



# Military Family Programs

Our nation's military families face unprecedented stressors, not the least of which is repeated, extended deployments of their loved ones to hostile zones far away from home, friends and family. When loved ones return home, there may be new challenges to face as the family reconnects and regroups. The USO has made a commitment to provide best-in-class programs and services to help them lead strong family lives today, tomorrow and in the future. Today's USO is - *always by their side*- meeting the needs of our troops and families in new and imaginative ways.

In today's active duty force, 54% of our troops are married and 44% have children. Of more than 1.2 million children with a parent in the United States military, there are 220,000 children who have a parent deployed and many have endured the stresses of multiple deployments. With thousands of troops returning home with visible and invisible wounds of wars, our nation's military children face the added challenge of coping with the "new normal"—life with a parent returning home "different." Some military families are struggling with the ultimate sacrifice and the grief accompanying the loss of a family member. Whether they are worrying about a loved one in harm's way or facing the unthinkable - the USO is by their side.

The USO has the **scope, scale, presence** and **reach** unlike any other organization in the world. We have the **knowledge** earned through millions of face-to-face contacts to inform our decisions about how to make a real difference in their lives. A 2012 USO survey of active duty troops and family members showed that 93% are satisfied with USO programs and services and 94% perceive these programs as valuable.

With more than 72 years of delivering on our promise, the USO has earned the **trust** of troops and military families everywhere. Our mission remains, "To lift the spirits of America's troops and their families." While this has not changed, the USO has continually adapted to meet their changing needs.

The USO engages valuable resources and partner organizations to create a comprehensive array of programs and facilities with the scale that is unmatched. USO military family programs and services offered worldwide are how America says "thank you" to our military families.

**More than 160 USO locations worldwide** –The USO provides programs, entertainment and services at more than 160 USO locations worldwide, including Afghanistan, Kuwait, UAE, Germany, Italy, Japan, Guam, South Korea and the United States. In 2012, military family members told the USO that one the programs of greatest importance and highest use are our USO Centers worldwide. In fact, last year the USO delivered 1,861 family events to more than 425,000 military family members through our USO Centers.

In 2012, troops and their families visited USO Centers nearly 9 million times; approximately 1 million of those visits were made by military family members. Some of the families visit centers to participate in a wide range of events from special family-focused programming, events designed to help strengthen families as well as fun opportunities that build strong families.

Some of the special programs and services offered at USO locations:

Family strengthening programs at USO Centers stateside:

Bestselling author and speaker Trevor Romain uses humor to help military children and teens cope with serious issues such as deployment, reintegration and when a parent returns home from war with invisible and/or visible wounds.

Sometimes family strengthening comes in a way you least expect – like a prom dress for a military child. In 2012, USO Metropolitan New York and USO Fort Campbell worked together to help teenage girls from Fort Campbell have the chance to enjoy a free shopping spree to find a special prom gown, thanks to "Operation: That's My Dress," created by the USO and made possible with the generosity of international stylist and designer Sherri Hill. Miss USA and Miss Teen USA pageant winners helped the teens pick out dresses, while hair and makeup pros taught styling tricks for their big night.

With an average of nearly two family members per service member assigned to the installation, USO Fort Hood puts tremendous effort into supporting families. One of their most popular programs is created just for children up to 4 years old. "Story Time" features a special guest who reads a story to the mothers and children, who also have books in hand to follow along. After the story, the children have an activity and socialization time. Fort Hood also sponsors family events such as "Movies on the Lawn" night and United Through Reading® events.

Services that connect military families:

Unfortunately some of our troops can't be home for the births of their children. Because of USO's investment in technology, we arrange Skype connections at bases around the world to bring deployed fathers into the delivery room. The USO offers troops a reliable connection and a private area to connect with their loved ones back home in order to share that special moment.

In 2012, the USO connected families with more than 3 million free phone calls and millions of emails from Afghanistan and Kuwait through Operation Phone Home®. Those 3 million phone calls from the frontlines used 28 million minutes of talk time. In Southwest Asia, connectivity is the number one reason troops visit our centers. Operation Phone Home® continues to be one of the most requested services by deployed troops and military families.

