

News and information from the nation's oldest community-based nonprofit organization serving veterans and their families.

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## A Message From the Executive Director

Dear Friends:

The last 18 years mark the longest period in our nation's history that we've been at war. And for the first time ever, our children are fighting the same war their parents fought. Sadly, our involvement in the Middle East conflicts has lasted so long that many Americans don't even remember we're still at war. To make matters worse, we're fighting these wars on multiple fronts on the other side of the globe with the smallest fighting force in history. The result? Today's men and women are spending years in a combat zone. They're separated from families, they live in a prolonged state of hypervigilance, and they wrestle with moral injury. Our service members sacrifice their comforts, health, and even their lives over and over again. So, it comes as no surprise that the impact of military service on individuals and their families is often chronic stress, sometimes exacerbated by PTSD, depression, traumatic brain injury, and other conditions prevalent among returning veterans. Many veterans become homeless due to mental health or substance abuse issues, and many more threaten or attempt suicide.

In 2019, the Department of Veterans Affairs published a study entitled, "National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report." Several noteworthy and distressing statistics were cited in this report, including the following:

- The number of veteran suicide deaths per year increased from 5,787 in 2005 to 6,139 in 2017.
- The annual number of veteran suicide deaths has exceeded 6,000 since 2008.
- Between 2005 and 2017, the female veteran population increased by 6.5%, but sadly, their rates of suicide climbed as well.
- By 2017, female veterans were 2.2 times more likely to die by suicide than non-veteran women.
- The 2017 rate of suicide among male veterans was 1.3 times higher than the rate among non-veterans.

This information is not only staggering, it is unacceptable. Veterans Outreach Center is committed to doing our part to combat this epidemic for all veterans. In addition, as the number of female veterans and their suicide rates increase, we continue to focus on and hone our services

for female veterans. And here's what all of this looks like:

In September of 2019, we hired a Director of Risk Management to spearhead the veteran suicide awareness/prevention initiative. He has been hard at work coordinating trainings for VOC staff and community partners alike so that we all have the tools needed to support our veterans in crisis. He's also developed internal processes for VOC staff and volunteers, raised awareness with public campaigns, and begun cross-collaborative efforts with organizations in the law enforcement/mental health communities. We've implemented a new female veteran group called Woman to Woman, in which female veterans can come together, develop friendships, and talk about the issues that are important to them. This peer support program is tailored specifically to female veterans, and it's an important complement to the work our Female Veteran case managers have been doing over the last two years.

Veterans Outreach Center has been serving vets for more than 47 years. We have maintained a host of programming that we KNOW works, including employment and training services, emergency and transitional housing programs, onsite VA benefits assistance, case management of the Veterans Treatment Court, budget counseling, legal assistance, and much more. But we know we also have to add new services as well in order to remain relevant for every veteran who walks through our doors. So last year, we asked our veterans what else they needed. And we've been delivering on those needs over the last 12 months. We're proud to now offer chiropractic care, massage therapy, barbershop/salon services, onsite laundry, Reiki, hydromassage, and therapeutic art groups—all free of charge—through our brand new Morale Center.

Veterans Outreach Center is an anchor in the Rochester Community for ALL who have worn their nation's uniform. As we embark on a new decade full of promise, VOC is keeping our promise to America's defenders. We welcome all of our friends to join us in these efforts!

Sincerely,

*Laura A. Stradley*

Laura Stradley  
Executive Director  
Veterans Outreach Center  
U.S. Army Veteran

# FINDING HOME

## *Again*

Mary had made her decision. It wasn't an easy one, but she knew it was the right thing to do. After nine years of abuse from her husband and the father of her two children, enough was enough. She would no longer stick around for the beatings and threats in front of her kids. She would no longer come home to find the computer and kids' toys gone from the house—sold to buy drugs. Her husband would vanish for days, only to return home and start the abusive cycle all over again.

Mary gathered up important papers, packed snacks in a backpack for the kids, and bought three bus tickets. She fled her home in Texas with her children and headed for Rochester, NY. This was their chance to finally be safe.

When Mary and her kids arrived in Rochester, they came to Veterans Outreach Center with only the clothing on their backs. Though she received disability compensation following service in the Air Force and was trained as a nurse, she needed food, clothing, and a place for she and the children to live.

VOC immediately took action. Through our Quartermaster, we supplied Mary and her kids with food, blankets, dishes, sneakers, and food. From there, our Case Management team contacted a landlord and applied for a grant to secure first month's rent and a security deposit. Within six days the landlord was paid and Mary and her children had a place to live.

The day after Mary moved into her new apartment, we found a donor who kindly provided furnishings for her new home, including a sofa, bed, coffee tables, three lamps, and a television. Next, our partners at the VA provided a "new apartment package," which included mops, a broom, two air mattresses, sheets, a garbage can, cleaning supplies, and pots and pans.

Just days after arriving in Rochester, Mary and her kids had a safe and secure home away from all of the abuse. They changed their phone number, began attending therapy, and started the road to recovery. Mary knew she was a fighter and a survivor from her years serving in the U.S. Military. With the support of her new friends at Veterans Outreach Center, she and her children finally had peace, healing, and healthy opportunities in their future.

