

# VETERANS & FAMILY SUPPORT AMBASSADOR



**BETH WEST**



The Veterans & Family Support Program is comprehensive Program. At its heart is a strong emphasis on assisting veterans, service members and their families and promoting veteran and military suicide prevention and mental health awareness.

In a novel by Allan Gurganus, the main character is a surviving spouse of a war veteran. She says, "Well, see, there's the war and it gets holt of him. It shakes him something awful, and then he gets to grab me by the scruff of my neck. (He didn't get to, but I noticed he sure done it often enough anyway.) So, say, he's the last vet of that war, but me? Why, honey, I'm a veteran of the veteran." The words resonate and remind me why our work with veterans and their families is so important.

## **Unmet Needs (National Military Service and National Veteran Services)**

The VFW Auxiliary has many options in our scouting report to provide support to our veterans and their families.

National Veteran Services provide service officers both pre and post discharge. Veteran Service Officers are crucial in making sure veterans receive their earned benefits and entitlements. Think of them as the trainers, preparing veterans to manage and adapt to civilian life.

National Military Services aids those currently serving. These are more like the coaches looking over the playbook to find the right call for the situation.

National Military Service programs include the VFW's Military Appreciation Program (MAP), Adopt-a-Unit, care packages, VFW Financial Assistance, "Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship" and the Student Veteran Support Grants. Financial assistance is needed, as no one heals mentally or physically when they are on fourth down, with no time outs, less than two minutes in the fourth quarter and out of range of a field goal. We also need to be familiar with available skilled military suicide prevention and mental health awareness initiatives.

The Auxiliary's Veterans & Family Support Program is more than fundraising for VFW programs. It is also a call to action for our veterans and military families within our communities. We encourage *continued support of those programs financially and with service.* We also challenge you to find ways to be more supportive of mental health and suicide prevention strategies in your Auxiliary and in your community for veterans and their families. In other words, do not just be the cheerleader; be the super fan, the band, the announcer, the security, the janitor or whatever it takes to get the veteran and/or family member the resources they need when they need it.

## **Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Awareness**

Aren't we all a "veteran of a veteran" in some way? That quote especially came to mind when I was asked if an Auxiliary could create and have a support group for spouses of veterans suffering from PTSD. I apologized to her, stating that if the Auxiliary is not a good enough support group for you, then we have failed. We joined not just to honor our veterans, not just to take care of and advocate for our veterans, but also to find a community of support for family members like us. The Post is a safe place for the veteran. The Auxiliary should be a safe space for their families.

Post Traumatic Stress (PTSD) and mental health awareness will be our focus this year. This is very personal for me and something I am passionate about as a spouse to and granddaughter of veterans

who struggled/are struggling with PTS. The family suffers, too. Secondary PTS is perhaps less recognized and diagnosed than PTS, yet just as prevalent in the immediate families of veterans living with PTS. Our focus should be on promotion of the resources we have to help those struggling and to educate the public on them as well. Be their "Hail Mary" pass with fractions of a second left on the clock. The play you call could be holding a veteran/military resource fair, asking a qualified speaker to address your meeting about suicide prevention, PTS and Secondary PTS or promoting the 988 (then press 1) Suicide Prevention and Crisis Lifeline. Whatever we can do to continue to make the VFW and its Auxiliary the safe space our military/veteran family needs should be our focus always and should always put those at risk within sight of the goal line.

See page 54 to read about Veterans & Family Support Awards.



# VETERANS & FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM

*VFW Veterans & Military Support Programs  
Assist Veterans, Service Members and their Families  
Promote Veteran & Military Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Awareness*

## **Spread the Word about National Veterans Service (NVS)**

### **VA Claims & Separation Benefits**

The VFW's **National Veterans Service (NVS)** was established to help all veterans, service members, their families and survivors. NVS consists of a nationwide network of VFW Accredited Service Officers and Pre-Discharge Representatives who are experts in navigating VA processes and are the key to your success. VFW Accredited Service Officers are with America's veterans every step of the way once they're ready to file a claim. This is a service the VFW is proud to offer — **FREE OF CHARGE** — to anyone seeking assistance with the claims process.

### **Pre-Discharge**

The VFW Pre-Discharge program was established in 2001 through a cooperative initiative with the Pentagon and the Department of Veterans Affairs. This program ensures separating and retiring active-duty military personnel receive assistance in obtaining their VA entitlements and benefits upon discharge. Pre-Discharge offices are located on or near major military installations across the country.

