



THE MISSION CONTINUES

Her Mission: Women Veteran Leadership Summit

Over the past year, The Mission Continues embarked on a new initiative, Her Mission, to address issues related to Women Veterans and how they navigate a post-military service world. From April 1-3, 52 women leaders from the Mission Continues network gathered in New Orleans, LA to share insights, provide an open discussion forum on the challenges women leaders face and the value they bring to their communities, as well as to share wisdom between the women “in the trenches” of service and business today.

This brief presents an overview of the Her Mission Initiative, the objectives of the Leadership Summit, as well as the effectiveness of the summit in reaching these objectives. To measure the effectiveness of the Women Veteran’s Leadership Summit, The Mission Continues staff collected data from program participants. These data collection efforts focused on who our participants were, what they learned and their individual experiences over the course of the weekend.



Why the Leadership Summit



The Inaugural Women Veteran’s Leadership Summit was born out of the Her Mission initiative. Women make up roughly 16% of the post-9/11 veteran population – the highest percentage in American history. These veterans are significantly more likely to have experienced combat compared with women who served in prior eras. They are also younger, more diverse, more likely to struggle with unemployment, and they experience reintegration into civilian life differently from their male peers. The Mission Continues has experienced high rates of female participation in our programs – more than 34% of our Fellows are women, as are 31% of platoon members.

In April 2015 we set out to learn more about how women veterans experience reintegration. 71 Female Fellowship Alumni shared their perspectives on what it means to be a woman veteran in the post-9/11 era. Throughout this process, we learned that of the 71 female alumni surveyed:

- Less than 19% felt comfortable and included within civilian culture
- Only 36.6% felt they had formed strong bonds with other female veterans
- 31% felt they had formed strong bonds with civilians
- 38% felt valued and respected as a veteran

Prior to the Her Mission Initiative, The Mission Continues offered two programs that engage veterans in structured volunteer service designed to support their successful reintegration into their communities, including the service platoon program and the fellowship program. Both programs have been successful in attracting high percentages of female veterans. Our survey found that continued service through these two programs might help women veterans overcome the social and cultural challenges they can face during reintegration. When asked about their experience with The Mission Continues:

- 94% reported that they felt comfortable and included within The Mission Continues culture
- 72% of respondents reported that they formed bonds with civilians through The Mission Continues



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Many also added their desire to find more gender specific opportunities. The following represents a small illustration of viewpoints describing what the Mission Continues could do to provide more opportunities for Women Veterans.

“I’m not sure gender is emphasized within TMC, once you have the blue shirt on there isn’t a difference. Maybe during orientation there can be gender specific empowerment training.”

“Bring them together help us network and support each other.”

“Create women veteran Mission Continues groups during orientation so that they can create their network.”

“It would be helpful to have female only events that target employment and networking opportunities.”

These findings validated The Mission Continues desire to provide women veterans support and a sense of community as they continued along their reintegration process. The first step in providing these opportunities was launching the inaugural Women Veterans Leadership Summit.



Leadership Summit Objectives



The objectives in holding the Women Veteran’s Leadership Summit included:

- Providing additional, structured leadership training to prepare emerging women leaders in our programs allowing them to develop their skills, techniques and style.
- Assisting the attendees to expand their professional network and makes connections across the country.
- Creating a safe, non-judgmental forum for participants to connect and share experiences and their voices on important leadership topics and challenges.
- Inspiring these women veterans to take further steps in leading at the local level in Platoons, and in their communities and to serve as local role-models—most especially in our 40 anchor and emerging cities.



Participant Demographics



- 52 women leaders came to New Orleans to participate in our inaugural Women Veteran’s Leadership Summit
- Of those 52 women leaders, nearly 33% have participated in the Mission Continues Fellowship Program and nearly 79% are members of at least one Service Platoon



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- 50 of the participants had some military affiliation, only 2 participant's military background was unknown. Their affiliation is as follows:
 - 34 Veterans
 - 6 Active Duty
 - 5 National Guard
 - 5 Reserve



New Skill Attainment



Several measurements were taken to determine whether new skills were gained by participating in the summit. Every participant was eligible to participate in the data collection process, which resulted in responses from 65% of the participants. The findings indicated:

- After participating in the Leadership Summit, 87% felt they gained new skills that allowed them to be more assertive in the work place
- After participating in the Leadership Summit, 94% felt they gained new skills that would allow them to take on more responsibility professionally
- After participating in the Leadership Summit, 93% felt they gained new skills to become a leader in their own community



Programming



Survey respondents were asked to rate the programming sessions that were held throughout the weekend. Each session was rated extremely high, and further reiterating their satisfaction with the programming.

- 100% of all respondents rated Opening ceremony with Suze Orman as excellent (80.6%) or good (19.4%)
- 100% of all respondents rated the service project at Langston Hughes Academy as excellent (90.6%) or good (9.4%)
- 100% of all respondents rated the Panel: Forging your own path through entrepreneurship, as excellent (75%) or good (25%)
- 100% of all respondents rated the Panel: Bringing your authentic self to work, as excellent (93.7%) or good (6.3%)
- 93.5% of all respondents rated the HerMission Roundtable as excellent (67.7%) or good (25.8%)
- 96.7% of all respondents rated the Leadership Training with Brigadier General Helen Pratt as excellent (80.7%) or good (16%)
- 100% of all respondents rated the fireside chat with Michele Flournoy as excellent (77.5%) or good (22.5%)



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Reflections



After wrapping up our inaugural Women's Veteran's Leadership Summit, we had an outpouring of requests to continue the Her Mission programming efforts along with praise for the programming. Qualitative responses included quotes such as:

"You far exceeded my expectations. While the summit sounded good in concept I wasn't sure what the execution would look like. You did an excellent job of finding great speakers who were not just impressive but open with us about the challenges faced, overcome and the things that still challenge them. My favorite program portion was the panel on authenticity. Nana was able to articulate my struggle far more eloquently and succinctly than I have been able to. There were takeaways throughout the weekend that I can apply and I feel recharged after a weekend among 'my people'."

"While participating in the project and collaborating with each project. I was amazed and honored to be part of the group because there was no judgment, no negative reactions or you can't do this. Instead each person showed or guided each person to the point they became experts. When I went to the leadership summit, I attended the weekend to bring back tools that I can benefit my community [with]. It gave me the confidence and the ability to reach out to individuals or companies that would help my dream to happen. I knew I was stuck until I attended this weekend. It was a weekend that changed my life forever."

"It was seriously amazing! It was like boot camp again; I made some great friends that I will keep in touch with forever. There was also an abundance of very useful information and ideas among these amazing women! So happy I was invited."

These sentiments were common among participants, as was the request to find out what was next. Many asked for more workshops to gain more tools such as:

- Resume building
- Professionalism – primarily in the civilian workforce
- Effective communication
- "Glass ceiling" or discrimination training
- Goal setting
- Financial planning



For more information about the Her Mission initiative or upcoming programming, please contact Laura L'Esperance, SVP, Communications and Branding, llesperance@missioncontinues.org