

INSIGHTS INFORMING THE CONCERNS OF POST- 9/11 VETERANS AND FAMILIES

Case Study:
Soldiers' Angels



SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY'S INSTITUTE FOR VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES (IVMF) HAS BEEN CONTRACTED TO SUPPORT THE GEORGE W. BUSH INSTITUTE'S RESEARCH TO EFFECTIVELY SERVE AND EMPOWER OUR POST-9/11 VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES.



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SOLDIERS' ANGELS CASE STUDY

1. Organizational Overview

History

Soldiers' Angels (SA), headquartered in San Antonio, TX, is a national organization providing aid and assistance through "virtual" programs and services to veterans and military families. Founded in 2003 by the mother of two American soldiers, the organization was incorporated in Nevada and began operations in January 2004. Previously based in Pasadena, CA, Soldiers' Angels transitioned to its current location in San Antonio in March of 2014. As part of this transition, SA has restructured its organizational leadership and refined its business model to be more effective and efficient in its operations.

Throughout the post-9/11 conflicts, the two focuses of the organization have been sending care packages overseas and supporting caregivers of the wounded and families back home. With the present drawdown of forces in Iraq and Afghanistan SA has shifted its focus toward support of VA hospitals and facilitating volunteer opportunities at VA locations.

Mission Statement

Soldiers' Angels Mission Statement is as follows: "May No Soldier Go Unloved."

Organizational Structure

Soldiers' Angels is an IRS designated 501(c)(3) charity overseen by a President/CEO, and Board of Directors, all serving in a volunteer capacity. There are six service area directors, one of whom is Texas-based and works out of the headquarters office. The primary role of the service area director is fundraising, outreach, and VA hospital support. In addition, SA has a Vice President of Operations, as well as other support staff including an Online Communications Manager, Accounting and Human Resources Manager, Office Manager, and Volunteer Coordinator. The San Antonio office is the only physical office space maintained by the organization and as a result, the organization has very little overhead. With the exception of the service area director for Texas, the remaining service area directors, volunteer coordinators, team leaders, and volunteers all work out of their own homes. Because of the online nature of their organization and the extensive leveraging of volunteer support, staff costs are extremely low.

Volunteers register online and choose one or more teams in which to participate (described in detail below). For many of the programs, volunteers are required to contribute \$1 per month. According to SA, this allows the organization to validate the identity of the volunteer and ensure active volunteerism. The

service member in need is then “adopted” and supported through the volunteers’ charitable donations of time, money, and material.

Soldiers’ Angels has approximately 115,000 volunteers in its database. According to their estimate, this is the largest volunteer database in the country. Volunteers are managed through a network of team leaders located geographically throughout the United States and Germany. Each team leader is responsible for 60 volunteers on their team. The database records and updates each volunteer’s activities and sends reminders when needed, such as when the next care package is due. Volunteers submit monthly reports of hours, value of purchase, and the contents of each package sent. Some donations are sent directly to SA for distribution to the volunteer teams. Training is primarily needed for older volunteers unfamiliar with computer use because all activities operate online.

Programming

Soldiers’ Angels does not provide general veterans’ support, but does offer a wide range of programs and services, including operating 12 “virtual” teams through which national and international volunteers participate in supporting active service members, military families, and veterans. Six of these teams are designed for deployed military personnel, and six provide support for families and veterans. SA identifies service members who need assistance through an online registration process. There are currently more than 200 active duty service members on a wait list for assistance. The virtual programs and services involve collecting and sending requested materials, such as clothing, food, and hygiene items. Volunteers may also be required to send letters for some of the programs. Other programs, such as the Adopt-a-Family Team, are more focused on supporting military families and veterans through the Christmas/winter holiday season. Two programs are specifically designed to support women. Ladies of Liberty is dedicated to addressing the unique needs of female deployed service members and is supported by an all-female volunteer team. The Women of Valor Team provides support to female caregivers of wounded veterans. The entire list of programs includes:

