

Slide 1: *“We are all musicians in a great human orchestra. You are not required to play a solo, but you are required to know what instrument you hold and play it as well as you can. You are required to find your place in the score. What we love we must protect. That’s what love means. From the right to know and the duty to inquire flows the obligation to act.” – Sandra Steingraber.*

Slide 2: As members of this organization, we all have our parts to play. Some of us do this by taking on leadership roles, while others might do it by lending their time to a planning committee or by providing baked goods for events. The one thing we all have in common though is our love for our veterans and I know that each of us will do our best to honor their service to our country in any way that we can.

Veterans & Family Support is the heart of our organization and a program that every member can and should participate in. When thinking about this program, one word often comes to mind – and that’s unity. We are all united in our passion for this organization and at our core we are all here for the same purpose, to support our veterans, active-duty military, their families and our communities! Our veterans have sacrificed so much for us and it’s time that we do all that we can for them. This year we’ll be *“Banding Together for Our Veterans,”* by focusing on Veterans and Military Support Programs, National Veterans Service, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Awareness.

Slide 3: The **Veterans & Military Support Program** is made up of three components – the **Military Assistance Program (MAP)**, **Unmet Needs and Sports Clips Help a Hero Scholarship**.

Slide 4: **MAP** has sponsored events supporting more than **3.4 million service members** and their families since 2005. A large part of **MAP** is the Adopt-a-Unit program, providing **VFW Posts** and their Auxiliaries

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 and Auxiliary has to offer for not only our veterans and active-duty personnel – but their families as well. The Military Assistance Program allows VFW and Auxiliaries to apply for grants to assist with send-offs, homecomings and get-togethers for adopted Units. Both the **MAP** and the **Adopt-A-Unit** application must be filed online.

Slide 5: Unmet Needs was established in 2004, and has provided over **\$10.5 million dollars** in emergency assistance grants to nearly **9,000** qualified veterans and military families. Unmet Needs provides grants in the amount up to \$1,500.00 for basic life needs. Applicants must be the service member, veteran or eligible dependent listed under the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System.

Eligibility for the grant must fall in one of the following three categories:

- A. The Applicant must be currently on active duty - whose financial hardship is a result of a current deployment, military pay error **or** from being discharged for medical reasons.
- B. Second - The Applicant may have been discharged **after** September 11, 2001, and have a financial hardship that is a direct result of military connected service injuries and/or illness.
- C. And last - The Applicant may have been discharged **prior** to September 11, 2001 and be on a fixed income, that must include VA compensation for service connected injuries and/or illnesses **and** who are facing an unexpected financial hardship.

Applications must be filed online through the VFW website and can take up to 20 days to be processed. If approved, funds are issued directly to the creditor. Basic life needs include:

- Household expenses (mortgage, rent, repairs, insurance)
- Vehicle expenses (payments, repairs, insurance)
- Utilities (primary phone and other utilities)
- Food (formula and other food)
- Clothing (children's clothing, diapers)
- And medical expenses (bills, prescriptions, eyeglasses – the patient's portion for necessary or emergency medical care only).

Slide 6: In 2013, Sport's Clips launched the VFW's "**Sports Clips Help A Hero Scholarship.**" These scholarships support service members and veterans as they work to get the education and training needed to begin the next chapter in their lives. Applicants must be citizens of the United States. Be retired, honorably discharged, active duty, or a member of the National Guard or Reserve. They must have completed Basic Training and follow-on training. Have a military pay grade of E-5 or below, and demonstrate a need for financial assistance. Applications are accepted August 1 through November 15th for the spring semester and January 1 through April 30 for the fall semester. Applicants may apply once per academic semester, regardless of prior award or denial and must be filed online through the VFW website. Scholarships are awarded up to \$5,000.00 and are administered directly to the schools.

Slide 7: **National Veterans Service** consists of a nationwide network of VFW Accredited Service Officers and Pre-Discharge Representatives who are experts in dealing with the VA. In 2022, Service Officers were able to help our veterans and eligible family members recoup more than **11.2 billion dollars** in benefits! This program helps veterans, active-duty service members and their families obtain the benefits they deserve,

at no cost to them, by pairing them with a Service Officer. Service Officers are able to assist with filing claims for:

- Disability
- Rehabilitation and education
- Pension programs & death benefits and
- Employment & training programs

They also help navigate the VA System and ensure that our veterans receive:

- Hospital care
- Outpatient care
- Specialized healthcare for female veterans
- Alcohol and drug dependency treatment and

Medical evaluation, for disorders associated with military service, exposure to Agent Orange, radiation or other environmental hazards.

Slide 8: In the United States, suicide is the 12th leading cause of death and it's estimated that one individual loses their life by suicide every 11 minutes. September is National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month, which encourages organizations to come together to spread awareness about suicide prevention and to advocate for mental health legislation. With **1.6 million members**, the VFW and its Auxiliary are able to *band together* with other organizations such as the Elizabeth Dole Foundation and Give an Hour, to raise awareness and foster community engagement to change the stigma surrounding mental health. Many veterans returning home do so with heavy hearts and minds – and it's important that we know the warning signs so that if we recognize that someone in our life is suffering, we are able to encourage them to reach out and get the help that they need. We need to be proactive in looking after our heroes because **one veteran lost to suicide is one veteran too many!** The National organization has provided us with resources to utilize in

promoting advocacy for **suicide prevention and mental health awareness** such as the blue teardrop stickers and pins as well as the Veterans Crisis Line posters. There are resource rack cards available too that have 20 different resources for veterans, active-duty military and their families as well as know the 5 signs cards.

Slide 9: I was once asked by a co-worker, where my passion for our veterans comes from. I told her that **I think about people like my dad** who served during Desert Storm, **my grandpa** who served during the Korean War, **my cousin** who served during Vietnam and **so many other friends** that have served and are still serving our country. I think about all the men and women I've never met who put their lives on the line **every day** to protect me and my freedoms. And while it seems so insignificant to me – my time is all I have to offer.

Slide 10: It's **up to each of us** to honor our veterans' service to this great nation, and the easiest way to do that is by giving your time. All of us *banding together for our veterans* will fight for their rights and offer the support and encouragement that is needed not only to them – but to our active-duty military and their families as well.

“The greatest gift you can give someone is your time because when you give your time, you are giving a portion of your life that you will never get back.” –unknown Thank you.