



## OFFICE OF SURVIVORS ASSISTANCE



*Advocating for Survivors of America's Veterans*



**Fiscal Year 2012 Report**

## PURPOSE

The Office of Survivors Assistance's (OSA) Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 Report describes the progress made during FY 2012 toward its mission to ensure that Survivors are knowledgeable of, have access to, and apply for applicable benefits and services under the law.

## 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 (see Page 5). OSA examines untapped opportunities to better serve the Survivor community and continues to foster new partnerships 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 in October 2008 to serve as a resource regarding all benefits and services furnished by VA to Survivors and dependents of deceased Veterans and 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.

As of September 30, 2010, there was an estimated 34.6 million dependents (spouses and dependent children) of living Veterans receiving VA Survivor benefits in the U. S. and Puerto Rico. More than 530,000 Survivors of deceased Veterans receive VA Survivor benefits in the U.S. and Puerto Rico [data provided by the 2012 Congressional Submission, Page1E-1]



The Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) Annual Benefits Report (ABR) FY 2011 provides a clear, data-driven picture and comprehensive summary of benefits programs for Survivors and dependents. One of the major programs is financial compensation, which is provided to surviving spouses, dependent children, and dependent parents in recognition of the economic loss caused by a Veteran's death during military service or, subsequent to discharge from military service, as a result of a service-connected disability.

Of particular note, we highlight the Dependency and Indemnification Compensation (DIC) program, pension benefits, and the death pension. DIC is payable to Survivors of Servicemembers who died while on active duty, or Veterans who died from service-connected disability (ABR Page 22).

Surviving Spouse:	338,595 (95.25%)
Child:	12,362 (3.48%)
Parent:	4,517 (1.27%)
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>355,474 (100%)</b>

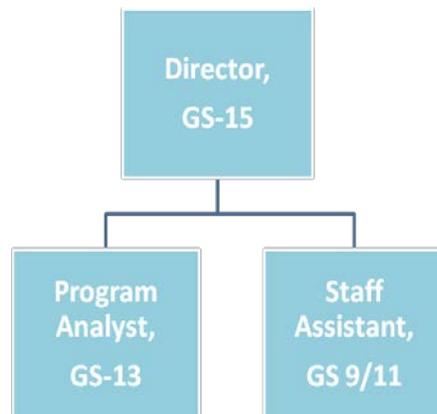
The total number of Survivors receiving pension benefits at the end of FY 2011 was 201,995 (ABR Page 30). Of this, 193,979 were surviving spouses whose age distribution is illustrated below (ABR Page 34):

35 and Under	0
36 - 55	11,848
56 - 75	43,029
75 and Over	139,002
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>193,879</b>

For more detailed information on Survivor benefit programs, please visit [http://www.vba.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/2011\\_abr.pdf](http://www.vba.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/2011_abr.pdf).

## 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. In FY 2012, OSA's staffing level was reduced from 5 to 3 with the elimination of two Program Analysts (GS-13 and GS 12/13, respectfully), which were both vacant. The Program Support Assistant, GS-7, was reclassified to a Staff Assistant, GS 9/11, and filled in June 2012. Below is the current organizational chart for FY 2012:



***“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***

With VA's Strategic Plan as the cornerstone of VA, 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 2011 – 2015**

**Strategic Goal:** Improve the quality and accessibility of health care, benefits, and memorial services while optimizing value

**Integrated Objective 2:** Educate and empower Veterans and their families through proactive outreach and effective advocacy

### **Integrated Strategies:**

2(a) – Use clear, accurate, consistent and targeted messages to build awareness of VA's benefits among our employees, Veterans and their families, and other stakeholders;

2(b) – Leverage technology and partnerships to reach Veterans and their families and advocate on their behalf;

2(c) – Reach out proactively and in a timely fashion to communicate with Veterans and their families and promote Veteran engagement; and

2(d) – Engage in two-way communication with Veterans and their families to help them understand available benefits, get feedback on VA programs, and build partnerships with them as our clients.