- Deployed Adoptions Team supports deployed male service members through monthly care packages and weekly letters.
- Letter Writing Team sends letters to service members awaiting official adoption. One letter or card per month is required.
- Ladies of Liberty Team is an all-female volunteer team dedicated to supporting deployed female service members through monthly care packages and weekly letters.
- Women of Valor provides support to female caregivers of wounded veterans. Support includes personal care items, as well as educational materials selected by experts in the field and referrals for specialized services if needed. Volunteers are personally matched with a caregiver and provide year-round support.
- Chaplain Support Team supplies military chaplains with items they use while visiting troops in remote areas, including food, stationary, games, books, and sports equipment. Team members send packages every other month.
- Special Operations Forces Team provides direct support to Special Operations units and individual service members assigned to a Special Operations unit. Service members do not need to register for this program due to the sensitivity of their jobs and mission. Volunteers must have six months of experience serving on another team and be recommended by their team leader to be considered for participation on this team. They are also interviewed by the Special

Operations Forces Team leader who makes the final decision on acceptance into this program. Materials requested are based more on operational needs, such as sand scarves or specific gear requests.

- Adopt-a-Family Team members support military families and veterans during the Christmas and the winter holiday season by providing a grocery store gift card or prepaid Visa gift card, enabling the recipient to purchase their holiday dinner and gifts. This team effort provides volunteer opportunities for companies, church and school groups, among other organizations.
- Operation Top Knot provides virtual baby showers for expectant spouses of deployed service members. Volunteers receive a wish list of approved participants and are required to send one package per month.
- Living Legends Team creates a “one of a kind” gift for family members of a deceased service member. Volunteers and team leaders work with the family to determine what supportive services the surviving family members might need. Volunteers are required to write at least one letter per month to their family.
- Cards Plus Team is dedicated to supporting the military population and their families, veterans, and SA volunteers with celebratory and sympathy cards and notes. A minimum of at least one card or note per month is required.
- Angel Bakers provide homemade baked goods for deployed service members, although prepackaged items are also acceptable. Angel Bakers mail a minimum of one package per month that includes a note or letter from the baker.
- Sewing Team members provide support to volunteers and staff through the creation of hand-sewn items, including blankets, pillowcases, catheter bags, cool neck scarves, and baby items. These materials are then included in care packages sent by one or more of the other team options. Members commit to continue their support on an ongoing basis.

Veteran Affairs Support Program

Soldiers’ Angels is one of a few nonprofit agencies approved to work within VA medical centers, and currently collaborates with 19 centers around the country, as well as the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. Support is coordinated through a Soldiers’ Angels VA representative assigned to each of the VA locations. As mentioned above, with the drawdown of troops overseas, SA hopes to leverage this relationship. This “morale boosting” support includes patient visits, bi-weekly or monthly luncheons or dinners, sack lunches for homeless or low-income veterans, and stocking the break rooms. SA also participates in VA-sponsored “Stand Downs”, during which the VA staff provides medical and dental services to homeless veterans, while SA contributes meals, hygiene items, clothing, and other requested items.

Given their VA access, SA can also facilitate support from corporations looking to donate funds and/or materials and/or provide volunteer opportunities for their employees. SA fulfills VA “wish lists” provided by each VA medical center by partnering with corporate donors and volunteers. Through this effort, VA centers have received landscaping services, wireless internet for patient rooms/waiting rooms, and bikes and bike racks, among other services. Finally, SA supports the Project Valor-IT, which provides voice-controlled/adaptive laptop computers and other needed technology products for service members recovering from hand wounds and other severe injuries.

Veteran Populations Served

Soldiers' Angels serves currently deployed personnel and their families, as well as veterans of current and previous conflicts. Their collaboration with 19 VA medical centers provides them access to a multitude of military personnel seeking services at the VA, and particularly veterans from the Vietnam era, as demographically this population is significantly larger than the post-9/11 generation. As described above, six programs directly connect to deployed military personnel, while six programs are designed to support those no longer deployed but still in uniform, their families, and veterans.

