

Service   
Women's   
Action   
Network 

# 2020 Annual Report



# INTRODUCTION

Service Women's Action Network is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded in 2007 as the only organization that advocates for and supports the needs of both service women and women veterans, regardless of rank, military branch, or years of experience. With over 40,000 nonprofits in America working to serve the needs of veterans and military personnel, this is an important distinction. While women service members and veterans have benefited from many support programs, the majority of them are still designed, by default, to meet the needs of men. We're making sure that changes. SWAN differs heavily from most veteran organizations because it focuses on the financial, legal, housing and mental health needs of women. It caters to the highly sensitive interaction needed to assist women during their time of need. It is more than a discussion, an email and a phone call to these women. Our resources save their lives and gives them hope in moments when they have no one left to call.

## History

In 2007, a group of women veterans who were having trouble getting their Veteran Affairs (VA) claims approved decided to organize and do something about the VA claim's process. Initially working under another organization, in 2009 they broke away and formed the Service Women's Action Network, establishing SWAN as a 501c3 in New York City.

They quickly found that many of the problems that women veterans face stemmed from harassment and assault that they experienced while on serving. At the time, the Veterans Administration (VA) did not recognize sexual assault as a source of post-traumatic stress (PTS) in the way it recognized combat stress. SWAN worked to support victims of military sexual assault, to hold perpetrators accountable in the military justice system and to have the PTS that results from a sexual assault recognized by the VA. Despite orchestrating many institutional improvements, including having sexual assault recognized as a source of post-traumatic stress by the VA, SWAN continues to work on these issues today and provides direct assistance to women facing challenges related to mental health, sexual assault, VA claims and more.

In 2012, SWAN began advocating for equality within military assignments after researching the DOD's exclusion of women from more than a quarter of a million prestigious ground combat jobs. SWAN believed that excluding women from key positions contributed to a military culture that devalued women, prevented advancement opportunities and created a culture that caused service women to be more vulnerable to harassment and assault. Due to dedicated legislators, military officials and SWAN's consistent efforts on Capitol Hill, the policy preventing women from entering combat positions was eliminated in 2013. In 2016, the military services began integrating women into previously closed occupations and units.

Today, SWAN continues to press for law and policy changes to better address the needs of service women and women veterans. Our organization also provides direct services in the form of workshops, case management assistance and a speaker services for leadership conferences around the country. In 2015, the organization moved to Washington, DC where it is better positioned to engage with law and policy makers. With a focus on research, advocacy and direct support, SWAN is the leading national organization focused on supporting service women and women veterans.

# SWAN LEADERSHIP



Army Capt. Deshauna Barber

Army Captain Deshauna Barber is a top-rated speaker who is widely requested as a speaker at Fortune 500 companies. She was born in Columbus, Georgia, and is the daughter of two Soldiers. Serving in the military is a family tradition. In 2016, Deshauna was crowned the first Soldier to win the prestigious title of Miss USA. She spent her yearlong reign as Miss USA advocating for men and women in uniform and continues her work advocating for service members suffering from post-traumatic stress. She is dedicated to ensuring that service members and veterans receive the support and assistance that they need. She has a Bachelor's degree in Business Management from Virginia State University, a Master of Science in Computer Information Systems and Services from University of Maryland and she is currently pursuing a Diversity,

Social Justice and Inclusion Certification at University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. SWAN looks forward to advancing our mission with Deshauna's leadership and dedication

As Miss USA, she spent her year-long reign advocating for our men and women in uniform by encouraging our government to provide additional support for soldiers suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The 31-year-old uses her platform to encourage us to pay close attention to the mental health of our service members after deployments and their service to our country.

Captain Barber has served her country for over 10 years and now works as cadet instructor at Howard University's Bison Battalion during her Army Reserve commitment. When she is not serving her country, she travels the world as a full time Motivational Speaker. She has made it her life goal to encourage, inspire and strengthen the people around her.

Deshauna has appeared on *The Steve Harvey Show*, *The Rachael Ray Show*, *Fox and Friends*, *The Chelsea Show*, *Good Morning Washington*, *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, *The T.D. Jakes Show*, *The Nightly Show*, *The Source on Sirius XM*, *The Daily Show*, *Lunch Break*, *Live with Kelly*, *Good Morning America* and in *Glamour Magazine* and *Diversity Magazine*.

# Service Women's Action Network

## MISSION AND GOALS



**SWAN's Mission:** The mission of the Service Women's Action Network is to support, connect and advocate for service women-past, present and future.

