

SEPTEMBER 15, 2025

Family

familymedia.com

The Magazine For Military Families

Call to Action

Leading nonprofit group, Stop Soldier Suicide, provides critical support, resources, and intervention to service members and veterans

PAGE 12

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

Military Spouse on the Street

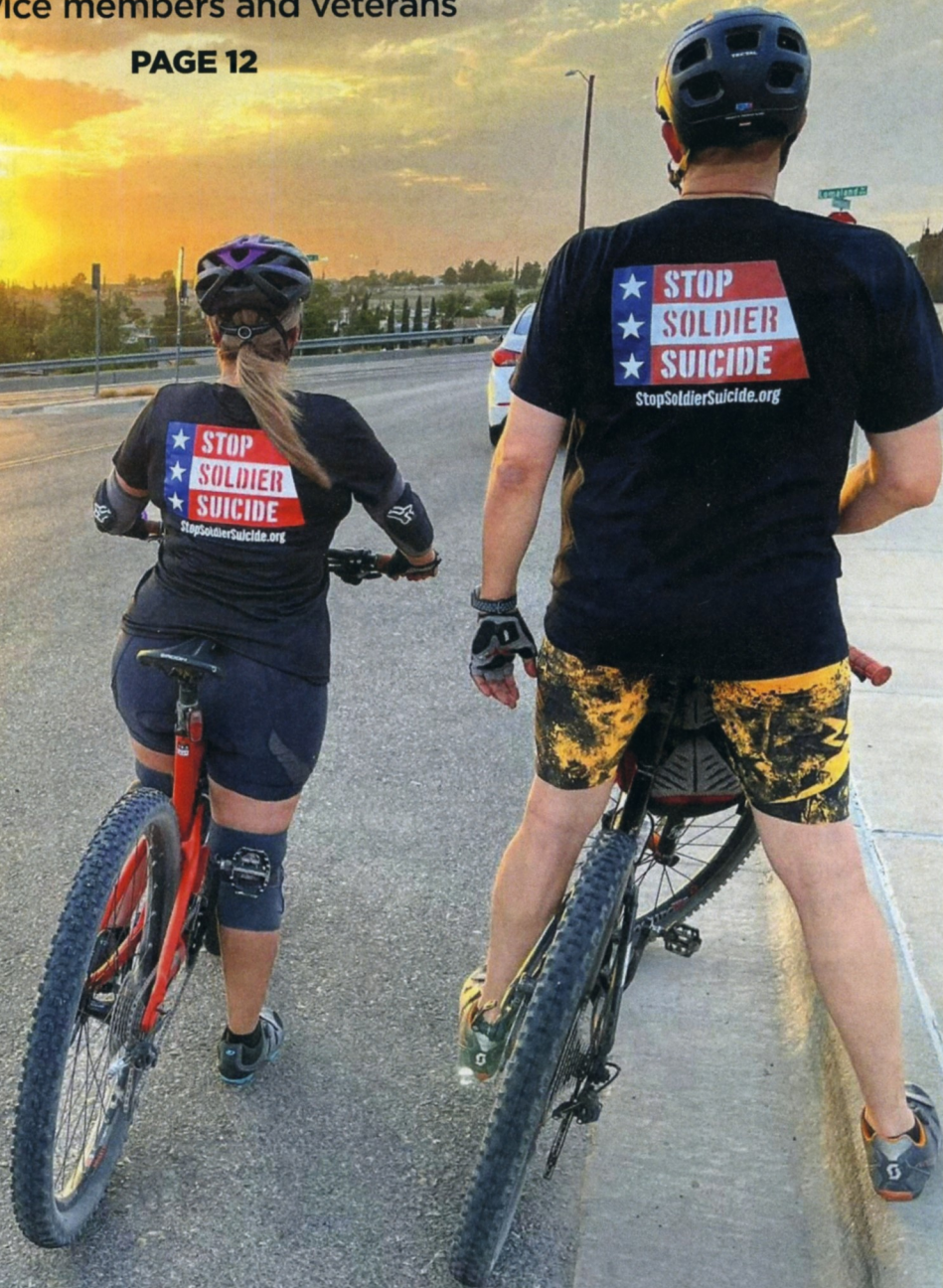
What are your favorite
fall break activities?

PAGE 10

PCS/Relocation

Incorporating Local Culture into
Your Family Life After a Move

PAGE 11



Call to Action

Leading nonprofit group, Stop Soldier Suicide, provides critical support, resources, and intervention to service members and veterans

The scourge of military suicide is well-documented and heart-breaking. One national nonprofit organization is committed to addressing the tragedy of military suicide through a comprehensive program of mental health support and intervention: Stop Soldier Suicide.

Military suicide has claimed more lives than were lost in most individual major conflicts, including World War I, the Vietnam War, and the Global War on Terror, and more than 6,000 U.S. veterans have died from suicide each year for the last 20 consecutive years, according to the organization's figures. Veterans are at a 58% higher risk of suicide than those who have not served. Suicide is the second leading cause of death in veterans under age 45, and it is also the second leading cause of death among post-9/11 veterans.