Funding Sources and Strategies

Soldiers' Angels is an IRS designated 501(c)(3) charity and is entirely funded through donations (primarily individual) and fundraising events. In addition, SA has an online store that helps support their mission. The organization is also beginning to explore grant funding. SA also receives financial or material support from a number of corporate sponsors, including Mary Kay, Harry & David, Books-A-Million/Barnes & Noble, Girl Scouts of America, Pepsi, Wells Fargo, and American Express. Volunteers pay out-of-pocket to provide care packages and postage overseas. SA is able to store large quantities of items at the VA centers for later use, and a few companies donate warehouse space and shipping capabilities. Due to its access to the VA medical centers, SA is able to facilitate corporate-sponsored donations and volunteer activities, with the goal that such collaboration will lead to long-term relationships with participating corporate sponsors.

2. Measurement and Data Supporting Effectiveness & Impact

Types of Data Routinely Collected

Currently, SA is able to track volunteer participation on a monthly basis. In addition, donors are required to submit a donation in-kind form, which provides SA with data on donor identity and the cost of each donation. However, this does not translate into quantifying "needs met" for each of its programs, which is admittedly a challenge for the organization. President and CEO Amy Palmer noted that identifying a qualitative indicator, such as the perceived value of care packages by the recipient, would be an important tool to effectively measure the organization's impact. Jennifer Cernoch, VP of Operations, agreed but noted the difficulty in measuring something as subjective as the impact of a care package, stating that "Foundation dollar donations want quantified proof that quality of life is improved. How do you measure that?" Likewise, Soldiers' Angels VA representatives establish goals with each center and conduct an assessment at the end of the year to determine if the organization's services met the needs of the center. Targeted goals might include number of lunches or hygiene kits provided, for example. This is considered a valuable metric, though it is similarly difficult to quantify impact for these services.

Finally, SA gathers and maintains a large amount of data through their applications for various programs. Data includes demographic information such as age, race, ethnicity, branch of service, rank, income/pay grade; and military service information such as service dates, discharge information, disability, proof of deployment, and combat theater status.

The SA leadership team estimated that their "efficiency rating," the percentage of each dollar that goes to program funding, is approximately 90%. SA is reviewing the accounting systems and working to streamline its finance reporting function.

Data Analysis and Reporting

At this time, Soldiers' Angels is not performing data analysis on its activities, although leadership would like to identify an appropriate method to do so. At the time of this interview, SA leaders noted that at their next meeting of the Board of Directors, they plan to address these issues and create a strategic plan for moving forward. As the organization searches out other funding sources, such as grants, they recognize the need for data collection, analysis, and reporting.

How data are used for getting to impact

As mentioned above, Soldiers' Angels completes required tax filings.

Data regarding scale of programming maintained by Soldiers Angels is used to articulate scale of impact. As reported by the organization, SA has provided over \$90 million in aid to military and veteran families; provided support to over 100,000 service members, veterans and family members in 2013 alone; organized over 150 luncheons at VA Hospitals serving 20,000 veterans, their families and hospital staff; provided sack lunches to over 2,000 homeless veterans; and provided hygiene kits and other items to over 10,000 veterans.

Leadership is very interested in learning what metrics to use and how best to implement them to better measure qualitative impact and articulate this to stakeholders. SA receives funding from fundraising events, community/corporate sponsors, and individual donations.

Formal Evaluation Activities (internal and external)

As previously noted, there currently is no formal process in place for collecting data to inform decision-making or quantifying and assessing impact. Program staff is currently working on streamlining the financial reporting systems and exploring ways to data mine their donations to identify the most efficient and effective use of their financial support.

3. Strategic Themes

Social Connectedness

Through its broad network of civilian volunteers, Soldiers' Angels helps to bridge the civilian-military divide by connecting service members and veterans directly with civilians. SA sees itself as having expertise in volunteer management, and reports that it has the largest MSO volunteer program in the country, which is its greatest asset. Programs with the most direct interaction with transitioning service members are those at the VA and consist of patient visits, catered lunch and dinner events, homeless outreach, and Stand Downs, though volunteers also interact with service members and veterans on the occasions when letter writing and care package shipments result in "pen pal"-like relationships.

