



YWCA Northern New Jersey

Program: Operation Sisterhood: Support for Servicewomen Returning to Civilian Life

Who we are

For over a century, YWCA Northern New Jersey (YWCA NNJ) has been on the forefront of the fight against gender and racial discrimination. YWCA NNJ is dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women, and promoting peace, justice, freedom, and dignity for all.

The program we are proposing

YWCA NNJ is respectfully requesting \$100,000 to expand our successful Operation Sisterhood Program to support 500 or more women veterans as they restructure their lives and adapt to civilian life. Impact100 Garden State funding will enable YWCA NNJ to expand Operation Sisterhood from Bergen County into Passaic and Morris Counties. Operation Sisterhood aims to improve women warriors' well-being, vibrancy, and quality of life through our programming, case management services, resource connections, trainings, counseling, and mentorship.

Operation Sisterhood offers education, training, and advocacy in workforce skills, entrepreneurship, finances and self-sufficiency, empowerment, access to basic needs such as housing and SNAP, self-care and health management issues for women, self-advocacy, and advocacy for others.

Specific activities to address mental, physical, and psychosocial well-being include yoga classes, equine therapy, personal wellness education (stress management, mindfulness, and meditation), and trauma-informed care (sexual assault counseling, support groups, and referrals to other treatment opportunities). The program is also launching a drop-in female veteran's circle facilitated by a social worker, which will offer two hybrid meetings per week (in-person and via Zoom.) The veteran's circle support group allows participants to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, promotes understanding, builds community, and encourages active listening.

What makes this a high-impact program

What makes Operation Sisterhood a high-impact program is its unique peer-to-peer model. Individuals with military experience understand the standard operating procedures of military life, one of which includes information sharing, and a “no sister left behind” mentality where peer support is considered part of the mission. How this makes the program high-impact is that it takes the burden off YWCA NNJ program staff to disseminate information to program participants, because they are so used to sharing information with each other.

We also increase our impact by serving historically underserved populations, including racial minorities and low-income women in our program. The demographics of the women served last year were 100% self-reported low-income, and the following racial demographics: 35% African-American, 29% Hispanic, 20% White, 15% Multi-racial, and 1% Asian.

How we will make it happen

YWCA NNJ will use funds, if awarded, to hire additional program staff to support program expansion to our five-county service area. We anticipate program staff will seek to enroll and serve female veterans through partnership with cooperating partners such as the NJ Secretary of State Veterans Stakeholders, Catholic Charities, and the Veterans Administration. Our program staff will also secure meetings with County Commissioners in each county to secure county-level support. We anticipate creating activations and events across partners to increase enrollment.

Program staff will also schedule twice-weekly drop-in Zoom veteran’s circle meetings and facilitations, plan and schedule social events and outings, and begin case management for enrolled veterans. Through case management, program staff will refer enrolled veterans to needed resources for education, basic needs, workforce development, and health care.

How we will measure success

Success is measured with pre/post-surveys and case manager reports on qualitative changes in physical, emotional or mental well-being. We anticipate serving 500 women veterans, with 95% reporting improved quality of life, 95% reporting increased access to services, and 35% showing physical or mental health improvements in the first year.