**Major Initiative:** Enable 21<sup>st</sup> century benefits delivery and services.

## **SURVIVOR STAKEHOLDERS**

Surviving spouses have organized to serve our Nation's heroes and show their support to this great Nation by serving in various capacities since World War I 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. Since 1917 with the founding of the American War Mothers, many other Survivor organizations have been established as indicated below:

- ❖ **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)
- ❖ **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)



- ❖ **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)
- ❖ **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)
- ❖ **National Association of Military Widows (NA)** 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. (1975)

- ❖ **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)

## CONDOLENCE LETTERS

During the second quarter of FY 2012 (January), OSA assumed the function of condolence letter preparation for Survivors of the fallen (U S Army) from the Office of the Executive Secretariat. OSA has processed many condolence letters which were signed by the Secretary of VA and sent to family members offering his and the Department's sincere condolences over the loss of their loved ones' supreme sacrifice for our Nation. The letter also provides information on how to seek Survivor benefits and services.

## OUTREACH

In FY 2012, OSA continued seeking innovative strategies for 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
- Joint outreach events
- Panels
- Presentations/briefings
- Conference calls
- Exhibit booths

OSA continued improving the FY 2011 strategies for communications and outreach as it seeks innovative ways to provide effective outreach to the Survivor community. New external partnerships were established and current partnerships strengthened as OSA and its partners continued integrated and collaborative outreach efforts throughout the year.

## COLLABORATIVE OUTREACH EFFORTS

Integrated and collaborative outreach efforts are crucial to OSA's success in 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 other stakeholders are aware of and have access to VA benefits and services.

Maintaining the momentum with its comprehensive outreach campaign implemented in FY 2011, OSA increased the number of collaborative outreach events it participated in 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

These outreach activities helped OSA share information on VA benefits and services provided to Survivors. Use of OSA's comprehensive Web site has proven to be a successful and effective outreach tool.



Listed below are the outreach events OSA participated in during FY 2012 along with OSA's role:

### **OCTOBER 2011**

- **Support** – McKendree-Simms-Brookland United Methodist Church 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Women Veterans Resource Center Event, Washington, DC
- **Support** – US Army Survivor Outreach Service Army Family Action Plan Conference (Association of the United States Army Annual Conference), Washington, DC
- **Exhibitor** – Armed Forces Services Corporation's Recovery Care Coordinators Training in Alexandria, VA
- **Support** – Association of the United States Army Annual Meeting and Exposition, TX
- **Exhibitor** – Antioch Baptist Church 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Aging: *"Connecting Seniors and Their Families to the Power of Choice,"* Fairfax Station, VA
- **Support** – Washington Redskins Time Out for Military Veterans Health Outreach Event at Redskins Park, Landover, MD



## NOVEMBER 2011

- **Support** – Association of the Military Surgeons of the United States Conference, San Antonio, TX
- **Support** – Department of Health and Human Services Celebrating America's Veterans, Washington, DC
- **Participant** – Veterans Service Organizations Quarterly Briefing, Washington, DC
- **Briefing** – US Army Fort Myer Survivor Outreach Service, Washington, DC
- **Briefing** – US Army Fort Meade Survivor Outreach Service, Washington, DC
- **Participant** – Center for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnership Steering Committee Meeting, Washington, DC

## DECEMBER 2011

- **Exhibitor** – Armed Forces Corporation's Recovery Care Coordinators Training, Alexandria, VA
- **Support** – The White House Office of Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnership 5<sup>th</sup> Connecting Communities for the Common Good Conference, Chicago, IL
- **Participant** – The National Baptist Convention USA, Inc. Meeting in Washington, DC
- **Exhibitor** – Mt. Zion Baptist Church First Veterans Seminar in Dumfries, VA
- **Participant** – Office of Policy and Planning Strategic Planning Alternate Futures Workshop in Washington, DC
- **Participant** – Center for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnership Quarterly Conference Call, Washington, DC

- **Briefing** – US Army Fort Meade Survivor Outreach Service in Washington, DC
- **Participant** – National Call Center Update Conference call in Washington, DC