According to Heather Krauss, Service Area Director for Texas, many volunteers and corporate donors contact Soldiers' Angels directly, seeking ways to assist and partner with the organization. Many contacts are developed through the SA website or because SA has served the individual or a member of the individual's family. As Krauss notes, the organization leverages the "pay it forward" attitude among civilian society. Additional volunteers come from the college students who need volunteer time for their degrees. In addition, San Antonio has a large population of veteran students pursuing their education through GI Bill benefits, and many of them contact SA looking for volunteer opportunities.

Further, corporations like Dell encourage their employees to participate in volunteer opportunities and donate money to that volunteer's charity of choice. Dell is one company that SA has partnered with for years, through an annual golf tournament and just recently a bowling tournament. A component of that partnership includes SA providing outreach at each event, thereby educating the broader civilian community about the issues and concerns facing veterans and their families. Krauss notes that this is particularly effective in communities that do not have a military installation or any connection to the military. It is a way to start the conversation and create interest, particularly in a community that is looking for a cause to support. At the request of Dell, all money collected at these events is donated to the local VA center, further cementing the connection between the civilian community and local veteran population.

Krauss works to further educate the broader community through local media coverage, promoting upcoming events, what the needs are, and how to get involved. She notes that volunteers and donors have been attracted to the organization due to its number one ranking on GreatNonprofits.org, an Internet site providing tools that allow people to find, review, and share information about nonprofits and charities.

Through these efforts, SA has worked to bridge the civilian-military divide by creating good will within the community through its high level of volunteer and donor engagement.

Independent Sector Involvement

Soldiers' Angels has key support from several corporations, which provide monetary and/or donations of material, warehouse space, shipping capabilities, as well as employee volunteers. SA is the charity of choice for Mary Kay, which provides items that are included in hygiene kits. Harry & David provides trail mix for care packages. Other corporate supporters include Books-A-Million/Barnes & Noble, Girl Scouts of America, Pepsi, Wells Fargo, and American Express. Due to the drawdown of military forces in Afghanistan, much of the donated material has been repurposed for use in the VA centers, and the corporate partners are aware that the need for donations is changing. So far, they have agreed to redirect the material for VA use, in accordance with Soldiers' Angels' plan to shift its focus toward working with veterans who have returned and are seeking services at VA medical centers.

This "morale boosting" support includes patient visits, bi-weekly or monthly luncheons or dinners, sack lunches for homeless or low-income veterans, and stocking the break rooms. Companies such as Dell encourage employee volunteerism and actively search out nonprofit organizations to support. SA has recently been voted the number one nonprofit on GreatNonprofits.org, which resulted in an increase in both corporate support and volunteers.

Additionally, SA has recently launched Operation: Next Chapter, a partnership with Vietnam War veteran and author Cym Lowell. Operation: Next Chapter is an initiative founded by Lowell to support veterans and works with the SA Valour-IT Team to provide voice-controlled, adaptive laptop computers for military personnel who have lost the use of their hands or suffered other severe traumatic injury. Lowell will donate 100% of the proceeds from the sale of his latest novel, *Jaspar's War*, to purchase the adaptive computers.

While Soldiers' Angels is normally highly dependent on individual engagement through monetary donations and/or volunteer support, CEO Palmer has identified more extensive development of corporate partnerships as a future goal.

Community Connectedness

Soldiers' Angels is approved to work within the VA medical centers and currently collaborates with 19 centers around the country, as well as the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. Support is coordinated through a Soldiers' Angels VA representative assigned to each of the VA locations. The representative works with each VA to create a "wish list" and works to fulfill these requests by partnering with corporate donors to facilitate direct interaction with patients in VA medical centers. Through this effort, VA centers have received landscaping services, wireless internet for patient rooms/waiting rooms, bikes and bike racks, among other services. Because of nutritional and dietary restrictions, the VA can only accept meals professionally prepared and that have been approved in advance. Staff works with local restaurants, such as Olive Garden, to cater meals that are delivered directly to the VA centers. Donors may also contribute funds towards the purchase of the monthly meals.

SA also participates in VA-sponsored "Stand Downs", during which the VA staff provides medical and dental services to homeless veterans, while SA contributes meals, hygiene items, clothing, and other requested items.

The organization's service area directors are educated and trained in outreach within their local communities, and work to further educate the community through events with organizations like the Elks Club, Rotary Club, or different veterans' organizations.