### Helping Veterans Like Mary

In 2019 we:



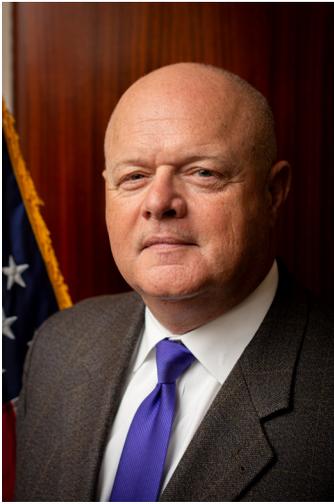
Served 224 Female Veterans



Helped 550 Veterans Find Housing



Provided Food, Clothing, & Supplies 1072 Times



## Veterans Outreach Center Hires Director of Risk Management

*Takes the Veteran Suicide Crisis Head On*

Chris Durkin, MPA, CEM, MEP(c) started at Veterans Outreach Center in late 2019 with the task of spearheading VOC's efforts to combat the veteran suicide epidemic.

Chris is an International Association of Emergency Managers (IAEM) Certified Emergency Manager (CEM) and soon to be a Master Exercise Practitioner (MEP). He is a retired 23-year combat veteran of the United States Marine Corps and later of the United States Army, where he accumulated over 3,000 flight hours as a special operations Blackhawk helicopter instructor pilot and flight lead.

Chris performed duties as the Information Technology Site Director in support of East Coast U.S. Navy S.E.A.L. operations and later moved to Rochester, NY and became the Monroe County Health Department Strategic National Stockpile Coordinator, responsible for developing and implementing a strategy to receive medication and supplies from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and overseeing the distribution of medication to the entire county population (735,000). He later performed the same role for the District of Columbia and Washington, D.C., population of over 1,000,000 residents and commuters. Following his support to Washington, DC, he worked in the private sector as a senior consultant specializing in traditional and public health emergency management activities for public and private sector organizations.

Chris is also President and Chief Executive Officer of Blackhawk Emergency Management Group.

Chris holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Professional Aeronautics and a Master of Public Administration from the State University of New York (SUNY). He is a member of the SUNY Brockport Master of Public Administration Advisory Board, Veterans Business Council and the New York State Emergency Management Association. He resides in Farmington, NY.

Currently, Chris is coordinating a series of ASIST workshops, which train caregivers in the necessary skills to identify and de-escalate someone who is considering suicide. For more information about these workshops, please call 585.546.1081.



## VOC Welcomes New Board Chair

Please join us in welcoming our new Board Chair, Ellen Adams, Maj, USAF, Retired.

Ellen served on our Board of Directors in 2019 and was the Stars & Stripes Committee Chair. She was a Contracting Officer in the U.S. Air Force and is a combat veteran after deploying to Baghdad, Iraq in 2004. Ellen was commissioned through the ROTC program at St. Michael's College in Winooski, VT and holds an MBA from Northeastern University in Boston, MA. Ellen grew up in Littleton, NH and currently lives in Webster, NY with her husband Dan Adams. She is Owner and Chef at Red Hot Dish.

## How You Can Support VOC & Veterans

- [Donate Online: vocroc.org/donate](https://vocroc.org/donate)
- [Host a Facebook Fundraiser](#) in support of Veterans Outreach Center
- [United Way Designation: #1119](#)



## We Remember. We Honor. We Celebrate. A Stars & Stripes Celebration 2019

Veterans Outreach Center hosted its annual Stars & Stripes Celebration Friday, Nov. 8, 2019 at the Rochester Riverside Convention Center. The event included the 198th Army Jazz Band during the cocktail hour, a tribute to the men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of our nation, a testimonial video with Adrian Hale (U.S. Marine and Air Force veteran), and dinner and dancing featuring local band Nik Lite.

About 600 supporters from all across Rochester came out to support Veterans Outreach Center and to honor the brave men and women who raised their hands and vowed to defend our country, our people, and our freedoms. Information and registration for A Stars & Stripes Celebration 2020 can be found at [vocroc.org](http://vocroc.org).

## Healing Beyond the Exterior - Free Reiki For Vets

Reiki is a form of alternative medicine called energy healing. A “universal energy” is said to be transferred through the palms of the practitioner to the patient in order to encourage emotional or physical healing.

Reiki Services are performed at our Morale Center by Reiki Master Illienne Martin, RMT, MSEd from Ki Harmony & Wellness - Reiki. Services are available every 2nd and 4th Tuesday from 3:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Veterans can make an appointment by calling 585.546.1081.



## Shop Local. Support Vets.

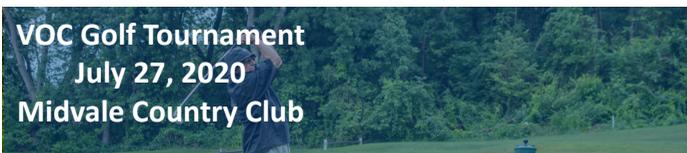
The Stars & Stripes Flag Store has everything you need to show off your patriotism! From mugs to shirts to pet collars and 100% American-made flags, there’s something for everyone! What’s more, 100% of the proceeds benefit veterans at Veterans Outreach Center.

Stars & Stripes Flag Store  
455 South Ave.  
Rochester, NY 14620  
Monday - Friday  
10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

We’re always open at  
[eflagstore.com](http://eflagstore.com)



## Save the Date 2020



### Mission:

Our mission is to serve veterans with compassion and advocate for all who have worn our nation’s uniform so they can RISE and live life to the fullest.

For more information about our special events, contact Kim Osur at 585.295.7824, [Kim.Osur@vocroc.org](mailto:Kim.Osur@vocroc.org), or visit [vocroc.org](http://vocroc.org).