"Suicide is a complex problem that disproportionately impacts the military community," explains Caitlyn Scaggs, national director of marketing and communications. "Stop Soldier Suicide is the only national nonprofit focused solely on solving the issue of suicide among U.S. veterans and service members. Our team is laser-focused on research and care that is specific to reducing veteran and service member suicide. Our vision is a nation where veterans and service members have no greater risk for suicide than any other American. We have an aggressive goal to reduce the military suicide rate by 40% no later than 2030."

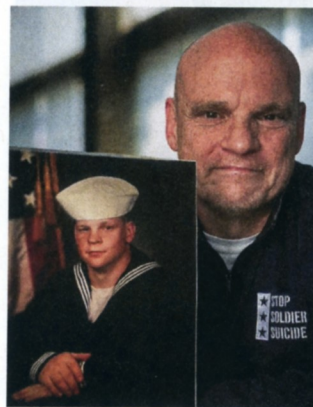
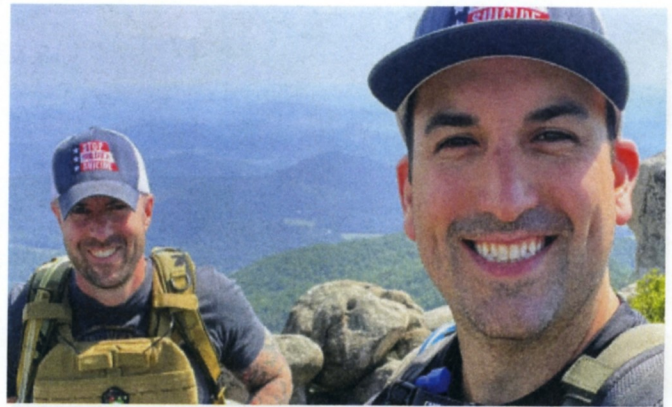
CEO Keith Hotle elaborates, "The mission of Stop Soldier Suicide is to propel military suicide rates to civilian parity by 2030. We approach our work with a sense of urgency and a relentless pursuit of providing demonstrable reductions in suicidal behavior. At its core, our overarching goal is to produce impact at scale.

"Leading research indicates each suicide affects 135 lives, meaning these untimely deaths have affected more than 16 million Americans in the last two decades," Hotle adds. "It's easy to focus on this problem in terms of numbers, percentages, and statistics, but these are real people who had friends, family members, and loved ones."

Stop Soldier Suicide provides free, one-to-one suicide-specific care to veterans and service members from all branches,

regardless of discharge status. Stop Soldier Suicide programs include evidence-based therapies and suicide-specific interventions for the most at-risk veterans and service members, as well as research and suicide intelligence, firearm safety, and more.

"Through our ROGER Wellness program, we employ best-in-class treatment and technical innovation to care for our veteran and military clients," Hotle states. "ROGER employs evidence-based practices at all levels of care - intake, risk assessment, safety planning, treatment and follow-up - to ensure each suicidal veteran we serve receives the best life-saving care available. Stop Soldier Suicide also deploys a team of resourcing specialists that link clients to community supports necessary to meet their



essential needs. Over seven years of intensive testing, continuous evaluation and improvement, Stop Soldier Suicide leads the field in the quality and effectiveness of its clinical program.

"Our other major initiative is Project Blackbox, which applies machine learning against data retrieved from digital devices donated by families of veterans who have died by suicide," he continues. "For the first time, we can dig deeply into the internal lives of those who have lost their struggle with suicide, allowing them to tell their stories of the factors and life circumstances that drove them to tragic end.

"By combining Blackbox technological innovation with ROGER's unique capability to validate and refine these solutions in real-world clinical settings, we're developing a deeper understanding of military suicide risk," Hotle adds. "This integration allows us to enhance interventions and save lives, affording Stop Soldier Suicide with a distinct advantage in creating more effective tools for prevention."

Since the launch of the ROGER Wellness Service, Stop Soldier Suicide has served nearly 6,000 clients for a total of over 41,000 clinical hours, and it also has responded to 21,438 help requests. "Each client we serve, help request we respond to, and minute dedicated to clinical care is a true honor," points out Scaggs. "One outcome that we find very rewarding is that in 2024, 73% of clients experienced a decrease in thoughts of suicide over the course of treatment."

Stop Soldier Suicide was co-founded in 2010 by U.S. Army veterans Brian Kinsella, Nick Black, and Craig Gridelli, who had lost friends and fellow service members to suicide. The veterans were determined to create a solution for their fellow veterans who were struggling. "My first encounter with the crisis of suicide in the military came at my very first duty assignment in Mannheim, Germany, where I



served as a platoon leader,” recalls Kinsella, co-founder and chairman. “A young 18-year-old soldier from Puerto Rico – just a teenager, the same age as my younger sister – attempted to take her own life. She had never seen combat. She hadn’t been deployed. She was homesick. When my platoon sergeant and I went to visit her at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, I remember looking into her eyes and realizing: we had failed her.