Support to Families of the Fallen:

The USO helps families of the fallen cope with their grief, provides respite and solace to families and provides continued support and comfort once they return home. Working together, the USO creates a web of support for those families coming to Dover to witness the return of their loved ones. Staff and volunteers personally escort family members through the maze of an unfamiliar airport. The USO offers families travel assistance, supports the families' on-site needs, and introduces them to special programs to help cope with their grief when they return home. The USO's commitment to troops and their families through every part of their service remains strong during these difficult times. Since the USO first began supporting

families of the fallen, thousands of family members have been comforted by the USO staff and volunteers every step of the way. In 2012, the USO was there for more than 3,000 family members, attending 310 dignified transfers at Dover last year.

**USO Warrior and Family Centers** – The USO has made significant progress in the construction of our two new USO Warrior and Family Centers. On February 5<sup>th</sup> of this year we opened the doors to our largest USO Center, the USO Warrior and Family Center at Fort Belvoir, with more than 22,000 square feet dedicated to serving our nation’s wounded, ill and injured troops, their families and caregivers as well as the active duty and military families of Fort Belvoir. On November 7, 2012, we broke ground on our second USO Warrior and Family Center located at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. These centers will offer a comprehensive array of specialized services and programs in a supportive and home-like setting including movie theaters, classrooms, sports lounges, business centers, healing gardens and more, created expressly for our nation’s healing heroes and their families.

**Operation Phone Home**<sup>®</sup> – Operation Phone Home<sup>®</sup> is one of the most frequently requested services from our forward deployed troops and one of the highest used programs according to military families. At our centers located in combat zones, the USO provides a private phone network for troops to make free phone calls home, access to computers with free high speed internet bandwidth to connect with friends and family, as well as free wireless Internet access for troops with their own computers. For those forward deployed troops serving in remote areas without access to our centers, the USO provides free international pre-paid calling cards. In 2012, the USO shipped phone cards to more than 300 locations around the globe. To date the USO has provided more than 3 million free pre-paid international calling cards to troops stationed overseas.

**The Little CHAMPS** – Military children move an average of 6-9 times between Kindergarten and 12th grade, usually attending multiple schools during that time. In an effort to support these children and honor the sacrifices they make, the USO supports the book “The Little CHAMPS: Child Heroes Attached to Military Personnel” by mother-daughter authors Debbie and Jennifer Fink. The five “CHAMPS” endure issues common to life as a military child from deployment to when a parent returns home wounded. The book concludes with lyrics for “The Little CHAMPS” song reminding children that “goodbyes are not forever.” In 2012, the USO provided copies of the book to USO Centers around the globe and brought the authors to military installations to perform the song and talk about the book’s themes with children and educators. In April, the USO and Debbie Fink will bring messages of hope and support to military children living in the Pacific with “The Little CHAMPS” tour.

**Sesame Street/USO Experience for Military Families** – *The Sesame Street/USO Experience for Military Families* made its debut in July 2008, to help families deal with the challenges of deployment and homecomings. Since its inception, the tour has taken its message to more than 368,000 troops and military families and performed 631 shows on 145 military installations in 33 states and 11 countries. Additionally, the tour has logged more than 122,000 miles and distributed more than 2 million giveaways. In April 2012, the tour kicked off its eight-month adventure across the U.S. at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois complete with a colorful new tour bus, fresh new look and a brand new character named Katie – a military child experiencing the stresses of moving as her parents are transferred to a new duty station. The longest-running tour in USO history, the show visited 67 military installations and performed 204 shows. This year, the *Sesame Street/USO Experience for Military Families* will once again be hitting the road to visit 45 installations in 8 countries in the

Europe and Pacific regions. In addition to tour stops around the world, through our partnership with Sesame Workshop, the USO supports military families by providing tools to help them adapt to many of life's challenges. We offer two sets of DVDs: *When Families Grieve* and *Little Children, Big Challenges: Divorce* already distributing more than 2,800 copies this year to USO Centers worldwide.