Soldiers' Angels integration into the broader network of providers appears to be more informal. The organization does not exist to provide other types of services to veterans and service members, but they often receive calls looking for additional services. Office staff estimates that they receive two to five telephone calls per day from veterans seeking services that result in a referral to another service-providing organization. Referrals are made based on SA staff knowledge and experience in working with service providers.

Media

Soldiers' Angels has a largely online media presence. The online communications manager oversees the organization's online presence, as well as directs its social media presence. SA is most active on Facebook, with 250,000 followers, as well as Twitter. The communications manager prepares flyers, communications for service area directors, a monthly e-newsletter and press releases. She also designs graphics for the website and works with the IT manager on other website-related issues. Viewers can donate to SA through the website.

Online Communications Director Michelle Julazadeh Chavarin, whose background is in advertising and marketing, notes that since October of 2013, SA's Facebook presence has grown from 160,000 to its present count of 250,000 followers. She credits this expansive growth to SA's online strategy that involves three "worthwhile" posts per day: one compelling piece, one regarding the organization itself, and one that shares information from other sites that benefit veterans. This "sweet spot" of how many posts per day is key so that the organization is not inundating people with information they do not care

about, or only promoting Soldiers' Angels events. Rather, the purpose behind the daily posts is to share compelling personal stories like homecoming videos. In addition to one informational post about SA, Chavarin also shares content from other sites that are benefitting veterans or other military like-minded sites that may benefit both that organization and SA as well. For example, video of a recent Medal of Honor ceremony was posted on the day of the event. Using visual media has been highly effective and impactful in terms of generating as many as 10,000 "likes" for one personal post. SA does not have any official partnerships with other communications outlets, but frequently shares posts from the websites of each branch of the Armed Services, as well as other veteran-focused websites. Occasionally SA shares posts from other veterans who maintain open Facebook pages, always looking for any social media presence that is vocal on Facebook in positively portraying the veteran experience. The IT manager uses Google Analytics to track web activity.

In terms of traditional media, Chavarin explained that press releases primarily focus on organizational changes, such as when a new team leader or board member has been chosen. As previously mentioned, the regional Service Area Directors coordinate their own media contact within their local communities. For example, Heather Krauss, Texas Area Service Director, deals directly with the media in Texas, primarily to advertise local fundraising events through radio interviews, and the other service area directors work directly with the media in their respective locations. In these cases, Chavarin described her role as being more "behind the scenes" regarding traditional media access.

Another key outlet for Soldiers' Angels is the e-newsletter that is distributed to approximately 13,000 people via email through iContact. Stories are shared about what is happening within the organization that month, as well as features from the service areas. One ongoing thread has followed author Cym Lowell and his efforts to raise awareness about veterans who have suffered severe traumatic injury. The e-newsletter contains links to the SA website and social media platforms but SA has not yet included a link to its donation page. Those wishing to receive the e-newsletter can sign up on the SA website or Facebook page. The week before the newsletter is sent, a reminder is posted on Facebook to sign up for the mailing list.

Donor emails are also distributed through iContact, but not on a monthly schedule. Typically, Chavarin uses verbiage provided by the CEO and inserts it into a designed format.

Chavarin notes that the use of Facebook is part of a broader strategy to bridge the civilian/military divide, particularly in terms of sharing information about the organization, and more specifically about the work of its volunteers. She states that up to 50% of the messages she receives from Facebook are inquiries about volunteer opportunities.

Reintegration with Family

SA leadership recognizes the value in providing support not only to the veteran, but also to the family members who make up their support network and are often overlooked. Family support, therefore, is seen as part of the organization's overall mission in supporting veterans and their efforts at reintegration with their families.

SA extends support to families of veterans and service members through a number of its volunteer programs. One example of family care is The Women of Valor team, which supports female caregivers of wounded service members. Throughout the year volunteers emphasize holidays, which may be major

stressors for the caregiver. With their team leader, volunteers also provide educational materials and resources as needed.