In 2019, our work centered on four major goals, derived from the three focus areas outlined in our mission as well as our commitment to developing a well-sustained organization in order to maximize our impact.

**Advocate:** Advocate for the rights of service women and women veterans in order to create lasting, institutional change to create just military and veteran systems.

**Connect:** Connect service women, women veterans, and organizations focused on supporting military women to each other, creating a national network of military women.

**Support:** Directly support service women, women veterans, and their families by connecting them to direct services, information, and opportunities to support personal and professional goals.

**Develop:** Maintaining organizational sustainability, transparency, and growth so that SWAN can continue its mission, increase its impact, and promote more equal and just military and veteran systems.



Barksdale Women Fly for Women's History Month by SrA Lillian Miller

# SWAN 2020: BY THE NUMBERS

Today, there are **more than a quarter of a million women** in uniform and **over 2 million women veterans**; the highest number in history.

**SWAN Members: 10,064**

## Case Management:

130 service members and veterans were referred to direct service providers

13,000+ people accessed the resource portal

## Research and General Reports Published: 3

*NDAAs 2021 House/Senate Comparison*

*Ongoing Research: Longitudinal Study on Combat Integration and Female Trailblazers*

*Disseminating the national survey "Assessing the Needs of Women Who Served in the U.S. Armed Forces."*

## New Community Partners: 20+

New Community partners in 2020 included corporate and small business partners, charitable foundations, individual litigators who provided pro bono legal services to SWAN members, governmental organizations like the DC Mayors Office of Veteran Affairs, Veteran Service Organizations, and Military Women's Coalition members

# RESEARCH

## Ongoing Research: Longitudinal Study on Combat Integration and Female Trailblazers

SWAN continued to conduct its longitudinal research project that is following the integration of women into newly opened combat units and occupations. In 2019, SWAN staff conducted more than 20 interviews with service women in the infantry and armor occupations. The purpose of this research is to follow the first five years of women's integration into the ground combat occupations of the US Army so that we can identify and address the issues female trailblazers face in these newly opened positions. SWAN fellow Dr. Ellen Haring continues to share her knowledge related to combat integration at academic conferences and with key stakeholders, and in 2019 served as the technical evaluator for NATO at the Research Symposium on Integration of Women into Ground Combat Units.

SWAN uses its staff's expertise to educate policy makers and to advocate for legislation affecting service women and women veterans. SWAN ensures that information is easily accessible to the public so that the issues affecting service women and women veterans are understood.

## Disseminating the national survey "Assessing the Needs of Women Who Served in the U.S. Armed Forces."

SWAN has partnered with researcher Kate Thomas and The University of Alabama to conduct research to assess the needs of women who have served in the United States Armed Services on a national level. Staying current with research trends is a goal for any Veteran Serving Organization/Military Serving Organization (VSO/MSO). The Service Women's Action Network has historically done more than stay current; they have sponsored and conducted cutting-edge research that helped inform the space about the needs, issues, strengths, and preferences of active-duty and veteran women in the United States. SWAN's works created a multiple separate calendar-year surveys and a robust focus group effort in 2017. That work yielded the below results:

- Internal SWAN reports, authored by SWAN fellow Dr. Ellen Haring
- Published scientific journal articles in *The Journal of Military, Veterans, and Family Health*, *Traumatology*, and the *Journal of Veterans Studies*.
- Peer-reviewed presentations at large, professional gatherings at the Military Social Work Conference and at the annual conference of the Society for Social Work and Research.
- Blogs written for mainstream audiences, one in *Task & Purpose*, the other for the Office of Women's Health.
- Congressional testimony before the House Veterans Affairs Committee Task Force on Women Veterans.

# ADVOCATE

## LEGAL EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY

One of the ways that SWAN enacts change for military women is through legislative efforts.

Part of our legislative efforts include crafting language for legislation and communicating and educating congressional offices and staff members as experts. While SWAN publishes new legislative priorities each year, the legislation we track is constantly evolving as it moves through the lawmaking process. Scroll through to see what we are tracking and how you can help removal obstacles for military women and be part of the change for a more equal military.