**USO/With You All The Way** –USO partners with The Trevor Romain Company and the Comfort Crew for Military Kids (CCMK) to promote self confidence and resiliency in military children six to 18 years old. Military families tell us about the power and impact Trevor has in helping military children tackle bullying in schools, adjust to life during and post-deployment, and coping when a parent makes the ultimate sacrifice. Using innovative, inspiring and humorous stories, Trevor has spoken with thousands of children about the difficulties military kids face during his many USO tours. In 2012 Trevor and his crew embarked on a multi-city international *With You All the Way* tour with presentations to thousands of military children living throughout the Pacific and European regions. This year he will deliver his messages of hope and support to military children stateside. As a compliment to his USO tours, Trevor has created a series of helpful kits that include DVDs, journals, resource books and other elements to help families cope with deployment, reintegration and what happens when a parent returns home with wounds, both seen and unseen. These deployment and Taking Care of You kits are distributed following every performance and also available through our USO Centers around the globe.

Trevor also lends his time to speak with military parents at USO events such as the USO Caregivers Conferences supporting those spouses and caregivers who care for a wounded, ill or injured soldier. He also participates in USO/TAPS Good Grief Camps and Survivor Seminars supporting those military families who have lost a loved one. The Trevor Romain Memory Boxes, delivered to families who have experienced loss, help bring some comfort and understanding to their new lives without Mom or Dad. In a recent survey conducted among active duty military and their dependents, Trevor Romain and the *With You All the Way* program ranked as one of the highest valued programs supporting our nation's military families.

**United Through Reading's Military Program** – USO joined United Through Reading® in 2006 to host the Military Program. Using all the emotion and inflection as if they were in the same room with their children, troops visiting a USO Center around the world and as far away as a Forward Operating Base in Afghanistan read one of many available storybooks while being recorded by a video camera. The USO mails the DVD recording and book home. Children then watch Mom or Dad and listen to their loving voice at bedtime, naptime, or anytime. Families back home then complete the United Through Reading® Circle of Communication by sending back a touch of home – a photo of the child watching their deployed Mom or Dad reading the book. Since the program's inception, the USO has shipped more than 254,000 recordings. Last year, more than 43,000 recordings and books were mailed to military families worldwide.

**'Joining Forces'** – The USO partners with the White House *Joining Forces* initiative to strengthen military families around the world. *Joining Forces* focuses on three key issues facing military families – education, employment and wellness. Last year, the USO worked with First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden on two events supporting our military families. In May, they hosted Congressional spouses to create Mother's Day gift boxes with the USO and nonprofit Full Circle Home. These gifts were filled with pampering products, gift cards and most importantly, a love note from their deployed troop. The USO shipped the boxes in time to surprise the women on Mother's Day. In June, Dr. Jill Biden introduced her new children's book "Don't Forget, God Bless Our Troops" to

military families of the DC National Guard at a USO book reading. The book, which was inspired by Dr. Biden's granddaughter Natalie's personal deployment experience, offers coping mechanisms, ideas on how to stay connected through lengthy deployments and lets military kids know that they are not alone. The USO supports the annual *Salute to the Military USO Concert* on July 4<sup>th</sup> hosted by President and Mrs. Obama featuring USO tour veterans who performs for military families on the South Lawn of the White House. The event includes a picnic and festive games, serving as a tribute to America's military families.

**USO/Hire Heroes of USA Transition Workshops and Career Opportunity Days** – The USO, in partnership with Hire Heroes USA, hosts transitions workshops for wounded, ill and injured service members, their spouses and caregivers. The workshops focus on resume writing, mock interviews, professional work practices and translating prior military experience into a civilian career. As a follow up to the workshops, the USO, in partnership with Hire Heroes USA, hosts Career Opportunity Days for wounded, ill and injured troops, spouses and caregivers. These non-traditional career transition events connect employers with participants based on interest and background. Employers are pre-matched to conduct practice interviews and provide feedback to these men and women who, in many cases, have never participated in a civilian interview. Career Opportunity Days are limited to 10-15 employers and 40-60 wounded, ill and injured transitioning troops and veterans, as well as their spouses and caregivers, to ensure these events provide an environment conducive to one-on-one interaction and networking. In 2013, the USO plans to support 67 workshops and 18 Career Opportunity Days expanding to more than two dozen locations. The USO will also pilot the delivery of these events to non-wounded troops and families transitioning to the civilian workforce.

