

JULIE

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It was a journey, let me tell you, and it wasn't always easy seeing my husband struggle.



Survivor of a Veteran

Moments that Matter

- Prepares for the end of life: Cares for their Veteran toward the end of their life
- Loved one passes away: Veteran passes from natural causes or service-connected illness
- Becomes aware of survivor benefits: May or may not become aware of the benefits they are owed

Relevant Insights from Research

- Outreach plays a key role in learning about benefits
- The process of applying for benefits can be challenging
- Survivors feel it is extremely helpful to have an informed and dedicated advocate to help them navigate acquiring benefits
- Veterans who prepare for their passing set up their Survivor(s) for a smoother process in applying for VA benefits

Engagement with VA or VSO



Experience

Julie had been taking care of her husband for the past seven years and is now a Survivor. Her husband was not involved in their local Veteran organizations and did not have end of life planning solidified. Julie and her children are now attempting to find documents and file paperwork so that they can apply for and hopefully receive support for the VA.

Challenges

I'm struggling to find all of the documents I need to even apply. Then the forms and navigating the computer is just overwhelming.

Questions

- Is it even worth me trying to apply for benefits?
- Is there someone who can help me with this?



MARIA

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Every day I think about what I could or should have done



HUNTER

“

I try to stay strong for my girls, some days it's harder than others



Survivor of a Veteran Death by Suicide

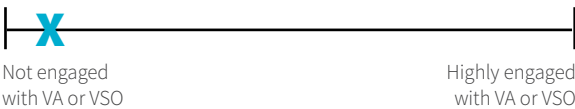
Moments that Matter

- Prepares for the end of life: Helps their loved one deal with mental health challenges such as depression and PTS
- Loved one passes away: Learns their loved one has taken their own life
- Becomes aware of survivor benefits: Benefits will vary based on the ability to determine service connection.

Relevant Insights from Research

- Outreach plays a key role in learning about benefits
- Survivors feel it is extremely helpful to have an informed and dedicated advocate to help them navigate acquiring benefits
- The process of applying for benefits can be challenging
- Not all service-connected suicides are well documented, making it harder for Survivors to acquire benefits

Engagement with VA or VSO



Experience

Maria’s husband died by suicide after he had returned home from his second deployment and left the military. Although Maria asked him to seek help, he never reported any depression or PTS formally to a doctor in or outside of the VA. She is having a difficult time financially and is unable to collect many Survivor benefits due to the lack of documented service connection to her husband’s death. In addition, Maria is feeling alienated from the Survivor community and feels like her experience is different than others. She has still not found the support and advocacy she feels she needs.

Challenges

I’m not sure we will be able to collect any benefits because he never sought help.

Questions

How can we prove that his passing was due to the trauma he endured in service?



Survivor of an Active Duty Servicemember

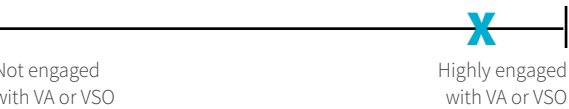
Moments that Matter

- Prepares for the end of life: Has worked with their Service Member to be prepared
- Loved one passes away: Casualty Assistance Officer and Chaplain inform next of kin in their home
- Becomes aware of survivor benefits: May have had been connected through a CAO with a VSO or other Veteran organization

Relevant Insights from Research

- Survivors feel it is extremely helpful to have an informed and dedicated advocate to help them navigate acquiring benefits
- The process of applying for benefits can be challenging

Engagement with VA or VSO



Experience

Hunter’s wife passed away in the line of duty. Hunter has been struggling to handle the funeral arrangements, understand financial considerations and try to be strong for his two girls. The CAO has been a huge help with logistics and understanding benefits. The support has been incredible helpful to Hunter and his family during this time.

Challenges

In addition to having to move off base away from my “military family,” I am struggling with how to process my own emotions and make sure my kids are okay.

Questions

- What benefit options will work best for me and my family?
- How can I help my kids to process their grief in a healthy way?

SECONDARY PERSONA PROFILES

Through the discovery phase, several groups with similar experiences and backgrounds emerged. These sub-personas illustrate a more granular depiction of the different types of Survivors. These personas are founded in the relationship between the Survivor to the Veteran or Active Duty Service Member.



PARENT SURVIVOR

“ I decided to raise money and have the track named after Brian. It took me 10 years but in September 2016 we awarded the town \$100,000 in Brian's memory and we had the track named after him.

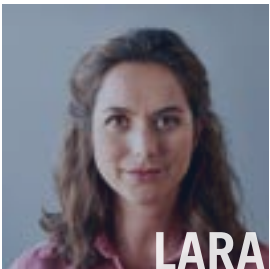
- I have been worried from the moment my son/daughter enlisted.
- I will honor and remember my son/daughter for many years, if not, the rest of my life. I don't think there are any benefits for me.



SIBLING SURVIVOR

“ I would share about the death – and someone would ask how's your mom, how's your dad...

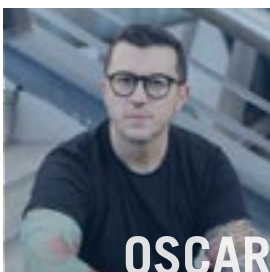
- People don't realize I am mourning the death of my sibling too.
- There is an expectation that I need to take care of everything, like the benefits, media, funeral, and emotional support.
- Years after my sibling died, I felt like I was competing with them for the affection of our parents.



CAREGIVER SURVIVOR

“ I had a hard time because I had a great career in marketing and fashion. Now I was in a role living on my husband's benefits. It was a very hard time for me. I never had someone take care of me.

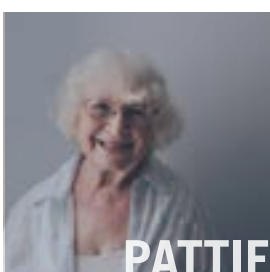
- Being a fulltime caregiver for my spouse wasn't an easy thing for me to admit, it didn't feel like a real job.
- I am strong but losing my spouse and raising three kids has been hard.
- My spouse was young and didn't know how to let someone care for him.



CHILD SURVIVOR

“ The 20 year mark was really hard for my family, it could be great for 20 years and then the 21st year comes along, and it could be really hard.

- I am there for my mom and I want to protect her.
- I watch my mom hold onto him, and I want to remember him... but I also want to move on.
- It's hard that they won't be there for celebrations like college graduation and weddings.



SPOUSE SURVIVOR

“ I'm so thankful for the benefits my husband earned for me.

- I was married to my husband for 52 years and was taking care of him for the past seven.
- I'm having a hard time finding all the papers I need. My son is going to help me apply with the VA.
- Even if I do find the papers everything on the forms is so confusing.