

Veteran Helps Women Find a 'Seester' for Civilian Life

The guiding principle of My Seester is ensuring that female veterans feel seen and have a place to turn to help them navigate civilian life

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“I am the VFW because I serve and I continue to serve,” said Makissa Lewis, a VFW Life member from south Florida who is **#StillServing** as founder and CEO of My Seester, Inc.

“The VFW is a kaleidoscope of those who served in the Armed Forces. This is why I’m proud to say ‘I am the VFW.’”

Lewis served in the U.S. Army, both Active Duty and Reserves, off and on from 1996 through 2010. She appreciated the range of people she met around the world in Korea, Germany and Iraq. But transitioning out of the military was not easy and Lewis realized that there are unique issues facing female veterans. The experience led her to start My Seester, a nonprofit that makes sure women get more help in that process.

“After encountering my own struggle to get information, services and resources, I decided to stop asking others what to do and do it for myself and my fellow female veterans,” Lewis stated.

“My Seester focuses on two groups of women – the recently transitioned female service member and the female veteran who has been out of the military for years. Both have been forgotten, and the benefits that they earned are not always used since these ladies may not know they exist.”

The guiding principle of My Seester is ensuring that female veterans feel seen and have a place to turn to help them navigate civilian life. This includes finding education options and financial assistance as well as fostering positive relationships and mentoring among women.

The organization is launching Redirecting Energies To Invent New Art, or the R.E.T.I.N.A.

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Project, named after Lewis' grandmother who recently passed away. The program will be a way for women to channel emotions to create art. My Seester also has hosted events to connect women to health care and social services, which became crucial as COVID-19 spread.

Partners in Florida have recognized Lewis for her contributions to the community. She is very grateful to have the support, but is most moved when she sees how she can make a difference.

"Some of my best work is not the events, but the late night calls," said Lewis.

One call came from a veteran who had moved to the area to stay with a friend. It didn't work out and she was stuck without a place to live on a holiday weekend. Hotels were booked and shelters were filling up. Lewis helped the woman find a place to go and stayed on the phone with her until she arrived safely.

"It turned out that she is 100% disabled. I gathered resources to help her," Lewis recalled.

"She told me that she thought coming to Florida would be a new start. I told her that it still can be."

In 2019, Lewis earned Mental Health First Aid USA certification with the National Council for Behavioral Health. She's proud to dedicate her life to serving veterans, especially women.

"As a female veteran myself, I have the opportunity to help prevent the female veteran transitioning to civilian life from falling in the cracks," said Lewis.

"Or if they are in the cracks, I want to help them out of it."

To find out more about the VFW's #StillServing campaign or to share your story, visit vfw.org/StillServing.