#### **USO Support of Caregivers:**

**USO Caregivers Conferences** – Caregivers Conferences provide *caregivers* (husbands, wives, parents, hospital staff and other family members supporting wounded, ill or injured troops) practical advice and valuable information about available resources. Sessions address such topics as post-traumatic stress, caregiver boundaries and intimacy, compassion fatigue, parenting, childhood grief and caregiver resiliency. The first Caregivers Conference of 2013 was held in February at Camp Pendleton in collaboration with the U.S. Marine Corps Wounded Warrior Battalion—West. More than 100 caregivers attended the event and spoke candidly about the issues they face seeking advice from subject matter experts and fellow caregivers. Two additional conferences will be held in 2013.

**USO/Easter Seals Caregiver Resiliency Curriculum** – These intimate workshops address the two medical conditions that have the most impact on service members behavior - traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress (PTS). During the workshop, caregivers explore the causes of TBI and PTS, explore resources and outline strategies to help caregivers better communicate with their service member and improve the quality of life.

**Stronger Families Oxygen Seminars** – The USO works with Stronger Families to bring the Oxygen Seminar to military couples to help them strengthen their relationship while working on tough issues in a fun and nonthreatening environment. Couples learn to improve their communication, better understand each other's needs, resolve conflict, rekindle romance and find renewed hope. In 2012, the USO hosted 11 USO Oxygen Seminars from California to the D.C. Metro area. In 2013, USO will collaborate with the Army Warrior Transition Command's Chaplain Corps to deliver the program to Warrior Transition Units across the nation.

**Family Strengthening Camps** – Partnerships with best-in-class organizations like the National Military Family Association, the Armed Services YMCA, and the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, afford the USO the opportunity to provide our nation’s healing heroes and their families, as well as families of the fallen with the chance to reconnect, reintegrate and rejuvenate. The camps offer specific programming uniquely geared to the challenges our military families face. For example, camps create opportunities for children to meet other children whose parents have sustained a wound, illness or injury. Families leave these events with the tools they need to help them adapt to challenges and keep their families strong and together.

**USO and Project Sanctuary** – One of the USO’s newest partners is a result of USO’s participation in the 2012 Joining Forces Community Challenge. Project Sanctuary, one of six winners, exemplifies the innovative ways Americans have stepped up to support and honor our military families. Active duty, veteran and wounded warrior families participate in six-day therapeutic retreats in the mountains of Colorado. The focus is on supporting the family as a unit. The retreats utilize therapeutic recreation as a way to reconnect and reintegrate along with sessions in “healthy marriages” and “finance.” The success of the retreat reinforces the USO’s belief that healing takes time and requires the family to be together in a comfortable environment. Those activities include horseback riding, hiking, fishing, snow skiing, art and; all sessions carry a therapeutic component tailored to each individual’s physical and emotional needs. This year the USO will support nearly a dozen retreats.

**TAPS Good Grief Camps and Spouse Seminars** – Good Grief Camps provide children and teenagers with a safe and supportive atmosphere to participate in activities, learn grief coping skills, establish and identify support systems, and create awareness that they are not alone in the grief of their loved one. In 2012, the USO in partnership with the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), hosted six Good Grief Camps and Spouse Seminars and 3 USO TAPS Kids Campouts supporting 1,135 family members.

**game on Nation** – The USO and game on Nation work together to provide resiliency support for medical providers, spouses and caregivers that are often the silent heroes that assist our recovering service members and families of the fallen. Through the use of improvisation and laughter, game on Nation facilitates half-day trainings for various military units.

