



## OFFICE OF SURVIVORS ASSISTANCE

*Advocating for Survivors of America's Veterans*



**Fiscal Year 2013 Report**

## PURPOSE

The Office of Survivors Assistance's (OSA) Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 Report describes the progress made during FY 2013 toward its mission to ensure that Survivors and the survivor community are knowledgeable of, have access to, and apply for applicable benefits and services under the law for which they are eligible.

## SUMMARY

OSA continues to increase awareness of survivor benefits and services by educating survivors, various Federal, State and local government agencies, Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), faith-based, non-profit and community organizations along with other stakeholders. OSA continues to examine untapped opportunities and partnerships to better serve the survivor community to achieve its mission by providing information in multiple formats to accommodate the diverse and changing demographics and needs of Survivors.

## BACKGROUND

Delivered more than 140 years ago in his Second Inaugural Address, President Lincoln's immortal words best describes the mission of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and inherently, the mission of OSA.

***“To care for him who shall have borne the battle,  
and for his widow, and his orphan...”***

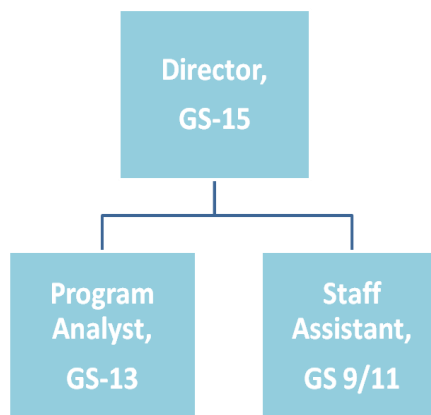


Public Law 110-389, Title II, Section 222 (Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2008) created the Office of Survivors Assistance (OSA) in October 2008 to serve as a resource regarding all benefits and services furnished by VA to Survivors and dependents of deceased Veterans and Survivors and dependents of deceased members of the Armed Forces. OSA continues to honor the commitment made to our Veterans and Servicemembers by ensuring that surviving spouses, children and parents of deceased Veterans and Servicemembers have access to applicable benefits and services under the law. OSA serves as an advocate for their special needs in the policy and programmatic decisions of VA.

***“Taking care of Survivors is as essential as taking care of our Veterans and military personnel,” Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki said.  
“By taking care of Survivors, we are honoring the commitment made to our Veterans and military members.” - September 29, 2008***

## ORGANIZATION

OSA consists of 3 full time employees (FTE) to include a Director, GS-15, Program Analyst, GS-13 and a Staff Assistant, GS-9/11. Below is the current organizational chart for FY 2013:



With VA's Strategic Plan as the cornerstone of the Department of Veterans Affairs, the OSA's ([www.va.gov/survivors](http://www.va.gov/survivors)) mission complements the strategic goals, integrated objectives and strategies and supports the Department's continued transformation into a 21<sup>st</sup> century organization by being *people-centric, results-driven and forward-looking*.

**VA Strategic Plan Fiscal Year 2014 – 2020. Strategic Goal #2:** Enhance and Develop Trusted Partnerships. **Integrated Objective 3:** Amplify awareness of services and benefits available to Veterans through improved communications and outreach.

### **SURVIVOR STAKEHOLDERS**

Since World War 1, surviving spouses have organized to serve our Nation's heroes and show their support to this great Nation by serving in various capacities to: perpetuate the memory of those whose lives were sacrificed; maintain the ties of fellowship born of that service; extend assistance to other surviving spouses and their children; and assist surviving spouses in understanding and obtaining benefits. It all started in 1917 with the founding of the American War Mothers, and since then, many other survivor organizations have been established as indicated below:



- ✚ **American Gold Star Mothers, Inc.** ([www.goldstarmoms.com](http://www.goldstarmoms.com)) is an organization of mothers whose sons or daughters served and died that this world might be a better place in which to live. (1928)
- ✚ **American War Mothers** ([www.americanwarmoms.org](http://www.americanwarmoms.org)) members are mothers of children who have served or are serving in the Armed Services during a time of conflict. (1917)

