



GRACE AFTER FIRE: NAVY VETERAN LEADS ORGANIZATION TO HELP THOUSANDS OF HER FELLOW FEMALE VETS

By Susan Keating: November 12, 2019

<https://people.com/human-interest/mea-williams-grace-after-fire-women-veterans>

"I wondered about other women veterans who didn't have strong support at home," says Mea Williams. "What would happen to them?"

When Mea Williams was in the Navy, she enjoyed her work as part of a crash and salvage team. She liked being on a flight deck, hearing the sounds of ship's bells and whistles while taking in the smell of salt water. Most of all, she loved being part of a team. When Williams left the Navy, she worried about other newly civilian women. She began to support them in small ways, and now leads Grace After Fire, a service organization that helps women vets.

"I am so proud to do this work," Williams, 37, tells PEOPLE.

Her Houston-based organization offers peer-to-peer support, job counseling, financial assistance and fellowship to women veterans. The group gives immediate outreach to 158,000-plus women in Texas and long-distance support to others around the country. Given its deep impact in Texas, several organizations have donated money, among them the Boeing Company, which in September gave \$100,000 to Grace After Fire.

Williams first grew concerned about women veterans when she left the service in 2006, after nearly seven years in uniform.

"When I got out of the Navy, I had my family, and that was so wonderful," says Williams, who loved being with her husband Derrick and their two small sons. "But I wondered about other women veterans who didn't have strong support at home. What would happen to them?"

Some thrive, Williams knew; but others fight to survive.

"They struggle to make the transition from military to civilian," says Williams. "In crisis, maybe they lose their jobs, or they lose their housing. I wanted to help. I wanted to get support for them."

In 2012, Williams signed on as a volunteer with Grace After Fire.



“We don’t put Band-Aids on a woman’s psychological wounds,” Williams says. “We offer connections. We offer peer-to-peer support. We give her time and space so she can connect and heal.”

“People know about the group through word of mouth,” says one Houston woman who told her cousin, a struggling veteran, to contact Williams’ group.

Grace After Fire told my cousin she could get health care from the VA, and they helped her sign up,” adds the woman, who requested anonymity because she does not want to embarrass her relative. “That literally changed my cousin’s life, for the better.”

“I started out as an outreach coordinator, and eventually I became the CEO,” says Williams.

The group grew to a cadre of veterans — mostly women, with the exception of one man — who want to see women thrive.

“We work with the individual woman veteran,” Williams says. “We will meet the veteran wherever she is in her journey.”

The help replicates what veterans experience while in service, in the form of comradeship.



Photos Courtesy: Denise Mills

Williams and her group aim to help as many women as they can.

“We’re going to get this program out across the nation,” says outreach coordinator Amelia Peacock, a former Marine who has focused on ending veteran homelessness.

For Williams and crew, the work is a mission.

“I love what I do,” Williams says. “I love my fellow veterans, and I love helping women veterans.”