### The Deborah Sampson Act

SWAN has long championed this Act — versions of which were introduced in many past sessions of Congress without becoming law. The 116th Congress finally passed it and it was signed into law by President Trump on January 5, 2021. The main provisions of this Act include:

- Establishes a dedicated Office of Women’s Health within the Veterans Health Administration.
- Expands reintegration and readjustment counselling for women veterans and their family members.
- Bolsters call-services available for women veterans.
- Eliminates barriers-to-care by staffing every VA facility with a dedicated women’s primary care provider, training on women’s healthcare for clinicians and retrofitting of VA facilities to provide privacy.
- Provides access to certain legal services for women veterans who receive VA healthcare.
- Requires a GAO report on VA efforts to support homeless and at-risk women veterans.
- Expands counselling for MST to former National Guard and Reserve members.

### Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act

SWAN supported this act which was signed into law on January 5, 2021 by President Trump. Its main provisions include:

- Data collection for all women veterans participating in VA programs including the Transition Assistance Program (TAP).
- A study on Barriers-to-Care experienced by women veterans.
- Provision of Parenting Skill Training in Affective and Interpersonal Regulation (STAIR) for PTSD patients.
- Changes to processing of and reporting on claims for Military Sexual Trauma: as follows:
  - All MST claims must be processed by specialized claims teams.
  - VA must track MST claims for consistency of decisions across Veterans Benefits Administration Regional Offices.
  - MST survivors can choose the gender of the Medical provider performing any medical examination needed for the MST compensation and pension benefits.
  - Requires the VA to report on the implementation of the recommendations made by the 2018 Office of the Inspector General Report “Denied PTSD Claims for MST”

## ADVOCATE CONTINUED

SWAN constantly highlights the contributions of military women in the media, shines light on issues affecting service women and women veterans and provides expertise on women in the military. We collaborate with major news outlets like The Hill, Politico, National Public Radio, Sirius XM, and more. In 2020:



Above: SWAN Fellow Dr. Ellen Haring discussing how female veterans are affected by homelessness during an interview on Sirius XM.

- SWAN issued 7 Press Releases
  - DoD's Annual Report on Sexual Harassment and Violence at the Military Service Academies
  - National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service Report
  - Dismantling Racism In America
  - Fort Hood Accountability and Disappearance of Vanessa Guillen
  - SWAN Urges Congress to Halt Implementation of Army Combat Fitness Test (ACFT)
  - SWAN Responds to the Army's Report of the Fort Hood Independent Review Committee
  - SWAN Responds to VA IG report on sexual assault allegations
- Appeared in over 35 interviews for various news outlets





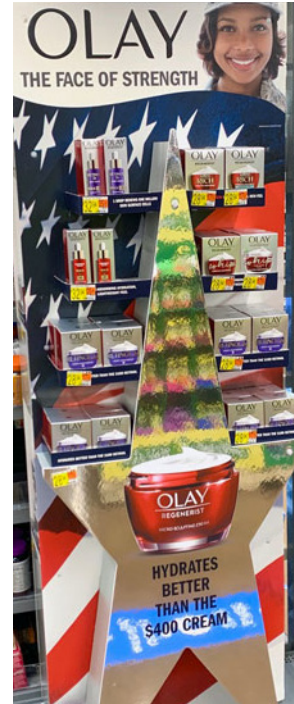
# CONNECT



## Faces Of Strength Campaign

In September 2020, SWAN partnered with Olay and Walmart for its “Faces Of Strength” campaign, highlighting and empowering the strength of our U.S. military women. Olay launched a limited-edition camouflage jar that was only available on Walmart.com. **Olay and Walmart donated \$250 to SWAN for every one jar of Olay’s limited-edition camouflage print jar of Olay Regenerist Micro-Sculpting Face Cream purchased on Walmart.com**, which resulted in a total donation of \$250,000. The monetary value of this donation equates to SWAN’s ability to serve three servicemembers for every one jar purchased.

“For almost 70 years, OLAY has empowered women to FACE ANYTHING fearlessly. This especially includes women who work in male-dominated fields, like our US armed forces. SWAN and Olay have complementary missions to celebrate and support women, which is why we are perfect partners,” says SWAN CEO, Deshauna Barber. “Olay and Walmart’s generous donation will directly support SWAN’s mission of supporting, connecting, and advocating for the individual and collective needs of servicewomen; past, present, and future.”