## **JANUARY 2012**

- **Participant** – Office of Policy and Planning Strategic Planning Alternate Futures Workshop in Washington, DC
- **Participant** – National Survivor Outreach Service Financial Teleconference at Fort Belvoir, VA
- **Exhibitor** – VA for Vets Career Fair and Expo in Washington, DC
- **Participant** – Winter Haven Homeless Stand Down at the VA Medical Center in Washington, DC
- **Presenter** – US Army Survivor Outreach Service Region 7 Conference Call
- **Presenter** – US Army Fort Meade Survivor Outreach Service Training in Anne Arundel County, MD
- **Coordinator and Facilitator** – US Navy Installation Commander, Casualty Section and VBA's Benefits Assistance Service in Washington, DC
- **Attendee** – Roundtable on Asian American and Pacific Islander Veterans' Issues at VACO
- **Judge** – VA Learning University's LVA Symposium in Washington, DC
- **Facilitator and Coordinator** – Meeting with US Navy and Benefits Assistance Service in Washington, DC

## **FEBRUARY 2012**

- **Briefing** – Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committee Staffers on the status of OSA

- **Participant** – Office of Policy and Planning Strategic Planning Alternate Futures Workshop in Washington, DC

### MARCH 2012

- **Support** – Disabled American Veterans Benefits Training, Sequin, TX
- **Participant** – Office of Policy and Planning Strategic Planning Alternate Futures Workshop in Washington, DC
- **Speaker** – US Army Survivor Outreach Service Pacific Teleconference Call
- **Facilitator/Coordinator/Attendee** – US Air Force Mortuary Affairs Operations Visit in Dover, DE
- **Participant** – Center for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships Quarterly Conference Call (Mar 15)
- **Participant** – 2012 Military Health Systems Remembrance Planning Day Committee Meeting Conference Call
- **Participant** – Give an Hour Organization Meeting



### APRIL 2012

- **Presenter** – National Guard Transition Assistance Advisors Conference Call
- **Exhibitor** – Gospel Union Church of Christ Veterans' Outreach Event in La Plata, MD

## MAY 2012

- **VA Coordinator/Exhibitor** – Department of Defense Joint Service Open House at Andrews Air Force Base
- **Participant** – 2012 Military Health Systems Remembrance Ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery
- **Exhibitor** – Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors Annual Survivor Seminar and Good Grief Camp in Arlington, VA
- **Participant** – Center for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships Quarterly Steering Committee Meeting

## JUNE 2012

- **Guest Speaker** – US Army Fort Belvoir Survivor Outreach Service Survivor Day
- **Training** – US Army Casualty Assistance Training at Fort Belvoir, VA
- **Speaker and Attendee** – American Gold Star Mothers Annual Conference in Arlington, VA
- **Exhibitor** – Virginia Funeral Directors Association 124<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention in Virginia Beach, VA
- **Exhibitor** – Department of Veterans Affairs National Small Business Conference in Detroit, MI
- **Participant** – Office of Policy and Planning Strategic Planning Gap Analysis Workshop in Washington, DC

## JULY 2012

- **Installation Speaker** – Gold Star Wives of America, Inc., 67<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention in Dayton, OH
- **Training** – US Navy Casualty Assistance Training in Washington, DC

- **Participant** – VA Central Office Telework Pilot
- **Participant** – Gold Star Wives Conference Call on Legislative Issues
- **Presenter** – Fort Belvoir Retiree Counsel at Fort Belvoir, VA

## AUGUST 2012

- **Presenter** – Blacks in Government 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual National Training Conference, 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Veterans Affairs Forum in Detroit, MI
- **Presenter** – Blacks in Government 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual National Training Conference VA Agency Forum in Detroit, MI
- **Exhibit Booth** – Blacks in Government 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual National Training Conference in Detroit, MI
- **Participant** – Center for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships Quarterly Steering Committee Meeting
- **Participant** – VBA Pension and Fiduciary Service Survivors Benefits Workshop in Washington, DC



## SEPTEMBER 2012

- **Exhibitor** – Community United Methodist Church 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Community Health Fair in Washington, DC
- **Presenter** – US Army National Survivor Outreach Service Casualty Assistance Academy at Fort Sam Houston, TX