**RenovatingHope** – The USO recently launched a new program in partnership with the nonprofit organization RenovatingHope. Through this collaboration, the USO will support recently discharged wounded, ill and injured troops and their families by providing basic housing rehabilitation services. The troops are referred directly from military installation commands and are identified as having an immediate need, are physically unable to make the repairs themselves, and/or do not have sufficient income to hire qualified contractors to complete the work.

**Military Family Care Package** – The USO makes it possible for a deploying troop to send a care package to a loved one back home. This small token of thanks contains items and gift cards targeting the needs of military families while their loved one is deployed. These packages are intended to be shipped to the families shortly after the deployment. The Military Family Care Package includes: a deployment journal to provide a way of recording thoughts, reflections or events that take place

while the service member is away, a disposable camera, photo frame, yellow ribbon magnet, military family bumper sticker and coupons and discounts at national retailers.

**USO Photo Book Program** – Through a partnership with RocketLife LLC, families upload up to 60 photos and create free personal soft cover photo books small enough to fit in a cargo pocket. These 20-page albums are sent to the deployed troop, keeping them connected to their loved ones back home. In a recent USO survey of active duty military and their families, the USO Photo Book program was rated as one of the most highly valued programs supporting our nation’s military families. Families noted the convenience and portability of the book made it an easy way to stay connected when separated by deployment.

**TellUSO Survey** – Since 2009, the USO has engaged TARP Worldwide, an independent, third party customer experience research organization, to conduct the “TellUSO Sound Off Survey.” The survey provides the USO with valuable data about what troops and their families really want and need from the USO and how well we are delivering it. The online survey opens for a month-long period during the fall and is conducted among active duty military and their families. TellUSO Survey data helps the USO make informed decisions regarding resource allocation and organizational scope and direction.

Thousands of family members from around the world participated in the 2012 survey. Family member results include:

- **AWARENESS AND USAGE OF USO SERVICES.** The survey measures awareness and usage of 16 USO programs and services, some broadly available (i.e. Centers) and some relevant only to those on the front lines (i.e. USO2GO).
  - Family members are aware of an average of 8.9 USO services (vs. their troops being aware of an average of 9.3 USO services). Put another way: family members are capable of telling anyone about more than half of what the USO provides.
  - Family members use an average of 3.0 services. Those on the active duty use an average of 4.3 services.
  - Both average awareness and usage levels of USO programs are up significantly from 2011 among family members, suggesting USO programming is becoming increasingly important to family members. More specifically, in 2012, family members’ awareness of 9 of 16 programs increased significantly over 2011 findings.
  - The programs of highest use are Centers, Free Phone Calls, and Entertainment Events.
  - United Through Reading is one of the most valued programs among family members and troops (77% and 82% “Extremely Valuable,” respectively).
  - Photo Books are very well received among family members and troops. This program receives the highest ratings of all 16 programs (82% “Very Satisfied” and 84% “Extremely Valuable”) among family members.
- **SATISFACTION.** Family members tell the USO that they are very satisfied – across all programs used by family members (and Active Duty).
  - Three out four family members are very satisfied.
  - Some of the highest rated USO services by family members include centers, phone calls and photo books.

- **USO VALUE:** Family members highly value USO services. When presented with a series of objective questions about “USO Value:”
  - 89% of family members “Totally Agree” that the USO boosts the morale of the troops.
  - 85% of family members are recommending USO services to others.

It is clear that military families appreciate USO programs and services:

*“The most valuable to me as a spouse is that the USO has helped to keep my husband’s morale high and offers free services that are beneficial to our family. When traveling, it is always nice to know that there is a USO available to support our military and families.”*

*“Knowing that if my son needed your help at any time, you would be there, taking care of him before I could get there to take care of him gives me peace of mind.”*

*“Absolutely loved the United Through Reading program when my husband was deployed the last few times. The kids were SO EXCITED every time a new DVD and book showed up in the mail. They would grab their pillows and blankets and lay in front of the TV “reading” with my husband.”*

*“I am still discovering the many things the USO has to offer. My favorite experience so far has been with the free Photo Book through RocketLife.”*

*“I was able to make and send my husband a photo book from the USO. When he was wounded and could only have a small bag with the necessities, he asked them to pack his photo book of our family.”*