Another example of family care is the Adopt-a-Family team, which provides financial assistance to an adopted family through the Christmas/winter holiday season. Financial donations are targeted for the purchase of food for a holiday meal, as well as holiday gifts for the children of the adopted family.

Other examples of how SA supports family members of veterans include Operation Top Knot, which provides virtual baby showers for expectant spouses of deployed service members, the Living Legends Team, which creates a “one of a kind” gift for family members of a deceased service member, and through Cards Plus, which is dedicated to supporting the military population and their families, veterans, and SA volunteers with celebratory and sympathy cards and notes.

Veteran Programming Differentiation

Veteran programming differentiation is evident in the various teams organized to target different audiences, such as deployed men and women, chaplains, expectant spouses, and caregivers. Over time, SA has identified specific needs for different groups within the veteran and military family community and responded to those needs as such. For example, chaplains may want 60 small bags of items to distribute in more remote locations, request toys for local children, or religious items. Deployed women may ask for more hygiene items, such as lotion. SA has created appropriate teams to respond to these differences in need.

One unique group supported by Soldiers’ Angels is members of the Special Operations Forces. Due to the sensitive nature of their identity, typically an entire unit will submit an application to be adopted and individual identities will not be known. Their needs tend to be different as well. While typical care package requests are made, sometimes a special item is requested, such as sand scarves, creating the need for an operational-needs package. Volunteers supporting the Special Operations teams must have at least six months’ experience on another team, be recommended by their team leader, and are carefully vetted. To further ensure confidentiality, the volunteer team information is saved in a separate database.

SA’s relationship with the VA and direct access to VA medical centers puts them in a unique position to provide services to veterans, including many older veterans from the Vietnam era. This relationship, and this different audience – creates a need to differentiate programming, supply delivery systems, staffing models, and partner relationships. In their two domains of programming – shipping care packages overseas and providing material to VA hospitals, SA serves populations with two different sets of needs and has responded with different team structures to address those needs.

Women Veteran Efforts

One of the 12 volunteer programs supported by Soldiers’ Angels is designed specifically for women service members. The Ladies of Liberty Team is an all-female volunteer team dedicated to supporting deployed female service members through monthly care packages and weekly letters. SA leadership explained that women service members often have different needs in terms of what they receive in the care packages, which often includes things like personal hygiene items, and usually are more comfortable making those requests of female volunteers.

CEO Amy Palmer, herself a veteran, noted that the focus on female veterans is increasing and the VA medical centers have to increase services provided to women, but that the centers are having a difficult time getting female veterans to attend. SA continues to support women veterans receiving services through the VA by providing hygiene packages stocked with Mary Kay items. Palmer refers to this “enticement” as a means of encouraging women veterans to approach the VA for services, but so far has not seen much of an impact.

Transition to Civilian Life

Though Soldiers’ Angels does not provide transition-focused programming, through the provision of care packages and programs for service members and their families prior to transition, and support for veterans post-transition seeking care at the VA, Soldiers’ Angels seeks to provide a continuation of care and connection across the timeline of passage to civilian life.

Employment and Education

As stated above, SA routinely gets telephone requests for services unrelated to those it provides, such as employment and education. Such requests are referred to other nonprofit organizations that provide related services. They also work collaboratively with the American GI Forum, another service provider in San Antonio, in assisting veterans seeking employment. Rather than simply provide the veteran in need with a telephone number, SA staff will communicate directly with an employment specialist at AGIF to connect the veteran with someone who will engage and assist the veteran in their employment search.

4. Key Learnings and Reflections

Catalysts of Impact

As previously noted, Soldiers’ Angels has recently undergone a period of transition and is in the process of charting its course for the future. One of the organization’s greatest strengths is its ability to manage such a large volunteer base, which currently totals 115,000, while maintaining consistent engagement over a period of time. SA has maintained its volunteer base even though the needs for its services have changed due to the military drawdown overseas. SA has approached this situation by repurposing donations to veterans being served by the VA. To date, most donors and volunteers have agreed to this new approach, so that the organization has been able to continue to deliver its services to veterans in need while meeting its core mission, “so no soldier goes unloved.” However, SA is not considering completely discontinuing its needs for overseas packages, as they see the need more like a pendulum: the current need may be diminishing, but the possibility of increased or additional military engagement is always present and, therefore, the demand for care packages will be a constant.