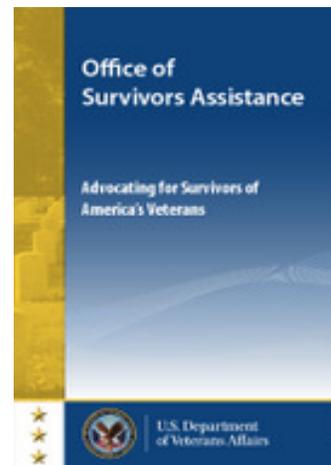
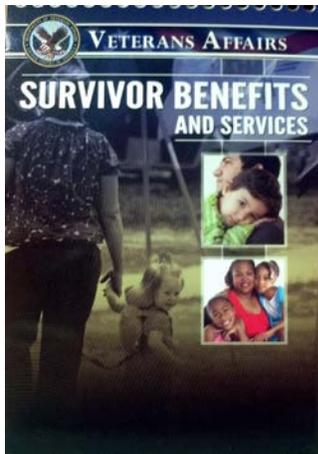
- **Presenter** – VBA Casualty Assistance Coordinators Conference Call in Washington, DC
- **Exhibitor** – Gospel Union Church of Christ Veterans Outreach Event in Clinton, MD
- **Exhibitor** – Fort Belvoir Retiree Appreciation Day at Fort Belvoir, VA
- **Article** – The American Legion Magazine, State Department of Michigan
- **Team Lead** – Office of Policy and Planning Strategic Options Task Force Change Academy in Washington, DC
- **Participant** – U S Army Wounded Warrior Program Meeting
- **Meeting** – National President, Blue Star Mothers of America, Inc.



