Army Survivor Advisory Working Group Update

Are you familiar with the Army Survivor Advisory Working Group that we refer to as SAWG? The SAWG is a voice for Regular Army, Army National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve survivors on quality of life issues and concerns affecting all survivors. Members of the working group strengthen communication between the Total Army and the Army survivor community.

The SAWG, established in 2007, was chartered in October 2016, formally defining the group’s mission and purpose. Membership consists of 12 Army General Officers from the Headquarters Army staff and Army commands, 12 survivor advisors and spouses of senior Army leaders.

The group meets twice a year with the Chief of Staff of the Army and the Sergeant Major of the Army to present their work.

So you might ask what has the SAWG been up to? The survivor advisors bring issues to the working group that they are hearing within the survivor community, these issues are discussed with the staff and all the advisors who determine if the issue should be addressed. The staff then works through the issues to find solutions. These solutions may range from simply changing local procedures to asking for policy changes from Army Senior Leaders. The work is done quietly behind the scenes and sometimes seems like not much is happening, but there are continual adjustments being made.

In 2021, the SAWG was able to bring to fruition several issues that were being addressed. Starting in January 2021, the Army published Army Directive 2021-01, Survivor Outreach Services (SOS) Program. This establishes policy for the SOS program for the first time since its inception. This is important because the Army staff derives authority from this policy and can now shift focus to improving the SOS program to best meet the needs of our Families.

The Army also published Army Directive 2021-04, Casualty Support for Dependent Children. While it is heartbreaking to need this policy, the Army unfortunately has situations in which a surviving child under the age of 18 who are faced with the loss of their second parent. This policy enables the family to request a CAO to help the child and guardian navigate the updates in benefits.

In May 2021, the *Survivor Link* was launched to be able to better communicate within the survivor community. The goal is to highlight throughout the year changes that will impact survivors and ensure you have information readily available to you. This was followed by the publication in June of an interactive pdf guide *Navigating the Road to Your Family’s Future.* This guide covers many of the key benefits that impact survivors. It is meant as a tool for currently serving families to help with their planning, but also as a guide for surviving families to begin navigating the plethora of websites, acronyms and agencies that are part of the network of resources.