- ✦ **American Widow Project** ([www.americanwidowproject.org](http://www.americanwidowproject.org)) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the new generation of those who have lost the heroes of yesterday, today and tomorrow, with an emphasis on healing through sharing stories, tears and laughter.....Military Widow to Military Widow. (2006)
- ✦ **Blue Star Families** ([www.bluestarfamilies.org](http://www.bluestarfamilies.org)) supports, connects and empowers military families by creating a platform through which military family members and their supporters can work directly to address the challenges that face our community during this period of long war, and into the transition home. (2008)
- ✦ **Blue Star Mothers of America, Inc.** ([www.bluestarmothers.org](http://www.bluestarmothers.org)) provides support for active duty service personnel, promotes patriotism, assists Veterans organizations, and is available to assist in homeland volunteer efforts to help our country remain strong. (1942)
- ✦ **Gold Star Wives of America, Inc.** ([www.goldstarwives.org](http://www.goldstarwives.org)) is an organization of military widows/widowers whose spouse died while on active duty or from service connected disabilities. (1945)
- ✦ **Society of Military Widows** ([www.militarywidows.org](http://www.militarywidows.org)) serves the interests of women whose husbands died while on active military duty, of a service-connected illness, or during disability or regular retirement from the armed forces. (1968)
- ✦ **Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors** ([www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org)) is 24/7 tragedy assistance resource for anyone who has suffered the loss of a military loved one, regardless of the relationship to the deceased or the circumstance of the death. (1994)
- ✦ **Veterans' Widow(ers) International Network, Inc.** ([www.vetsurvivors.com](http://www.vetsurvivors.com)) provides help and support to all Veterans' Survivors either receiving benefits or on the waiting list. (1995)

## **CONDOLENCE LETTERS**

During FY 2013, OSA expanded the condolence letter preparation for Survivors of the fallen from the U. S. Army to include the U. S. Air Force, U. S. Navy, and the U. S. Coast Guard. OSA processed condolence letters which were signed by the Secretary of Veterans and sent to family members offering his and the Department's sincere condolence over the loss of their loved ones' supreme sacrifice for our Nation.

## OUTREACH

In FY 2013, with the impact of reduced expenditures throughout the Federal government, OSA continued to seek innovative strategies for develop partnerships to promote and increase the awareness of survivor benefits, exchange resources, and conduct collaborative outreach efforts. This effort was conducted in multiple formats to accommodate the diverse and changing needs of Survivors through forums:

- Forums
- Joint outreach events
- Panels
- Presentations/briefings
- Conference calls
- Exhibit booths



OSA continued its strategic communications and outreach efforts that were established in previous years, tweaking where requested to continue providing innovative ways for effective outreach to the survivor community. New external partnerships were established and current partnerships were nurtured and strengthened as OSA and its partners continued integrated and collaborative outreach efforts throughout the year.

## COLLABORATIVE OUTREACH EFFORTS

Integrated and collaborative outreach efforts are, and continue to be crucial to OSA successfully promoting and increasing awareness of services and benefits for survivors. It is imperative that OSA employs every opportunity it has to ensure that Servicemembers, Veterans, their families, Survivors, caregivers and others stakeholders are aware of and have access to VA benefits and services.

OSA worked diligently to maintain the momentum with its comprehensive outreach campaign implemented in FY 2012, however, like most Federal government organizations, OSA was impacted with its forward movement on collaborative outreach events with Federal, State and local government agencies, VSOs, faith-based, non-profit and community organizations and other stakeholders to promote the awareness of

survivor benefits and services. During the year, OSA's participation in outreach increased tremendously with staff:

- Conducting presentations
- Serving as panel members
- Attending and facilitating events
- Participating in conference calls
- Hosting and staffing exhibit booths

Listed below are the outreach events OSA participated in during FY 2013 along with OSA's role:

## **OCTOBER 2012**

**Presenter** - US Navy/Marine Corps Relief Society in Arlington, VA

**Exhibit Booth** - Antioch Baptist church 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Elderly Care Ministry Conference in Fairfax, VA

**Exhibit Booth** - Reid Temple AME Church Military and Veterans Outreach Event in Glenn Dale, MD

**Attendee** - Fifty-Ninth Annual Veterans Day National Ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery

**Keynote Speaker** - Gospel Union Church of Christ Veterans Day Event in La Plata, MD

## **NOVEMBER 2012**

**Presenter** - Center for Minority Veterans' Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans

**Participant** - Center for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships Quarterly Steering Committee Meeting

**Participant** - Center for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships Conference Call

## **DECEMBER 2012**



**Presenter** - US Army Installation Command Survivor Outreach Service Training Academy at Fort Sam Houston, TX

**Participant** - Wreaths Across America at Arlington National Cemetery



**Exhibit Booth** - Winter Haven Stand Down for Homeless Veterans at the Washington DC VAMC

### **JANUARY 2013**

**Coordinator** - US Army Survivor Outreach Service at VACO

### **FEBRUARY 2013**

**Participant** - VBA Veterans Service Organization Quarterly Meeting in Washington, DC

**Participant** - Center for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships Quarterly Steering Committee Meeting at VACO

