared their stories through their art in a public forum. This event had a positive and healing impact on the veterans. It provided a focused "mission" and allowed them to work both individually, as well as collaboratively, to support one another as a team. Participants spoke about how powerful it felt for them to overcome their fear of publicly expressing the truths they had kept suppressed for so many years. Others expressed elation at finally being heard after feeling silenced, invisible, misunderstood, and abandoned by families and communities. Several



mentioned how healing it felt to get the stories out and to leave them there, no longer needing to carry the burden of the memories. The facilitators were joined by an attendee of a previous Warrior Songs retreat who assisted volunteered during the art show.

Community – Who made it happen

Our community showed great investment in, and support of, the war healing effort both financially and by physically showing up to volunteer. Over 150 individuals from across the country made monetary contributions. We also received financial support from: PSI World, The Iron Man Foundation and Bloomfield Family Foundation

This retreat was originally scheduled for 2020 but the Covid Pandemic delayed it. The original retreat budget was \$27,053.00 with the actual final cost being \$34,160.51. Due to unexpected increases in expenses, we fell \$6,000 short of our need. Warrior Songs general fund covered the difference.

Outcome and Follow Up

While one attendee had difficulty initially reintegrating, post retreat feedback has been extremely positive. Veterans filled out a pre and post retreat PTSD Checklist (PCL) – 5 that indicated an average decrease of 36.5 points in symptom severity. Veteran's report feeling reconnected with their own hearts, their loved ones and with one another. There is always concern among staff that after the

retreat the vets will return to old patterns of shutting down and closing the world out as a means of self-protection and survival, which only perpetuates the isolation of PTSD. To help remedy this, a private Facebook group was created so the participants could stay in touch with each other and share their success and growth.



Here is some feedback given by the veterans:

"Warrior Songs provided me with a safe space to speak my pain, express my joy in healing. I now have a special path ahead in my life through art and a strong circle of new friends that I can count on. I am so blessed that Warrior Songs exists. Blessings to Jason Moon and the outstanding facilitators as they all blessed me" - P Simmons, Army Veteran



"The retreat was amazing! I was able to connect with fellow female veterans from all branches and feel supported as well as supporting them. The staff was exceptionally respectful and encouraging in our journey to heal. The activities helped to clear my mind from the demons that haunt my thoughts and keep the negative emotions and feelings at bay. While creating art, I feel like I'm meditating in loving kindness and awakening my soul to heal myself through creativity." – TT

"I feel safer inside and like the things I've experienced are normal post trauma. I feel more confident and emotionally strong. I think all the activities you had us do and the information you provided all worked really well together. The schedule of the events and order worked very well together. I think many other veterans regardless of MST experience could benefit from this program and team." - Anonymous



"Jason Moon wrote a tribute song for our class and sang it at Franciscan Renewal Center, "Trauma Transformed" art show. Showcasing women veteran's expressive art, the show had a profound effect on me. Along with the caring Warrior Songs retreat stuff, the drum cleansing, sage bundle making while learning other spiritual modalities are now enhancing my mental reactions to traumatic memories. The Warrior Songs

retreat experience added major weapons to my healing arsenal. Thank you, Warrior Songs staff for leading this retreat, gently guiding me through my mental trauma maze towards a path of renewal.”
– Anonymous

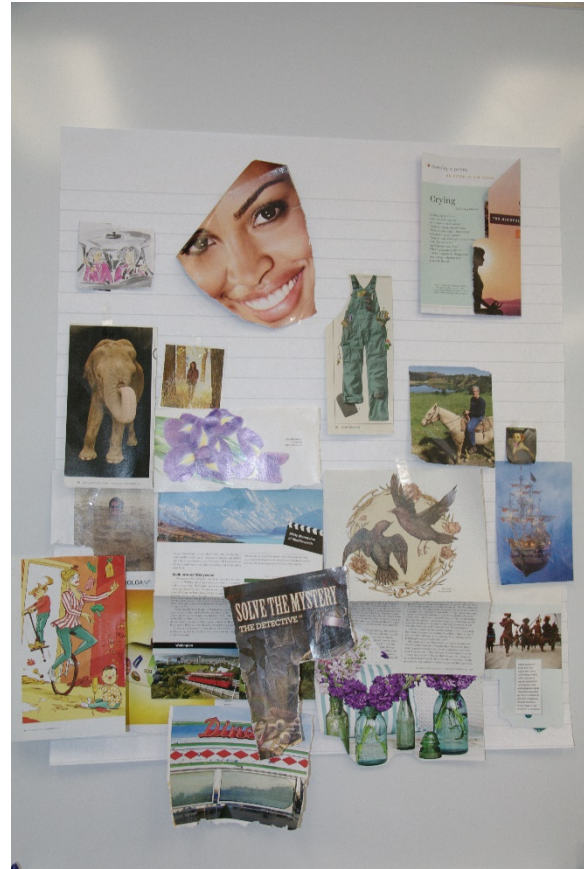
“When something like MST happens to you, it’s easy for the sense/s of loyalty, duty, dedication, and hard work you gave to the military to be lost! Years of sacrifice pulled away like a rug from under your feet. I was a Sergeant First Class in the world’s greatest Army and, with the BETRAYAL comes a sudden and harsh loss of identity. Through Warrior Song, I was again, able to find my space amongst “Peers”. ” – Anonymous

“After not going to any retreats since before Covid, I thought I had successfully done all the healing I needed to be well. Not so fast! This retreat reminded me of just how far I still have to go on this journey of wellness. I thank you for giving me tools to reinvigorate my new trip of self-discovery as I continue to search for the person, I lost so many years ago. Many hugs and much love to all of you.” – Anonymous

You can view a video montage of the art, which also contains the song written at the retreat at:
www.warriorsongs.org or <https://youtu.be/T8rmdfOZ70>

Thank you,

Jason Moon—Warrior Songs Founder



**2022 Creative Arts Retreat
Budget
(16 Veterans 5 Staff)
Scottsdale**

Expenses		Projected	Actual	Difference
Retreat Center	22 single room occupancy 2 nights.	<u>\$15,535.00</u>	<u>\$15,699.00</u>	<u>-\$164.00</u>
Travel	Air Travel Staff x 3	\$1,800.00	\$3,604.73	\$1,804.73
	Air Travel Veterans x 8	\$5,000.00	\$7,273.75	\$2,273.75
	Travel support Veterans x 8	\$1,000.00	\$3,016.34	\$2,016.34
	<u>Travel Budget</u>	<u>\$7,800.00</u>	<u>\$13,894.82</u>	<u>-\$6,094.82</u>
Other	Art Supplies	\$1,000.00	\$1,622.60	-\$622.60
	Refreshments	\$400.00	\$842.85	-\$442.85
	Promotion	\$250.00	\$101.24	\$148.76
	Miscellaneous	\$68.00	\$0.00	\$68.00
	Recovery Stipend \$250 x 6	\$1,500.00	\$1,500.00	\$0.00
	Logistics Coordinator	\$500.00	\$500.00	\$0.00
	<u>Other total</u>	<u>\$3,718.00</u>	<u>\$4,566.69</u>	<u>-\$848.69</u>
Estimated total cost		<u>\$27,053.00</u>	<u>\$34,160.51</u>	<u>-\$7,107.51</u>
Cost per veteran at 16 Veterans		<u>\$1,690.81</u>	<u>\$2,440.04</u>	<u>-\$749.22</u>