

10 June 2010

VCSA SENDS: Suicide Prevention Rests on all our Shoulders....No Army Soldier, leader, DA Civilian or Family member stands alone

Leaders,

In January 2010, I sent a VCSA Sends underscoring the need for leadership involvement and vigilance in our efforts to reduce the Army's suicide trend. We have made observed progress in several critical areas, but we are still experiencing a significant number of suicides. Particularly, we have experienced 19 suicides within the last 18 days. As we approach our summer transition period for the Army, I am concerned with the potential this time period presents for an increase in suicides. As of 18 June 2010, there have been 69 active duty and 60 Reserve Component (not on active duty) suicides in CY 2010. Of these, we have had 19 more Reserve Component, not on active duty suicides as compared to last year suicides for the same time. Among active duty Soldier suicides, there are 16 less suicides as compared to the same date last year. We must amplify our efforts as we move into the summer months, to let all members of the Army Family know that we are concerned and genuinely care about their well-being and that help is available by reaching out, talking, and listening. Let's give life a chance!

I challenge our NCO Corps, green tab leaders, and first line supervisors at all duty locations to continue their efforts to remind Soldiers, DA Civilians and Family members that their Army remains committed to help, support, and assist with helping to meet their hardships and challenges head on. As you move about the community, troop the line, walk through the facilities, stop by the barracks, eat a meal in the dining establishments, or wherever members of the Army Family gather, take those opportunities to look each and every member in the eye and convey that THEY MATTER and are valued by YOU and the Army at large. Suicide prevention starts with you! You are our first line of defense against the tragedy of suicide. The offense is vigilance, accessibility, communication, and seeking help. Suicides in our Army represent an unacceptable loss to the Army and our nation. As I visit Army Communities around the world, I have come to realize that combating suicide means more than prevention. It requires promoting a holistic approach to address the physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of taking care of Soldiers, Civilians, their Families, and communities. It's our job to build and maintain a resilient Army Family; I am counting on YOU to help me accomplish this mission.

Many programs exist on installations to promote team building, communication, and help build resiliency in Soldiers. These programs include financial readiness programs, family strengthening programs such as Strong Bonds, Chaplains, and behavioral health counseling services. Ensure YOUR Soldiers are aware of these programs and build a command climate that continually encourages them to take advantage of the services.

Our Soldiers give their all everyday to protect the American way of life. The stresses and demands made upon them are great. They deserve our best, as leaders. We must focus on building resiliency in our Soldiers, DA Civilians, and Families. Building resilient Soldiers is a critical issue for the Army – every Leader must be involved to make our Soldiers Army Strong.

There are many excellent resources for suicide prevention – the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255) for crisis intervention, and Military One Source at 1-800-342-9647 for resources and counseling, just to name but a few.

Remember, together we are Army strong!

GEN Chiarelli