“Shortly after, a military officer I had been dating attempted suicide,” he continues. “Again, she had never been to war. She wasn’t dealing with post-traumatic stress in the traditional sense. These back-to-back experiences forced me to recognize something deeper: This wasn’t just about trauma from combat. It was about something endemic in the structure and culture of the military (and our society writ large) a system where people were silently struggling, and yet, not truly accessing the help they needed.

“My next assignment took me to Vicenza, Italy, and eventually to Iraq, where I led soldiers in combat,” Kinsella adds. “I saw how common emotional pain was – nights spent on missions, riding in trucks with soldiers who were hurting but had no clear place to turn. We had briefings meant to address mental health, but they felt performative – like the Friday safety briefings warning not to drink and drive. ‘Don’t kill yourself’ was the underlying message, but that approach was never going to be enough.

“Then, shortly before a deployment to Haiti as part of the Global Response Force with the XVIII Airborne Corps, one of our best NCOs took his own life,” he states. “He had just returned from a 15-month combat deployment. There had been marital issues and some alcohol involved. But none of it seemed like enough to explain his death, especially not after surviving the kind of sustained combat that breaks people. That loss stayed with me throughout our mission in Haiti. It haunted me that someone could survive the enemy and come home and take their own life.

“That’s when the words came to me: Stop Soldier Suicide,” Kinsella declares. “The name became a call to action – and eventually, a nonprofit. When I returned to New York City and transitioned into civilian life and finance, I joined forces with two of my ROTC classmates, Nick Black and Craig Gridelli, who had witnessed similar patterns in their own service. Together, we founded Stop Soldier Suicide to address what we saw as a systemic failure: a military and veteran support ecosystem with resources that simply weren’t working fast enough, early enough, or precisely enough to save lives. We believed, and still believe, that this is a solvable problem. But it requires a different approach – one that is proactive, data-driven, and veteran-led. That belief became our mission.”

According to Kinsella, the key to preventing suicide is to identify, understand, and address the underlying issues—things like financial strain, post-traumatic stress and other mental health issues, and difficulties navigating the transition from military to civilian—before they escalate to a point of crisis. To this end, the ROGER wellness services include a 24/7 phone line that is answered by someone with military culture competence and also specific training on how to address immediate safety concerns. The services are available to anyone who served in any U.S. military service branch, of any status. The organization employs a digital outreach strategy to connect with veterans and service members who may need suicide-specific care; the targeted ads are designed to get to individuals in their moment of need.

Stop Soldier Suicide is funded by individual donors, corporate partners, and foundations, and has a robust network of community support. “In order to advance our work, we are building meaningful relationships with individuals who care deeply about our lifesaving work, who are advocates and fundraisers, who are loss survivors, and who stand shoulder to shoulder with us in the fight against veteran suicide,” comments Kathy Kauffman, chief development officer. “We are inspired every day by those who want to know

more and do more to help us solve this preventable tragedy.”

Scaggs adds, “We have a robust and highly engaged challenge community. It is really powerful to see community-led efforts to raise awareness, support, and to bring people together in order to advance our mission to end the suicide crisis within the military community. These individuals may sign up to do a 50-mile ruck challenge within one month and as they post pictures and updates about their ruck, they garner support and also help educate communities about the realities of the suicide crisis. It has been incredible to watch this network of support grow over the years. The numbers tell an inspiring story: since launching these challenges in 2020, over 90,000 fundraisers have joined our cause, raising critical funds, spreading awareness, and becoming true believers in our mission.

“We have events that occur nationwide, year-round,” she continues. “Some events are virtual, such as our Facebook-based challenges, and others are in-person and organized by our community of support. One thing that is wonderful about our organization is there are numerous ways to get involved. We believe that everybody can do something to help solve the suicide crisis within the military community.”

Scaggs points out that the work is deeply personal for many team members because they are loss survivors. “One example is our creative manager, Chris Stephens, who first joined our community as a challenger, running miles in his brother’s memory, but later joined the team as a staff member,” she explains. “He continues now with ‘Miles for Mike,’ the movement that helps keep his late brother’s memory alive, which also raises funds for our organization. As Chris works and raises awareness, he helps us all remember Mike and he also is part of the solution to the problem



of suicide within the military community.

“It is special to see how people are both creative and committed in their support for us,” Scaggs adds. “We know that everyone can do something to help solve the suicide crisis within the military. For example, a high school senior in Idaho organized a charity softball game to raise money for Stop Soldier Suicide. It was in her late-cousin’s memory, a Marine veteran who died by suicide. To see a young person choose to take a stand, raise awareness, and rally her community is nothing short of inspiring.” 🇺🇸