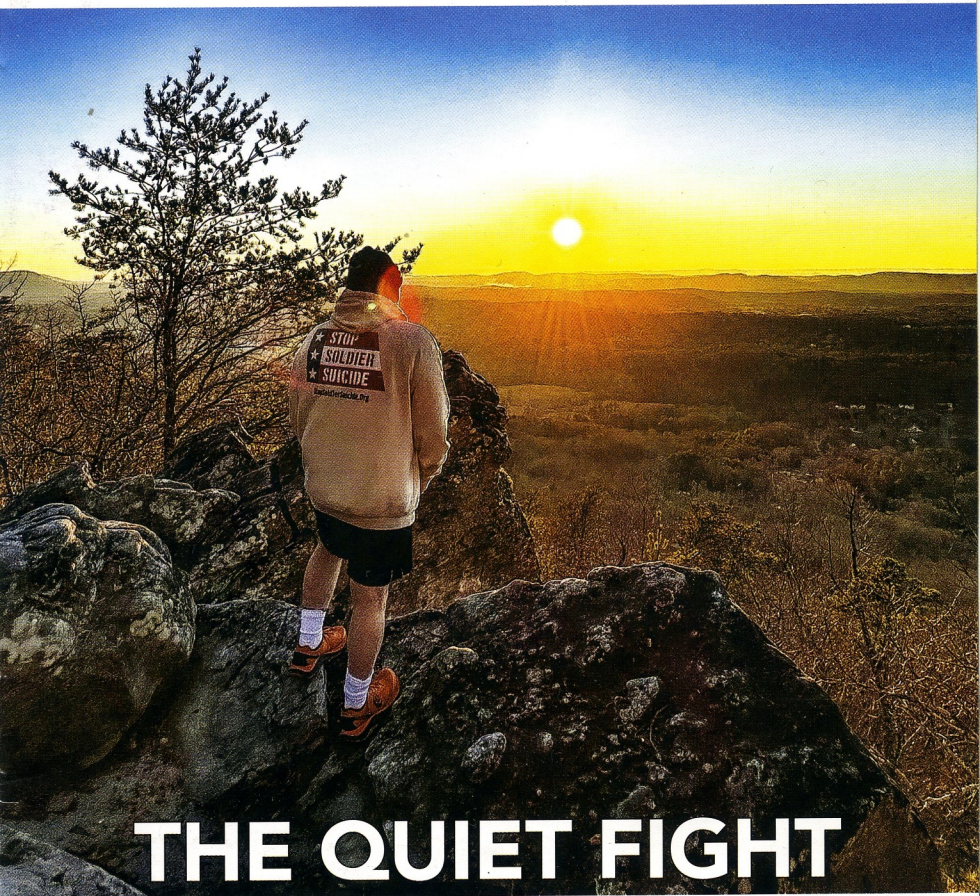


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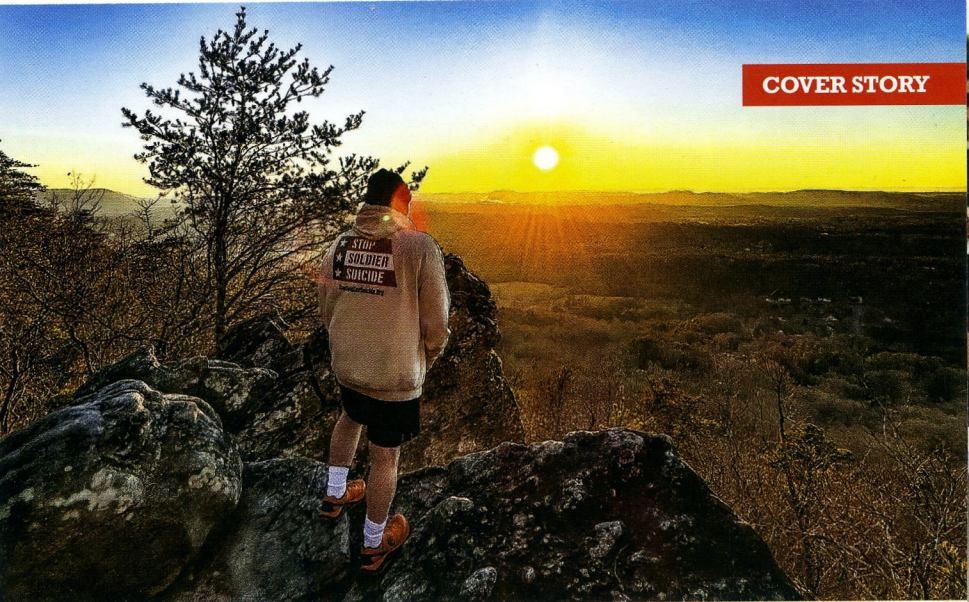
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THE QUIET FIGHT

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PAGE 13



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by DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ

Military suicide remains a devastating and heart-breaking tragedy that resists easy solutions. One leading nonprofit group, Stop Soldier Suicide, is fighting to “move the needle” and lower the military suicide rate through a combination of compassion, innovation, and collective action.

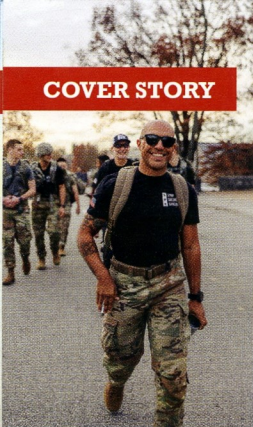
“Our goal is simple: to reach every veteran or service member who needs support,” explains Caitlyn Scaggs, national director of marketing and communications for Stop Soldier Suicide. “We do not turn anyone away based on branch, discharge status, era of service, or life circumstances.

