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Survivor Outreach Services hosts annual training

By Evan Dyson
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ORLANDO, Fl. – Survivor Outreach Services recently held four days of professional development training for nearly 300 employees in Orlando, Fl., as part of a larger mission to improve the quality of service provided to the Families of fallen Soldiers.

More than 100 sessions were held to benefit representatives from active duty components, the Army National Guard, the U.S. Army Reserve and private organizations assisting survivors. According to organizers, this mixture of participants allowed interactions and relationships to form that will help the program move toward a more uniform operating standard.

The course options ranged from “SOS Basics” for new employees to “The Spirituality of Grief” and “SOS Regulations.”

“There was something for everyone,” said SOS Program Manager Hal Snyder. “We’ve had very positive feedback and, in fact, people have said ‘we hope next year will be more of the same.’”

For participants like Stacey Pennington, a financial counselor at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, the courses offered an opportunity to share best practices and to network with others.

“That was one of the things I said when I left my installation: ‘I can’t wait to bring back what other people are doing that’s working effectively in their area.’”

During the conference, Pennington said, she realized that Washington state was excelling in the areas that were being discussed. “Our survivors are getting the best of the best, and that’s a really great feeling.”

Suzanne Crosby, an SOS support coordinator from Fort Gordon, also thought that the ability to share best practices was valuable, but added, “We also share our problems, so you get an opportunity to talk to people about how they’re dealing with a problem and you get ideas.”

In addition to the education delivered directly through the presentations, participants benefited from the cumulative experiences of their peers. Crosby noted that discussion sometimes lead to ideas for events and, in a broader sense, the fact that many of the SOS employees are survivors can also help to shape the program.

“There’s great value in having survivors work in this program,” said Donna Engeman, an employee of SOS and a surviving spouse. “I believe they bring a perspective that the non-survivor working in the program doesn’t have. They’ve been through it. They’ve walked that walk.”

On the first day of the conference, Lt. Gen. Rick Lynch, commanding general of the Installation Management Command, thanked all those in attendance for their passion and dedication to helping survivors.

“The most emotional thing I do is deal with survivors, and you do it every day,” he said. “If you need help, don’t hesitate to ask. You may need support, too.”

“Having this conference truly reflects the Army’s commitment to survivors and the fulfillment of the Army Family Covenant,” said Snyder. “This is an enduring mission that the Army values and has committed resources to in order to ensure that survivors receive the best service for as long as they desire.”

To learn more about Survivor Outreach Services, visit myarmyonesource.com.

Bill Bradner, IMCOM Public Affairs, contributed to this report.

Link:

<http://www.myarmyonesource.com/FamilyProgramsandServices/SurvivingFamilies/SurvivorOutreachServices.aspx>

Link to photos on Flickr:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/familymwr/sets/72157627281121066/>

Story on Army.mil:

http://www.army.mil/article/62742/Survivor_Outreach_Services_hosts_annual_training/