Additional information, links and forms are located on the VFW website:  
<https://www.vfw.org/assistance/va-claims-separation-benefits>

### **Military Appreciation Program (MAP)**

The VFW Military Appreciation Program (MAP) is the outstretched hand between the local VFW and military community, offering support around the world. Since 2005, MAP has sponsored events supporting service members and their families.

A large part of MAP is the **Adopt-A-Unit** program, providing VFW Posts with the opportunity to adopt hundreds of military units around the world. Adopt-A-Unit's goal is to develop supportive relationships with units before, during and after deployments to help deliver the vast network of resources the VFW has available to the military. Unfortunately, VFW Auxiliaries will no longer be eligible to request this money. This does not affect the VFW Auxiliaries' ability to request Foundation grants.

Additional information, links and forms are located on the VFW website:

<https://www.vfw.org/community/troop-support>

### **Student Veteran Support Grant**

The VFW recognizes that both funding and support for our student veterans and dependents at institutions of higher learning can often be difficult to find. The **VFW's Student Veteran Support Grant** offers much needed assistance to support specific student veteran events. The grant, administered by the VFW Washington Office, focuses on supporting the overall student veteran population within the community, which consists of many student veterans at campuses across the country that are not affiliated with a Student Veterans of America chapter. The grants will be disbursed to a VFW Post or Department that has submitted an application, to support the student veterans at the university or college.

Additional information, links and forms are located on the VFW website:

<https://www.vfw.org/assistance/student-veterans-support>

## **VFW Foundation Grants**

- **VFW #StillServing Grant**  
The #StillServing Grant is offered exclusively to VFW Posts, Districts and their Auxiliaries to offset expenses incurred while doing community service projects.
- **Uniting for Veterans Grant**  
The Uniting for Veterans Grant is a limited matching grant available to VFW Posts or VFW Auxiliaries for monetary, food, or item donations to local food banks, pantries or homeless relief organizations in their communities.
- **Post Assistance Grant (PAG)**  
The Post Assistance Grant is offered exclusively to VFW Posts to offset expenses incurred for building repairs and equipment that enhances or restores the applicant organization's ability to serve veterans and their community.

More information about VFW Foundation Grants is located on the VFW website:

<https://www.vfw.org/community/community-initiatives/post-grants>

### **Disaster Relief**

The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. is accepting donations to help veterans, service members and military families impacted by natural disasters. The VFW's Disaster Relief Fund provides our organization with the opportunity to react quickly with immediate relief to those in the affected areas.

### **Uniting for Veterans**

In 2018, the VFW and Humana created Uniting to Combat Hunger (UTCH) to actively address food insecurity across America with an emphasis on the military community. VFW Posts and VFW Auxiliaries are integral to making a positive dent in food insecurity and veteran homelessness.

For more information about UTCH, please contact the VFW Foundation at [foundation@vfw.org](mailto:foundation@vfw.org).

### **VFW Mental Wellness Campaign**

The purpose of the project is to educate VFW and VFW Auxiliary members, veterans and communities about the important topic of mental health and wellness and offer proven tools to intervene on behalf of veterans in crisis.

In the year 2024-2025, the VFW expanded the program in support of an additional underserved veteran population: Veterans experiencing homelessness. The VFW has renamed the grant as it has expanded from its original purpose to address food insecurity in the local veteran community. The VFW Foundation is proud to work with Volunteers of America (VOA) who have been helping address homelessness for more than a century.

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In order to raise awareness, foster community engagement, improve research and provide intervention for those affected by invisible injuries and emotional stress, the VFW has teamed up with the nationwide organizations **Give an Hour** and the **Campaign to Change Direction, One Mind, PatientsLikeMe** and the **Elizabeth Dole Foundation** to combat this critical issue.

Find links and learn about resources and support to change the stigma surrounding mental health on the VFW website:

<https://www.vfw.org/assistance/mental-wellness>

### **Veterans Crisis Line**

The Veterans Crisis Line connects veterans in crisis and their families and friends with qualified, caring Department of Veterans Affairs responders through a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat or text. Veterans and their loved ones can dial 988 then press 1, chat online, or text 838255 to receive confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.