

‘We Provide Veterans Camaraderie and Purpose’

How VFW Post 1181's warming center outreach became a mental health anchor for veterans and the community

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Last winter, Louisville, Kentucky, was hit by long stretches of extreme cold. Members of VFW Post 1181 were concerned that older veterans would not be able to keep warm in temperatures below freezing. The Post offered its hall as a place for them to stay overnight. Soon, others were invited, too.

“I noticed local advocacy groups that were trying to get the city to open shelters for the homeless population,” said Post Commander Stephen Kanfield. “We have a pretty decent-sized hall, so I volunteered for it to be set up as an overnight warming center.”

A Safe Place for All

Kanfield and fellow Post members welcomed anyone in need. Other community groups chipped in, donating time and essentials.

“It was a safe place for people to relax for a bit,” Kanfield said. “Several groups volunteered to cook meals for our guests, and we coordinated with other organizations to get bedding, cots and air mattresses for people to sleep on.”

When asked why Kanfield and his Post chose to open their shelter to the wider community, he explained how this type of service also helps the veterans who are providing it.

“I joined the VFW to find a sense of purpose again. I wasn’t doing well mentally and needed to take my mind off things,” he said. “By working with others, I was able to jump right in and do something meaningful. Having so many people trust me to keep them safe overnight let me know I was where I was supposed to be.”

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‘Other Veterans Joined to be Part of the Work We Were Doing’

Kanfield and his fellow members were not the only ones who gained a sense of purpose.

“Other veterans in our area joined our Post so they could be part of the work we were doing,” he said.

Still Serving in this way inspired individuals outside of the veteran population to get involved as well.

“People realized that the Post wasn’t just a bar,” Kanfield said. “Strangers that had never been to the Post saw what we were doing and wanted to help.”

‘When a Need Arises, Our Members Will be There’

In fact, since 2023, the Post has been trying to increase its outreach efforts to serve the greater good. The warming center certainly seemed to serve that goal. Recently, Kanfield spoke with an individual who stayed at the Post for a few nights.

“He told me that if we hadn’t opened during that time, he most likely would have frozen to death,” Kanfield said. “The gentleman explained that he already wasn’t feeling well and feared he would have been stuck outside in the cold.

“That’s why we’ve been working to show that when the need arises anywhere in our community, our members and their families will be there ready to help. We’re here to provide veterans camaraderie and a sense of purpose through meaningful service.”

To get involved or learn more about the Still Serving campaign, visit [TodaysVFW.org](https://www.vfw.org).