



## Military Family Programs

Our nation's military families face unprecedented stressors, not the least of which are repeated, extended deployments of their loved ones to hostile locations far 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 is committed to providing 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 U.S. military, 220,000 have a parent deployed and many have endured the stresses of multiple deployments. With thousands of troops returning home with visible and invisible wounds 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." And the USO is continually adapting 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 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 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 including special family-focused programming and fun opportunities that build strong families.

Each center looks carefully at the needs of the troops and families they serve, creating specific events and programs tailored to their regions. For example:

The USO of North Carolina hosts educational seminars focused on reading and studying skills for elementary and middle school-aged military children and their parents. These seminars have been developed by the state coordinator of the North Carolina Reading Association and are instructed by experienced educators from across the state. Three seminars are offered and held concurrently: one designed for elementary school children and their parents, one for middle school children, and another focused on good study habits for the parents of middle school children. These seminars offer critical insights on topics such as questioning techniques that will make the most out of reading, and how to assess and use a particular learning style to enhance studying skills.

*"I know this was for my daughter but it gave me more desire for myself to do more with my children as well as for me to increase my reading." - Fort Bragg Parent*

USO Family Free Game Night in Missouri: The event is designed to bring military families together to create stronger bonds between parents and children. Military families leave the electronics at home to ensure quality time by participating in fun family activities that enhance their quality of life. Some of the monthly activities are old-fashioned board games that provide the opportunity for family involvement. There's also a craft corner and face painting. All of the events at the Military Family Game Nights require family participation.

These activities are scheduled for the fourth Friday of each month, which falls right before the military payday and helps stretch the family budget. Many come, because it's expensive to take their entire family out to dinner. At the USO, it's a complete, worry free zone for the military family.

Quotes:

*"Thank you for having these family game nights each month. We look forward to them and appreciate everyone who works so hard to make these events happen." - Laura Gaskins*

*"Thank you' doesn't express what the USO did for my family tonight. Great event, great people, great idea! Thank you for showing us how to play again and connect with our children at a different level, they are already asking when the next game night will be! We will be at Wal-Mart tomorrow to buy some board games to play in between game nights!" - SFC Anderson*

*"Had a wonderful time with my family tonight! Thank you so much for the opportunity!"  
- S.Utykanski*

*"Thank you for having this event where I can spend time with my family prior to my deployment. Means a lot." - PVT Kissel*

Family strengthening programs at USO centers stateside:

*The With You All the Way!* program features award-winning author and motivational speaker Trevor Romain. 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 teen. In April, USO Metropolitan New York and USO Fort Hood worked together to help teenage girls from Fort Hood 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 Teen USA pageant winners helped the teens pick out dresses, while hair and makeup pros taught styling tricks for their big night. USO of Metropolitan New York worked with USO North Carolina on September 29<sup>th</sup> to support teens attending homecoming dances in the Camp Lejeune area this fall.

With hundreds of births recorded on the island each month, the USO launched a new program in August to support expectant military mothers in Okinawa. The USO and What to Expect presents Special Delivery hosted by popular *What to Expect* series author, Heidi Murkoff. The event features traditional baby shower fun including food, games and gifts for military moms-to-be as well as a question and answer session with Murkoff. The three Okinawa events marked the launch of the program and supported 300 expecting military spouses and active duty service women.

#### Services that connect military families:

Unfortunately, some of our troops can't be home for the births of their children. Through the 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 offers continued support and comfort once they return home. The USO creates a web of support for those families coming to Dover Air Force Base, Del. 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 them cope with their grief. The USO's commitment to troops and 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. This year, our nation's military have experienced fewer wartime deaths than 2012, but the USO's work to support families of the fallen has increased with more than 700 missions supporting families enduring loss from cancer, accidents and other tragic incidents.

**USO Warrior and Family Centers** – In February we opened 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.

Our second USO Warrior and Family Center located at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md. will open in early 2014. Like Fort Belvoir, Bethesda 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®** – Operation Phone Home® 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, and 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.

**USO and What to Expect presents Special Delivery** – This summer the USO launched a new partnership with the What to Expect Foundation to host baby showers for military moms-to-be around the globe. The showers incorporate information from the best-selling “What to Expect” book series and feature traditional baby shower activities like games, food, and gifts. The shower events are hosted by author Heidi Murkoff in collaboration with a USO center and provide a touch of home for moms-to-be who are often away from their families, friends and support network when they are expecting. The August launch consisted of three events supporting 300 military spouses and active duty expecting mothers on the island of Okinawa, Japan. One additional stateside event is scheduled for later this year.

