

National Guard Soldier & Family

Foundations

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**BREAKING
THE SILENCE**
JUSTIN JONES'
STRUGGLE WITH
HOMELESSNESS

ADOPT A SOLDIER
CHARITY GIVES BACK
TO THE TROOPS

MAJOR STRETCH
EXERCISES TO
INCREASE YOUR
FLEXIBILITY

Marathon Man

MAJ GEORGE KRAEHE
RUNS ACROSS AMERICA
FOR FALLEN SOLDIERS





adopt a soldier

Foundation Empowers America to Give Back to the Troops and Their Families

BY LIISA SULLIVAN

A commitment to making a difference in the lives of Veterans, Soldiers and their Families is the core of the America's Adopt a Soldier program.

"It's not a matter of why, but why not," said founder Mary E. Keeser, when asked why she started it. "Why not use one's knowledge and network capital to make a positive impact and give back? We're all in this together, and through commitment, compassion and balance, we can make a difference."

MANY MISSIONS

The America's Adopt a Soldier program was founded in 2009 in an effort to formalize and bring focus to several programs that were already under way. Its mission is broken up into four parts:

Inform and Educate: To maintain visibility when addressing the needs of Service Members, Veterans and their Families through hosting or participating in special events, workshops, speaking engagements and concerts.

Care Packages: To ensure that every deployed Service Member receives a care package through regional and local partnerships and outreach to Families, Service Members and communities. While national packing days take place in July and November, support is year-round.

Wounded Warrior Path To Strength (WWPTS): This is a partnership to be developed over a four-year period with Dell, Microsoft, Verizon, Sprint and AT&T. Currently, laptops and desktop systems are delivered to Wounded

Warriors at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Microsoft donates software and training; Verizon contributes mobile broadband access. These computer-based rehabilitation programs enable a speedier recovery and foster new career skills.

Other: To respond to and/or facilitate the stated needs of service, Veteran or Family members (e.g., internships, sponsorships, clothing, financial support, etc.).

GRASSROOTS GRIT

"By pooling our resources into one focused program, we can better serve and respond to need," said Keeser.

This unified program accomplishes its mission through the grassroots assistance of thousands of volunteers nationwide.



Above: America's Adopt a Soldier and Outback Steakhouse joined forces for an Army National Guard Family Readiness Group care-packing event. **Opposite Page:** America's Adopt a Soldier teamed with the USO in support of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's 32nd IBCT welcome-home celebration. *Pictured left to right, BG Mark Anderson, Wisconsin assistant adjutant general; Mary Keeser, America's Adopt a Soldier founder; Brittini Black, recording artist; BG Donald P. Dunbar, Wisconsin adjutant general; COL (Ret.) Steve Bensend, former 32nd IBCT commander.*

"I first met Mary at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center," said Sandra Lowe, mother of a Soldier who had been wounded in Afghanistan. "It was a tough day. But, I soon learned that Mary was one of those people I would not just know, but be privileged to know."

Today, Lowe volunteers for WWPTS in her city of Savannah, GA, and says that she has seen many Soldiers and their Families benefit from this program, including her son, who has attended many of the field trips and concerts.

Well-known country singer Brittini Black leads the way in the concert arena.

"We are so grateful that Brittini has stepped forward and embraced an active role as our ambassador and partner," said Keeser. "Her commitment not only to raising awareness, but also [to offering] critical financial support, demonstrates her character and sincere desire to make a difference."

In support of America's Adopt a Soldier program, Black donates \$1 for every CD sold and has performed at multiple America's Adopt a Soldier concerts.

"The camaraderie that develops at these concerts and events is so important to morale," said Lowe. "The computer classes are also invaluable."

To date, America's Adopt a Soldier has delivered more than 700 fully

equipped laptop and desktop systems to Wounded Warriors.

ONE FOR ALL

The fourth mission works to ensure that all Service Members receive assistance as needed. For instance, SSG Shane Overstreet shared a story about a unit member who was training in Oklahoma when his house was significantly damaged by fire.

"I searched for ways to help this Soldier, but since he was not Active Duty, services were limited. And then I found Mary. She helped organize donations that ranged from major appliances and furnishings to gift cards and Christmas presents. Additionally, Army Community Service is now revisiting how they assist Guard Soldiers in need," explained Overstreet.

Keeser adds that the support from the Guard has been overwhelming. "We are so proud of our esteemed board of honorary advisors and military liaison representatives," she said. "Many of them are retired from or have a long history with the Guard. We just couldn't ask for anything more." 

For information about how to get involved, visit:
AmericasAdoptASoldier.org.



Handle With Care

Deployed Soldiers can sign up online to be "adopted" for national care package distribution. In 2009, more than 2,000 care packages were mailed; in 2010, the goal was 100,000. In 2011, the goal is to ensure that every deployed Service Member receives a care package.

Packages typically include:

- Baby wipes
- Socks
- DVDs
- CDs/CD players
- Liquid body wash soap
- Toiletries (toothbrushes, toothpaste)
- Snacks (hard candy, crackers)
- Water, coffee, sports drinks
- Sunblock
- Paper, pens, pencils, envelopes
- Batteries
- Foot powder
- Small can food items
- Books, magazines, crossword puzzles

"The care packages were well received," said a Soldier of Headquarters and Headquarters Battalion, 1-113th Field Artillery, whose unit received a shipment from the program. "The ... awareness that someone out there is ... passionate enough to ... select and package these items brings instant smiles and a real sense of pride to our faces. It's during these times that I am reminded that our separation and sacrifices are not ours alone, but rather shared."