## The Military Women’s Coalition

The Military Women’s Coalition is a national group of formal and informal organizations that work collaboratively to serve and support active duty, reserve, guard, veteran and retired service women by uniting and elevating their voices to influence policy and improve their well being. In 2018, SWAN researched and led the creation of the Military Women’s Coalition. SWAN identified over 150 small, mostly unfunded organizations across the country that were serving military women at the local and state levels. In 2020, we have worked diligently to establish the Military Women’s Coalition as an impactful and valuable Coalition for both member organizations and military women across the United States. In June 2019, SWAN hosted the first annual MWC Steering Committee meeting in Washington, DC. Through the establishment of the steering committee, the MWC has been able to focus its mission, create organizational bylaws and governing practices, establish avenues of funding for the MWC, and more. Though the MWC is a new organization, members have already seen the benefits of coalition membership in the ways of fundraising, resource allocation, connecting service women to relevant coalition organizations to assist them with the challenges they face and more. In 2019, SWAN played a major role not only in the Steering Committee and by the establishment of a basic organizational structure for the MWC but by planning, organizing, and hosting this conference.

## MILITARY WOMEN'S COALITION

UNITING SERVICEWOMEN:  
PAST. PRESENT & FUTURE

## SWAN 2019 SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

Facebook: 16,561

Instagram: 1,557

Twitter: 8,574

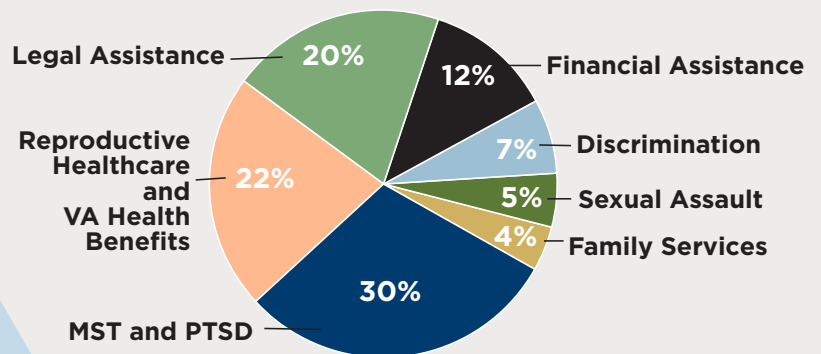


# SUPPORT

## CASE MANAGEMENT

In 2020, SWAN grew its case management program significantly. SWAN established the new position of case manager within the organization, meaning we now have a member of staff solely dedicated to responding to support requests from women veterans and service women and identifying gender specific resources in communities all over the United States.

SWAN responded to requests from veterans and service members related to a wide variety of issues in 2020:



## SUPPORT CONTINUED

### INTERNSHIPS

SWAN provides young professionals and students with paid internship opportunities, enabling them to gain professional development experience, the opportunity to learn about issues affecting service women and women veterans and the ability to give back to their communities. In recruitment, we give priority to candidates who have served, currently serve or come from military families.

Throughout 2020, SWAN had 5 interns:

- 4 were student veterans
- All 5 were women

### RESOURCE PORTAL

Since its creation in 2018, our Resource Portal is continuously expanding. In 2020, the SWAN Resource Portal grew to include more than 85 gender-specific resources and was accessed over 3,000 times. The Portal includes resources related to gender equality, housing, financial assistance, alternative therapies, mental health, and more.



SWAN Fellow Dr. Ellen Haring shares information with the public at a community event.

# THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS



Deployed Base Honors Women's History Month With Formation, Ceremony by Senior Airman Jenifer Calhoun

In order to work towards our mission for service women and women veterans, we depend entirely on the generosity of our members, community partners, and charitable foundations. In 2020, with the help of our supporters, SWAN:

- Fought to ensure equal treatment of women in the military, hold sex offenders accountable in the military justice system, and eliminate barriers to disability claims for women veterans.
- Worked to expand and solidify the Military Women's Coalition, and to expand the efficacy of a national network of organizations and individuals focused on supporting service women and women veterans.
- Fought to ensure service women have access to all jobs, regardless of their gender.

SWAN remains focused and passionate in advancing our mission. In 2021, join us in supporting, connecting and advocating for service women-past, present and future.

To continue your support for service women, women veterans, and the Service Women's Action network, visit our website to become a SWAN member or to make a contribution in solidarity with all military women.

SWAN could not conduct research, educate policy makers, build networks among military women, or connect service women and women veterans to the resources they need without the support of our community.

THANK YOU for supporting the Service Women's Action Network!



Not Forgotten - Vietnam Women Veterans Visit Fort Lee by Dani Johnson

**Service**   
**Women's**   
**Action**   
**Network** 

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