**The Little CHAMPS** – Military children move an average of six to nine 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 April, the USO and Debbie Fink brought these messages of hope and support to military children living in the Pacific with “The Little CHAMPS” tour. The tour made 25 presentations at 13 schools to more than 6,000 military children living in mainland Japan and Okinawa.

**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 384,000 troops and military families and performed 687 shows on 144 military installations in 33 states and 11 countries. Additionally, the tour has logged more than 143,465 miles and distributed more than 2.1 million giveaways. In May, the *Sesame Street/USO Experience for Military Families* hit the road again

and is currently touring the globe, this time to visit 47 installations in eight countries. 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 4,413 copies this year to USO centers worldwide.

**USO/With You All The Way** – USO partners with the Comfort Crew for Military Kids to send Trevor Romain on tour 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 2013, Trevor and his crew embarked on a multi-city *With You All the Way!* tour with presentations to military children living throughout the U.S. 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. This year more than 2,000 deployment, Taking Care of You, and Memory kits have been distributed following performances and also to USO centers around the globe.

Trevor also lends his time to speak with military parents at USO events such as the USO Caregivers Conference supporting those spouses and caregivers who care for a wounded, ill or injured service member. 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 its Military Program. Using all the emotion and inflection as if they were in the same room with their children, troops visiting a USO centers around the world as far away as a Forward Operating Base in Afghanistan read one of many available storybooks on 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 began, the USO has helped thousands of families stay connected during periods of separation and deployment.

**'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. The USO's support of this initiative has included; creating Mother's Day gift boxes with the Congressional spouses and book readings for military families stateside and in Germany featuring Dr. Jill Biden and her children's book "Don't Forget, God Bless Our Troops". The USO also supports the annual *Salute to the Military USO Concert* on July 4<sup>th</sup> hosted by President and Mrs. Obama featuring top tier entertainers who perform for military families on the South Lawn of the White House. The year's event featured pop group fun. and included 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 transition workshops for wounded, ill and injured troops, 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 and Hire Heroes USA host Career Opportunity Days for 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 job interview. Career Opportunity Days are limited to 10-15 employers and 40-60 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. This year, the USO hosted 48 workshops and 11 Career Opportunity Days expanding to more than two dozen locations. We also piloted the delivery of these events to non-wounded troops and families transitioning to the civilian workforce at six workshops and six Career Opportunity Days.

#### **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 post-traumatic stress disorder, 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 60 caregivers attended the event and subject matter experts spoke candidly about the issues they face as well as the availability of local resources. The next conference will be held October 18 in Norfolk, Va.

**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 disorder (PTSD). During the workshop, caregivers explore the causes of TBI and PTSD, 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. This year, 15 Oxygen Seminars have been held across the country including five seminars for wounded, ill and injured couples.

**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, give 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. The USO supported 24 camps so far this year

with several more scheduled throughout September.

**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 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 use 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. Activities include horseback riding, hiking, fishing, snow skiing and art. All sessions carry a therapeutic component tailored to each individual’s physical and emotional needs. This year, the USO has supported more than 30 families through this program and there are an additional two retreats scheduled for the remainder of 2013.

**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.

**game on Nation** – The USO and game on Nation are working together to provide resiliency support for wounded, ill and injured, medical providers, caregivers and mortuary affairs staff who are often the silent heroes who assist our recovering service members and families of the fallen and are beginning to include general active duty. Through the use of improvisation and laughter, game on Nation facilitates trainings for various military units and military impacted personnel. Upcoming game on Nation presentations will include USO Caregivers Conference; USO Fort Drum Resiliency Fair; and Regional Care Coordinators training for the Air Force.

**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.

**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 uniform’s cargo pocket. These 20-page albums are sent to deployed troops, 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 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 is conducted for a month each fall among active duty military and their families. TellUSO Survey data helps the USO make informed decisions regarding resource

allocation and organizational scope and direction. The 2013 survey runs September 3 through October 1.

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).
  - Family members use an average of 3 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. 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 recommend USO services to others.

It is clear that military families appreciate USO programs and services. Program participants share their feedback:

*"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 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.”*

*“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.”*