“Anyone who has served—or is currently serving—and is experiencing suicidal thoughts deserves access to care,” she continues. “We hope that they will reach out to us. Through our nationwide network of clinicians, we can provide suicide-specific care to veterans and service members across the country, meeting

people where they are and connecting them with the support they need.”

By all accounts, the scourge of military suicide is an intractable and historic problem: According to the *National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report* by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the most recent available data reveal little change from the previous year in terms of annual suicides and daily averages. The report analyzed veteran suicides from 2001 through 2023. Suicides among veterans in 2023 totaled 6,398, a negligible decrease from the 6,442 suicides in 2022. Among the key findings from the report:

- The suicide rate per 100,000 veterans was 35.2, marking the highest level reported since 2018.
- The suicide rate per 100,000 veterans rose for both male and female veterans in 2023. That rate for women increased from 13.7 to 13.9, while for men it increased from 37.3 to 37.8.



- Suicide rates are elevated for veterans aged 18-34 years, leading to certain risk characteristics including health problems, homelessness, and chronic pain. Among veterans who died by suicide between 2021-2023 and whose deaths were reported by VA suicide prevention teams, the most frequently identified risk factor was pain.
- Roughly 61% of veterans who died by suicide in 2023 were not receiving VA health care in the last year of their lives.

Against this grim backdrop, Stop Soldier Suicide has dramatically expanded its outreach programs, bolstered key partnerships, and strengthened its data-driven approach to suicide prevention. “The newly released Veterans Health Administration report shows veteran suicide rates are not improving—underscoring how urgent this work remains,” Scaggs points out. “Over the past year, our mission has continued to evolve as we work both to save lives today and build scalable solutions that can prevent suicide in the future.

“We have strengthened the reach and effectiveness of our ROGER Wellness Service, which provides suicide-specific care to veterans and service members in all 50 states,” she continues. “Simultaneously, we have advanced our groundbreaking research initiative, the Black Box Project.

“Equally important, we have continued to expand the national community supporting this mission—from clinical partners and researchers to donors, volunteers and corporate partners—because addressing veteran suicide requires collaboration across sectors,” she adds. “Our focus remains on combining direct care with innovation to continue improving outcomes for veterans and service members at risk. We exist to save

lives, and we are relentless in that mission.”

As reported in the Sept. 15, 2025, issue of *FAMILY* magazine, Stop Soldier Suicide was co-founded in 2010 by U.S. Army veterans Brian Kinsella, Nick Black, and Craig Gridelli, all of whom had lost friends and fellow service members to suicide. The veterans were united in their desire to create a solution for their fellow veterans who were struggling. 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, Stop Soldier Suicide’s ROGER Wellness Service delivers suicide-specific care through confidential telehealth services that are available at no cost to U.S. veterans and active-duty service members nationwide, regardless of branch or discharge status. This model connects individuals with trained clinicians who specialize in evidence-based approaches to suicide prevention.

“When someone reaches out for help, our team prioritizes rapid response,” explains Scaggs. “In most cases, individuals who submit a request for assistance are contacted within minutes so that we can assess their needs and connect them with appropriate support as quickly as possible. Our average response time to a request for help is just four minutes—a reflection of the urgency and commitment behind our life-saving mission.”


Since the organization’s founding, Stop Soldier Suicide has responded to more than 26,400 requests for help, delivered more than 49,000 hours of care,

and provided services to 12,600-plus individuals, including more than 6,400 veterans and service members who have received suicide-specific clinical care.

Families who have experienced suicide loss also have the opportunity to participate in the organization's Black Box Project, a research initiative designed to better understand suicide risk. Families choose to temporarily loan digital devices belonging to their loved one, so researchers can analyze the data they contain in an anonymized manner. Through leading-edge data analysis, these collective insights may help identify patterns and warning signs that can inform future prevention efforts.

"Through the Black Box Project, families are profoundly honoring their loved ones,—helping us uncover insights that may one day prevent other families from experiencing this loss," says Kim Burditt Barlett, senior manager of family engagement with the Black Box Project and a suicide loss survivor.

The Black Box Project is an important tool that helps Stop Soldier Suicide better understand when suicide risk emerges and how it can be identified earlier, leading ultimately to enhanced prevention initiatives. "The goal is to move toward more precise, data-informed prevention efforts that allow us to intervene before someone reaches a crisis point," Scaggs explains. "When you combine the resilience we see in the people we serve with the innovation driving new approaches to prevention, it gives us a great deal of optimism that more lives can be saved and more families can be spared the pain of suicide loss within the military community.

"Our hope as an organization is rooted in a simple but powerful belief: suicide is preventable," she adds. "We see that hope every day through the veterans and service members who come to us in their most difficult moments and go on to recover, rebuild their lives, and reconnect with the people who care about them. Their stories are proof that even in the face of a complex challenge like suicide, recovery is possible." 

If you are a veteran or service member who may be struggling—or if you know someone who is—help is available. Visit goroger.org/Get-Help or call **833-MY-ROGER (833-697-6437)** to connect with the Stop Soldier Suicide team.



In Their Own Words

Anonymous comments from service members who have been helped by Stop Soldier Suicide's ROGER Wellness Service

"Just knowing someone is there to listen and make a plan for me to stay safe was awesome."

"The best part was how fast you guys were and actual solutions, and talking with someone. Taking my suicide seriously."

"From the first moment I called, the immediate support was incredibly helpful and enlightening."

"You get to retain dignity and receive compassionate understanding; nothing you got to 'c.y.a.' about. Just be real and get some relief."

"It has helped me to maneuver through some tough moments. The availability of the staff and clear communication are refreshing."

"ROGER gave me the tools to manage my darkest moments. I'm here today because someone answered when I called."

15  **STOP SOLDIER SUICIDE**
YEARS