



women veterans initiative
wisconsin



A program of Milwaukee Homeless Veterans Initiative



What is WOVIN?

WOVIN is a new program of Milwaukee Homeless Veterans Initiative (MHVI) to address the unique needs of female veterans and to address the growing numbers of homeless and at-risk female veterans and their children in our city and state.



Why WOVIN is needed

Women are the fastest-growing segment of the military. Women veterans are also the fastest growing segment of the homeless. Statistics on female homeless vets are grim:

- 66% of homeless women veterans are older—ages 40-59.
- 33% of homeless women veterans have disabilities.
- 64% of homeless women veterans are an ethnic or racial minority.
- 77% of homeless women veterans have experienced physical assault and 80% report being raped in their lifetime.
- 53% of homeless women veterans have experienced military sexual trauma (MST).
- 66% of women vets receiving housing support do not have a college education.

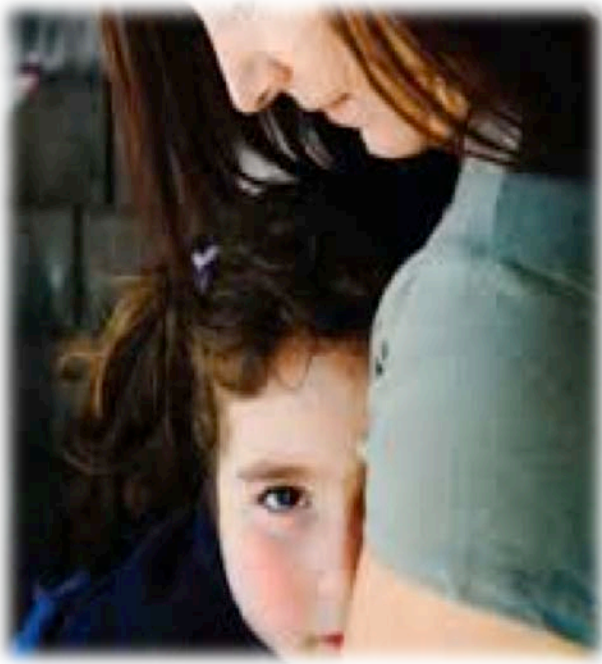


Women veterans are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population. And a quarter of those female vets have children. Their challenges are often overwhelming and very complicated.



Why establishing trust is crucial for women vets.

The majority of female vets have experienced sexual assault and rape in their lifetime. Many have experienced sexual trauma *while in the military*. Often women veterans, therefore, have a distrust of military channels and male authority, so they avoid turning to the VA or other military support services. There is another challenge in dealing with women veterans: many *do not even regard themselves as veterans*, either because they did not serve in active war zones or did not feel integrated in the armed forces. Strange as it may seem, many do not accept that if they served, they are veterans. WOVIN exists, in part, to bridge the trust gap.



WOVIN is a program of Milwaukee Homeless Veterans Initiative. We help homeless and at-risk vets get back on their feet. We move vets into permanent housing, completely furnish their new homes with donated food, furniture, and household goods, and connect them and their family with services they need to be independent and healthy.

What services does WOVIN provide?

WOVIN is a new program (started in 2014) and we are finding that the services required to help female veterans are varied and many. We work with each individual veteran to work through her unique challenges. Following are some of the services we can offer, among others:

- provides a trusted, go-to, first line of defense for women veterans in our city, county, and state, whatever their needs and challenges may be
- provides food, hygiene items, clothes, bus tickets, safe haven referrals, and other emergency needs;
- finds and funds temporary housing for homeless female vets and connects them to government and nonprofit services for long-term housing
- secures referrals for female veterans for medical care, psychological counseling and other therapies
- secures legal representation referrals to provide restraining orders in domestic abuse cases
- helps female veterans with childcare and child custody cases and provides referrals for help
- WOVIN works with many partners, including the VA and its Women's Center; Center for Veterans Issues; government offices including those in Congress, the Mayor, County Executive, District Attorney and others; local women's shelters; many organizations providing pro bono services in therapy, health, education, employment, childcare, legal services, and other areas.



Their stories are heartbreaking, but there is help. Following are stories of four vets WOVIN is assisting. (NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED.)

Amy is an Army veteran with a medical discharge for a leg injury, who was also sexually assaulted by her drill sergeant. A college grad, she was married to a Marine, an engineer at a large corporation, who committed suicide in 2009. Then her life began to unravel. She lost her home in a foreclosure. Although she was eligible for a residential treatment program at the VA domiciliary, she was expelled from the program early because she was not able to attend all of the required classes when she started her new full time job. Now, without a place to live, she found she did not qualify for the VA's Homeless Program because she did not spend enough time on active duty. She was forced to live in her car, spending her nights in the parking structure of her alma mater where she felt safe. She was referred to WOVIN by the office of a Congresswoman. Our staff secured a referral from Community Action Coalition for an apartment. MHVI staff moved Amy into permanent housing and completely furnished her new home. She also secured a job as a CNA and is now collecting a paycheck. Amy is on her way to a healthy, independent life.

Sarah, a Navy veteran with two young children, suffers from anxiety and depression complicated by her difficulty in finding a job. WOVIN is helping her with a job search and linking her up with a community of other female veterans.

Nicole is an Army Iraqi war veteran who suffers from PTSD. She was referred to WOVIN by the American Legion the day she was fired from her job because of childcare challenges. She is afraid she won't be able to find another job that will accommodate her son's school schedule and provide enough income for them to live independently. WOVIN provided her with job search and childcare referrals and linked her up with a support group of other women vets who are mothers.

Anna is an Army veteran who was violently assaulted by a group of male soldiers in her platoon. She was released from inpatient mental health treatment at the VA hospital only to return home to find that the man she owned her home with since 2009 had skipped out and stopped paying the mortgage. She is afraid the bank will foreclose on her home as she does not have enough money saved up to pay the arrears. WOVIN staff arranged for Anna to meet with Sojourner Peace and Family Center staff and also coordinated with an attorney to work with her foreclosure.

For information about how you can support female veterans and WOVIN, call Kirsten at 414-755-9232 or go to www.mkehomelessvets.org/WOVIN .



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