

Evaluation Report: Veterans Meditation Retreat

Hosted by Life Transition Meditation Center

September 2025



Abstract: The 2025 Veterans Meditation Retreat was a highly successful event, providing veterans with practical tools to deepen their mindfulness practices, build peer connections, and address symptoms of distress. Pre- and post-test surveys demonstrate both strong satisfaction with the retreat and measurable improvements in self-regulation skills, while also highlighting areas for future enhancement.

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**NOTE* A detailed report with additional information will be provided after the delayed posttest is conducted in January 2025.*

Veterans Meditation Retreat (VMR)

In September 2025, a total of about 40 veterans attended Life Transition Meditation Center's (LTMC) Veteran Meditation Retreat (VMR). Of those who participated in Life Transition Meditation Center's (LTMC), a total of 34 (85%) participants took the pre-test and 33 (83%) took the post-test. SBS Evaluation & Program Development Specialists (SBS Evaluation) reviewed and analyzed pre- and post-event surveys from the retreat, and the results are summarized herein.

Participation

In 2025, there was a similar number of participants in the VMR. Due to the nature, complexities, and barriers encountered by veterans, recruitment included a variety of methods from ads in the paper to phone calls and mailings. It is impressive that LTMC was able to serve a similar number of veterans, considering funding constraints, especially for private foundations, of the current national economic landscape. Sindy Sacoman, of SBS Evaluation, attended the first day of the retreat to meet and build relationships with the veterans who attended.

Participant Needs

Similar to 2024, most participants (85-90%) had been previously exposed to meditation and/or mindfulness; although, largely their engagement was limited to "a little bit." The overwhelming majority of individuals reported difficulty managing their emotions and other significant behavioral health challenges (i.e., strong negative emotions – 88%, loss of interest in activities – 82%, feeling distant/cut off from others – 85%, difficulty concentrating – 91%, and trouble sleeping – 82%).

Participants shared future conference needs which included a full day on Monday, dinner provided to limit personal expenses, removal of politics from the retreat, group dinners, a warmer temperature and more outside time.



Retreat Experience

"I was able to overcome my emotions, thoughts, tendencies, habits to isolate, be idle and catastrophize. I was able to feel and receive love freely and safely. I was free to learn and share. I was able to walk around my city without cares, worries or anger. I was able to find peace, serenity & relative clarity.

-Retreat participant

Almost all participants reported great satisfaction with the event – most participants were satisfied with the event's location (97%), duration (90%), flow (85%), instructor (94%), and relevance to managing their well-being (94%). These numbers are generally slightly lower than 2024 satisfaction ratings, although still very high. Veteran's favorite aspects of the retreat included meeting and connecting with fellow veterans, knowledge and guidance of instructors, structured meditation instruction, food, location, and the supportive environment.

"Honestly, This experience has been transformative on many levels personally! I was able to feel safe and supported throughout everything! I never felt alone! I got to connect with others on such a deep level that I did not think was possible! The connection I felt in the room with everyone was healing! This retreat has made a huge shift within myself! I'm honored to be a part of this experience!

-Retreat participant

Challenges overcome included: social anxiety, stress, detaching from rigid schedules, sleeping away from home, and reducing hypervigilance. All participants both felt confident in using and planned on practicing walking/moving (100%) and sitting/standing meditation (100%). Similar to 2024, most participants felt comfortable applying their newly refreshed knowledge of walking and moving meditation, sitting and standing meditation, and yoga and stretching. Also similarly to the previous year, sound and lying meditation proved somewhat more difficult to practice outside of the retreat (80-85%). Positively, all participants rated the retreat "good" or "very good" and all would recommend the VMR to other veterans in their respective circles. Nearly all of the participants reported an improved perceived ability to manage mental challenges and most reported improved ability to manage physical pain.

“Separating my essence from body or bag of bones. Also to include my essence from that thing between my ears. I want to give a very special thanks to Ralph and Lorraine. I truly feel I have been empowered to unlock an inspiration I have lost and longed for in my journey through the use of meditation. What I take from it for now is a template or process to explain to my brain what my soul or inner spirit would like and how to respond and react to situations I encounter. Please continue your works, your efforts and build on the community of people who have been enlightened or at least start the path.

-Retreat participant

Participants indicated that managing stress, practicing listening skills, managing physical pain, controlling a wandering mind, patience, staying for the entire event and quieting the mind, calming anxiety, and being less reactive were all positive outcomes of the conference.

“I was less reactive to the lights and noise from the world. I was able to better stay in around and be on time with most events. I was able to overcome my fear of being around a large group of people. I began to form connections with other vets. This is the first time I could really relax and be truly in my body. Thank you Ralph and all the volunteers. You created a truly sacred, safe space in which to better practice the tools of meditation. This program has saved my life and is teaching me so many ways to practice meditation to continue my healing journey. I am forever grateful.

-US AIRFORCE

Suggestions for Improvement

Overall, veterans reported high levels of satisfaction with the event. Some participant suggestions for improvement included a more formal introduction into meditation and yoga purpose, a framework for mindfulness purpose, benefit of the practice, more physical activities (potentially aquatics, yoga or outdoor movement), added structured time for gratitude practices, and inclusion of sound-based meditation tools (gong baths, singing bowls, monk chant etc.).

PARTICIPANT QUOTES FOR RETREAT IMPROVEMENT	
●	"I could have done more walking meditation."
●	"Singing bowl meditation, monk chant"
●	"An aquatics class in the pool floating yoga or water aerobics"
●	"That I could have done more walking meditation"
●	"I like to see 1 or 2 more yoga or mindful stretching."
●	"Full day on Monday, dinner (on a fixed income its hard to eat out), absence of politics and mention of politics."
●	"More understanding of quantum entanglement"
●	"More introductions to weekend objectives outcomes-follow up/ more introductions with teachers."
●	"There needed to be more information given on what we were doing."
●	"We could have all gone out to dinner together at least for one night."
●	"I wish the temperature could have been warm."
●	"A more 101 or introduction into yoga and meditation"
●	"Introduction and framework of mindfulness practice and the benefits of the practice and guidance."
●	"More time outside connecting with the other than human"
●	"Introduction of individuals needed to happen sooner either on Friday evening or Saturday morning"

- “More sound meditation of different sounds like in past years”
- “I’d like to see 1 or 2 more yoga or mindful stretching.”
- “Dinner, I know we are being exposed to a fasting diet schedule, but for myself, I burn and require a lot of calories over a span of many mealtimes and found myself distracted by hunger in the evening.”

Conclusion

The 2025 retreat replicated and strengthened the success of 2024: participants reported high satisfaction, improved coping skills, and strong intent to continue mindfulness practices. Veterans emphasized the value of camaraderie, structured learning, and safe healing spaces.

Future retreats may expand offerings in sound meditation, gratitude practices, and outdoor/nature-based activities. Continued collection of delayed post-test data will help assess long-term impact on mental health symptoms and meditation adherence.