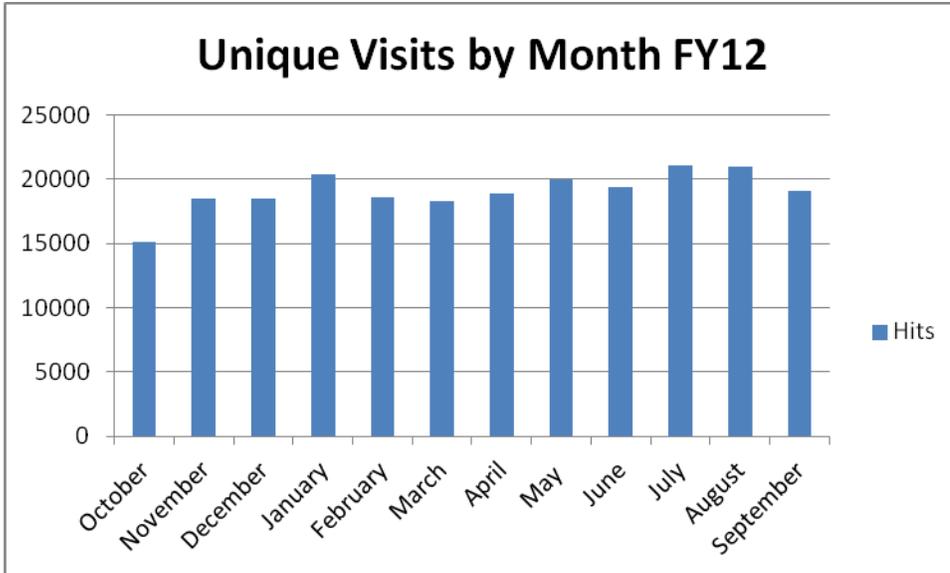
## OUTREACH AND WEB COMMUNICATIONS

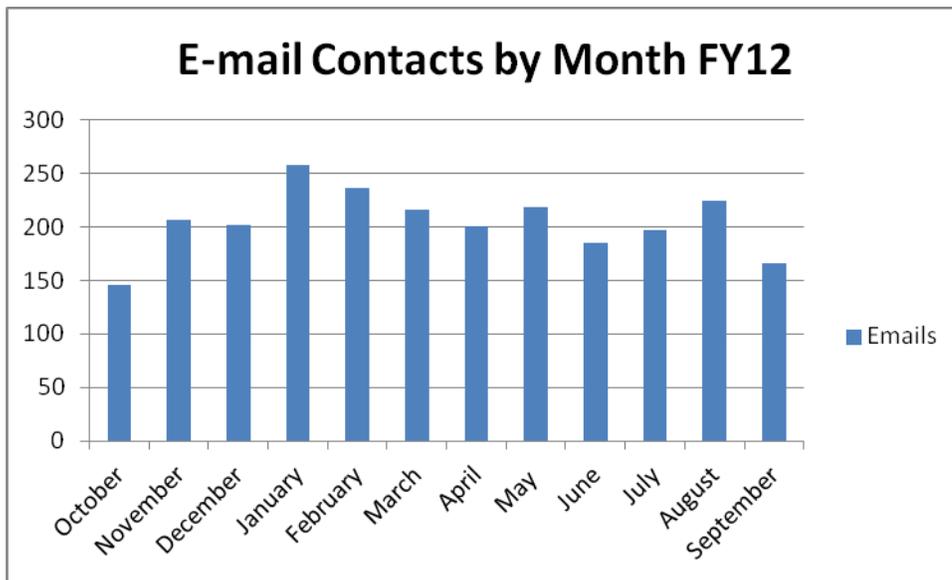
In FY 2012, OSA rolled out a new communications outreach product, the Quick Series for Survivor Benefits. Distribution of this product began on November 15, 2011, with a total of 18,400 distributed by the end of the fiscal year. Additionally, in FY 2012, OSA distributed 12,825 brochures to various organizations (see Page 20). In FY 2011, OSA distributed 6,712 (May – September) brochures.

In FY 2011, OSA began offering Survivors a higher level of service by leveraging technology to provide information, as many users prefer to access information electronically. This is demonstrated by the increase in FY 2012's Web traffic. Unique visits for FY 2012 increased by 14.39% to 228,859 (200,859 in FY 2011); page visits increased by 9.73% to 347,144 (316,144 in FY 2011); and e-mails increased by 26.71% to 2,457 (1,939 in FY 2011).



FY 2012 charts below demonstrate the monthly statistics for unique visits, page visits, and e-mails.





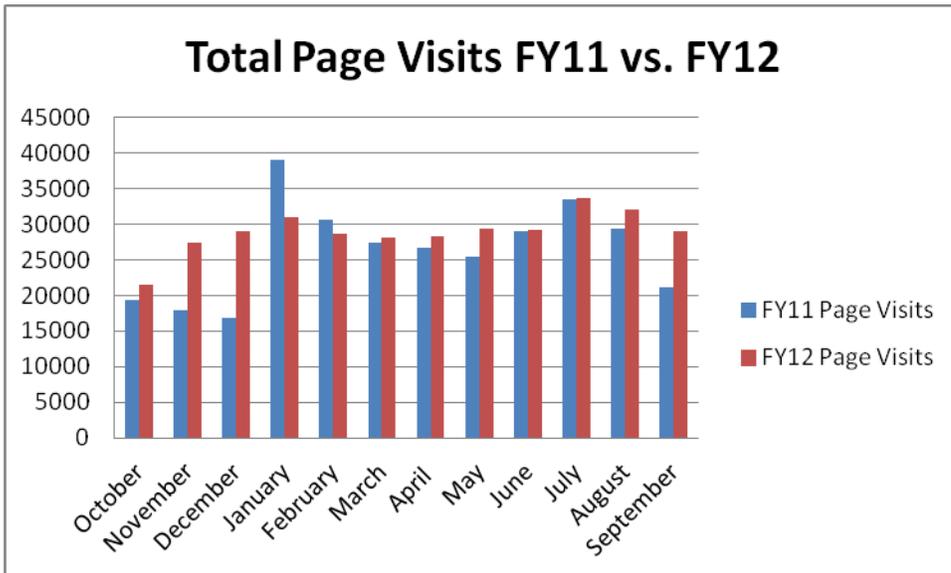
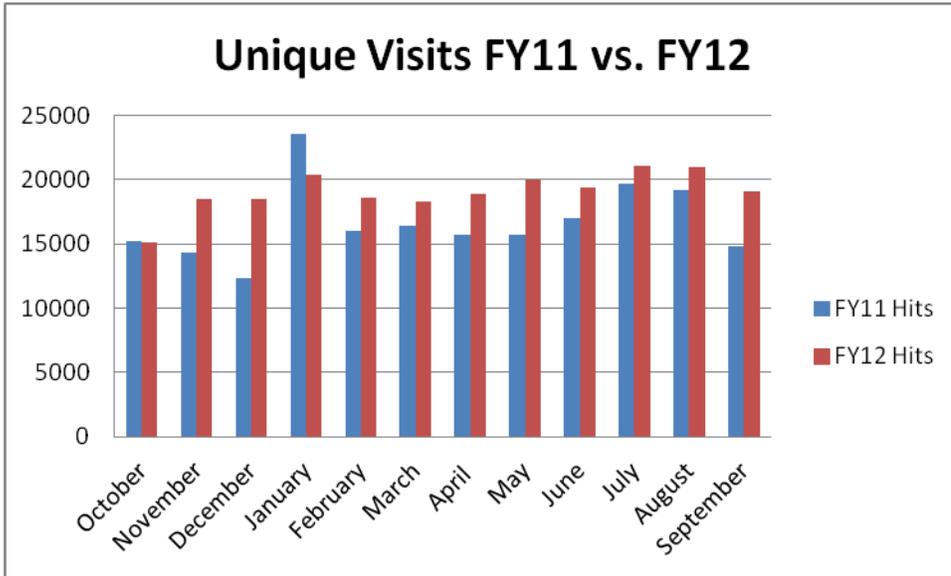
## CONCLUSION