**Presenter** - US Army Survivor Outreach Survivor Benefits Training at Fort Eustis, VA

### **MARCH 2013**

**Presenter** - VA Learning University Presidential Management Fellows Orientation in Crystal City, VA

**Exhibit Booth/Partner** - Blue Star Families at the NBC4 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Health and Fitness Expo in Washington, DC



## **APRIL 2013**

**Facilitator** – VA/DoD Survivor Forum in Crystal City, VA

**Participant** - Maryland Governor's Commission Meeting on Suicide Prevention in Catonsville, MD

**Participant** - Inaugural Tysons Regional Chamber of Commerce 5K Run for the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors in Tysons, VA

**Exhibit Booth** - 2013 Mount Olive Baptist Church Community Health Fair in Woodbridge, VA

**Participant** - Blue Star Families Honor Flight at the World War II Monument in Washington, DC

## **MAY 2013**

**Participant** - Blue Star Families: US Army National Guard Appreciation Event in Washington, DC

**Exhibit Booth** - 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors National Military Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp for Survivors in Crystal City, VA

**Presenter** - Fort Belvoir Retire Association at Fort Belvoir, VA

**Presenter** - Mount Zion Baptist Church Veterans' Informational Workshop in Arlington, VA

## **JUNE 2013**

**Speaker** - American Gold Star Mothers, Inc. 2013 Annual Convention in Las Vegas, NV

**Exhibit Booth** - Indian Head Village Veterans' Outreach Event in Indian Head, MD

## **JULY 2013**

**Speaker** - Gold Star Wives of America, Inc. 2013 Annual Convention in Denver, CO

**Exhibit Table** - National Naval Officers Association, Inc. Leadership, Professional Development and Training Conference in Crystal City, VA

**Exhibit Table** - Japanese American Citizens League National Conference in Washington, DC

### **AUGUST 2013**

**Exhibit Booth** - Pacific Fun Day; Guam Host in Upper Marlboro, MD

**Judge** - VA Learning University InnoVAtion Open Symposium Project Judge, Washington, DC

**Participant** - Congressman Donna F. Edwards' Job Fair in Landover, MD

### **SEPTEMBER 2013**

**Presenter** – Fort Belvoir Retiree Association at Fort Belvoir, VA

**Presenter** - US Army Fort Myer Survivor Outreach Service Seminar at Fort Myer, VA

**Presenter/ Exhibit Table** – VA CFBNP and Williams County Ministerial Association for Veterans (Clergy) Outreach Initiative Training in Prince William County, VA

**Exhibit Booth** - Veterans Recognition/Resource Fair for Loudoun and Prince William Counties (Host – 87<sup>th</sup> House District Delegate David Ramadan) in South Riding, VA

**Participant** - Center for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships Quarterly Steering Committee Meeting at VACO

### **OUTREACH AND WEB COMMUNICATIONS**

In FY 2013, OSA distributed 10,520 Quick Series for Survivor Benefits and 4,050 brochures, exhausting all of its supply, which was unable to be replenished.

OSA continued offering Survivors a higher level of service by leveraging technology to provide information as many users prefer to access information electronically. This year, OSA was not able to translate outreach and web communications with the prior years'

comparisons due to Federal changes by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) regarding changes in data measurement. OMB's digital strategy milestone 8.2 was required to implement Google Analytics (GA), which allowed Federal government agencies to share common performance measures with a common measurement framework. Prior to this shift, VA utilized WebTrends, which is a commercial product and the legacy analytic tool for VA.

Beginning in May 2013, WebTrends no longer supported the Office of Survivors Assistance's Web page, as analytics were shifted to the Google platform. Because of the differences between how the two analytic platforms gather data, there are discrepancies in reported performance. WebTrends uses log files which record all requests made to the site regardless of the source (i. e. visitor, a link to a file on your Web site from another Web site, or an RSS feed). Google Analytics only counts visitors that come to a page on your Web site that has a link to a small javascript file (federated-analytics.js)

## CONCLUSION

OSA honors the commitment made to our Veterans and Servicemembers by ensuring that surviving spouses, children and parents of the deceased have information and access to applicable benefits and services under the law. OSA is committed to expanding outreach efforts and meeting the needs of the changing demographics and expectations of Survivors.



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