Another organizational strength is the unique relationship that exists between Soldiers’ Angels and 19 VA medical centers. In recognition of the changing landscape regarding military deployment, the organization’s leadership is identifying new ways to leverage this access with their volunteer base and corporate donors in an effort to continue their mission. For example, national corporate sponsors like Barnes & Noble and Books-a-Million understand that while the need for overseas care packages is waning, their donations can be repurposed for use by the VA medical centers. SA recently distributed 26 pallets of coffee donated by Books-a-Million to the VA centers that was originally targeted to go overseas. Through relationships with for-profit organizations like Dell, SA can also facilitate the private sector’s efforts to serve the veteran population through volunteerism.

Soldiers' Angels has been successful in engaging and growing its volunteer base due in part to its use of social media. The organization's current online communications manager has experience in the advertising/marketing field, and by utilizing similar tools, has grown its online presence to 250,000 Facebook followers. This seems to be a highly effective method for maintaining the volunteer base, while also serving as a new source of volunteers. It also contributes to the sense of community created around the organization, its followers and those that it serves.

Barriers to Impact

Soldiers' Angels is currently undergoing structural and leadership changes and since March 2014 has been rebuilding its infrastructure. Leadership acknowledges that their greatest challenge is how to continue to keep their volunteer base engaged as the needs of servicemembers change from overseas deployment to reintegrating into society and, for some, seeking care at VA medical centers. With the military drawdown, they anticipate a drop off in resources as donors and volunteers shift to newer causes to support. They are actively positioning their organization as a partner with the VA and seeking ways to continue their mission through this partnership on a different front. As a result of the change in leadership and new processes being put in place, there was push back from some donors resulting in a number of them severing their relationship with SA. A larger problem identified by SA leadership is the ever-growing number of veterans who need assistance and the dwindling resources available to provide services to this population.

Like that of many veteran-serving nonprofits, the Soldiers' Angels leadership team and staff mentioned that the organization's current need for more robust metrics for quantifying impact (past the ability to tell success stories) can be seen as an obstacle to their fundraising efforts. More and more donors want proof that their dollars are having a direct impact on those served by the organization. As noted by leadership, most of their feedback is strictly anecdotal in the form of testimonials or word-of-mouth comments they receive. On the other hand, they acknowledge the difficulty in quantifying the impact of a care package on a service member or their family. They understand that theirs is a service in a broad continuum of services received by veterans throughout their deployment, transition and reintegration timeline, and attempting to ascertain the impact that SA specifically has had on any particular veteran is extremely difficult.

Finally, staff indicated that comprehensive accounting tools are not yet in place – tools that would assist in disseminating financial information in useable formats so the organization can report on its financial status to a wider audience. SA's leaders are actively redesigning databases to better utilize the data they collect which may have a greater impact on potential donors.

Ongoing Efforts to Enhance Impact

Soldiers' Angels continues looking for ways to assess the impact of their programs. Due to the nature of their support, this remains a difficult task. As CEO Amy Palmer noted, it would be good to be able to follow each service member who received a care package through the entire process of their deployment and return home, but that would involve potentially tracking multiple services received from multiple agencies the service member may be accessing for different needs. For now, the staff is motivated by their innate belief that what they do is impacting the lives of those they serve.

More than measuring their impact, SA is tasked with remaining relevant in an ever-changing landscape among military service providing organizations. Due to the military drawdown overseas, SA is seeing less

demand for its care packages. In order to maintain its large volunteer base and keep volunteers and donors engaged while continuing to fulfill its mission, SA is moving to leverage its partnership with 19 VA medical centers and refocus its support on veterans receiving assistance through the VA, as well as homeless veterans. SA has the opportunity to serve as a key conduit through which corporations can gain access to volunteer opportunities at VA medical centers. In addition, SA has the ability to serve as a broker for other MSOs to combine efforts in serving veterans in need through its collaboration with the VA. Such partnerships would benefit all like-minded organizations given the potentially waning interest in supporting veterans along with a more restrictive funding environment.