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. We continue to make progress and are committed to expanding outreach efforts and meeting the needs of the changing demographics and expectations of Survivors.

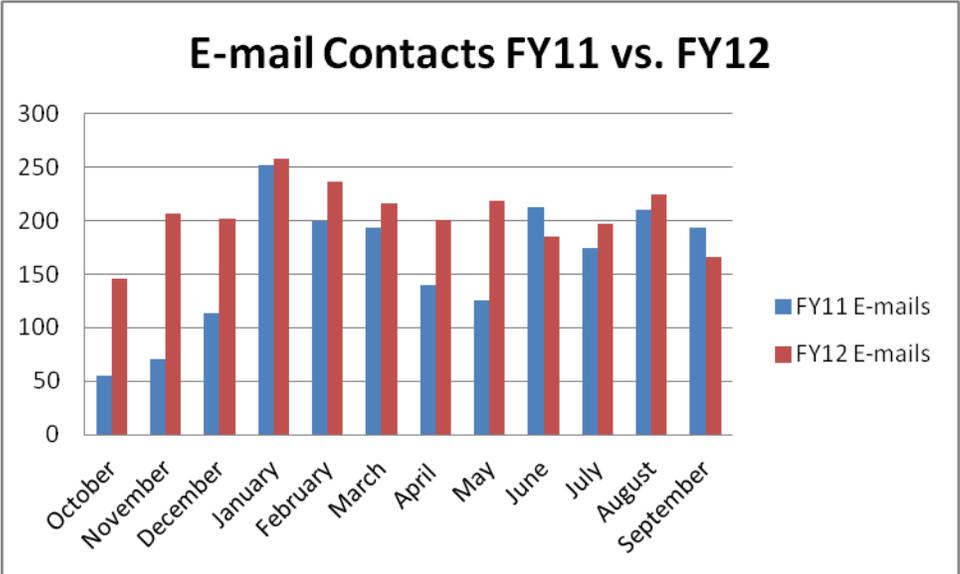
OSA also realizes that there are opportunities for improvement. In its FY 2011 Annual Report, OSA identified working with the Office of Policy and Planning, Data Governance and Analysis Office, as an opportunity to develop internal data capabilities to help identify areas where strategic, targeted outreach efforts are needed to ensure quality services and information are provided.

OSA will continue to explore untapped resources and organizations to develop innovative outreach strategies to reach Survivors and will continue to expand collaborative efforts internally and externally.

**WEB COMMUNICATIONS COMPARISONS FOR**  
**FY 2011 and FY 2012**



**WEB COMMUNICATIONS COMPARISONS FOR**  
**FY 2011 and FY 2012 (cont.)**



## **OUTREACH MATERIALS DISTRIBUTION LIST**

### **SURVIVOR STAKEHOLDERS**

Gold Star Wives of America  
American Gold Star Mothers  
Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors  
Veterans Widow/ers International Network  
The American Gold Manor  
National Association of Military Widows  
Blue Star Mothers of America  
American Widow Project

### **DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

US Army National Survivor Outreach Service (Headquarters)  
US Army Survivor Outreach Service (HI)  
US Army Survivor Outreach Service (Europe)  
US Army Survivor Outreach Service (Asia)  
US Army Survivor Outreach Service (Fort Belvoir)  
US Army Survivor Outreach Service (Fort Meade)  
US Navy Installation Command (US Navy Yard)  
US Army Survivor Outreach Service Joint-Base Meyer-Henderson  
US Army Survivor Outreach Services (Aberdeen Proving Ground)  
US Army Survivor Outreach Service (Fort Shafter)  
US Family Assistance Program (MI)  
US Marine Corps Casualty Section (Quantico)  
US Navy Fleet and Family Services  
US Navy – Commandant Naval District of Washington  
US Navy – Commander Navy Region Southwest  
US Navy – Commander Navy Region Northwest  
US Navy – Commander Navy Region Mid-Atlantic  
US Navy – Commander Navy Region Southeast  
US Navy – Commander Navy Region Northeast  
US Navy – Commander Navy Region Europe, Africa, Southwest Asia  
US Navy – Commander Navy Region Hawaii  
US Air Force Mortuary Affairs  
US National Guard Bureau

## Fisher Houses

- Blanchfield Army Community Hospital
- Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center
- Edward J. Hines VA Hospital
- Davis Grant US Air Force Medical Center

## CONGRESSIONAL OFFICES

Congressman Dale E. Kildee's Office (MI)

Congressman Steve Austria's (OH)

## FEDERAL ORGANIZATIONS

US Department of Labor

US Social Security Administration

US Department of Health and Human Services

## STATE ORGANIZATIONS

State Departments of Veterans Affairs

Maine Womens' Veterans Committee

Maryland State Veterans Commission

New York State Department of Labor

State of Maryland, Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation

## MILITARY/VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

Association of the United States Army (VA)

National Military Family Association (VA)

Disabled American Veterans (DAV) – Alamo, TX Chapter

Armed Forces Services Corporation

AMVETS

Veterans of Foreign Wars (Montgomery County, MD)

The American Legion – Department of Michigan

Veterans 4 Vets

American Heritage Veterans Center (NY)

Association of the Military Surgeons of the United States

Operation TBI Freedom (CO)

## **FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS**

National Baptist Convention, USA  
Gospel Union Church of Christ (MD)  
Community United Methodist Church (Washington, DC)  
First Mount Zion Baptist Church (VA)  
McKendree-Simms-Brookland United Methodist Church (Washington, DC)  
Antioch Baptist Church (VA)

## **NON-PROFIT AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS**

National Funeral Directors Association  
Virginia Funeral Directors Association  
National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization  
Reliance Funeral Services (VA)  
Give An Hour  
Mary Washington Healthcare – Mary Washington Hospice  
American Red Cross  
Kingston Center for Active Adults (VA)  
Rocky Mountain Human Services Military Support (CO)  
Lynch Group International (VA)  
El Paso Community College  
Blacks in Government

## **INTERNAL ORGANIZATIONS**

Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships  
Center for Women Veterans  
Center for Minority Veterans  
VA for Vets  
VBA – Benefits Assistance Service  
VBA – Regional Casualty Coordinators  
VBA – Pension and Fiduciary Services  
OPIA – Office of Tribal Government  
OPIA – Office of Intergovernmental Affairs  
VHA – Wichita KS Regional Office  
VHA – Togus ME Regional Office

## INTERNAL ORGANIZATIONS (cont.)

VHA – Minneapolis VAMC

VHA – Ann Arbor Healthcare Systems, Chaplain Services

VHA – Kansas City VAMC

VHA – Kansas City Hospice Program

VHA – Chaplains Headquarters

VHA – Palo Alto Geriatric Care Services

NCA – VACO Offices

NCA – Scheduling Office



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