



ARMY RESILIENCE DIRECTORATE

DOD Recognizes 'Connect to Protect' as Top Suicide Prevention Program

By Antwaun J. Parrish, Army Resilience Directorate

ARLINGTON, Va. – Since 2016, the Department of Defense has honored exemplary programs of each Military Department, for their exceptional efforts to increase suicide prevention awareness and community through engagement throughout the month of September- which is Suicide Prevention Month.

This year The U.S. Army Garrison White Sands Missile Range, White Sands, New Mexico is the Army recipient of the 2020-2021 DoD Suicide Prevention Recognition.

“The Department recognizes suicide prevention requires year-round dedication and honors those programs that have positively influenced suicide prevention efforts,” said Gilbert Cisneros, Under Secretary of Defense.

USAG WSMR Army Substance Abuse Program collaborated with other agencies in the community to host several year-round activities for suicide prevention.

“Connect to Protect: Be There”, was the message and focus for WSMR throughout the year. ASAP and other agencies within their community hosted several activities for suicide prevention for a year-round prevention effort.

Despite COVID-19 restrictions and protocol WSMR were creative with developing 12 activities to bring awareness to the community. Four of the main activities were the push-up challenge, a community pledge, training, and a commercial leading up to an all-encompassing event, Connect to Protect: Train Your Mind, Challenge your Body.

Push-up challenge

September 1, 2020 ASAP engaged with service members, DOD employees, and Family Members to participate in a pushup challenge. The challenge called for the participants to perform 17 pushups daily for a month.

The number 17 was chosen as a way to represent the daily number of veterans reported as committing suicide.

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Pledge

Community members signed a suicide prevention pledge to demonstrate their personal commitment to prevention. According to the WSMR ASAP team the pledge is a promise to 'Be There', which means to check-in with a friend, or co-worker, learn the resources available, be the one who reaches out first, and sets the example by creating an environment where asking for help is a strength.

The campaign was initiated October 2020 and the signed pledges were posted from December 2020 – February 2021.

Training

Over 56 training sessions were provided to the workforce and Soldiers, using the Ask, Care, Escort training method. According to the EAP coordinator, the participation in the classes continued to increase after each class and stayed behind after class asking more questions about suicide attempts. The training was offered virtual and face-to-face with over 1550 students total.

Commercial

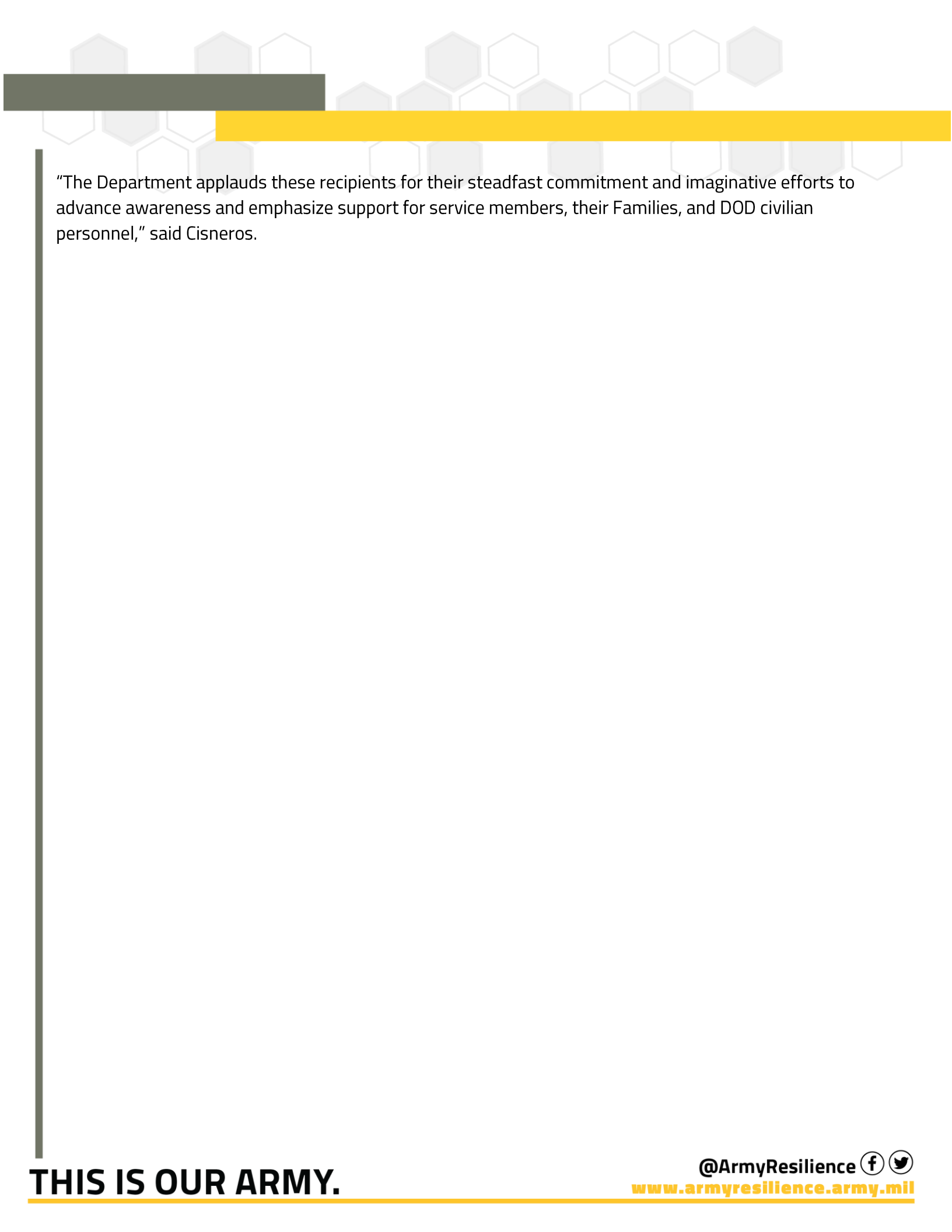
The WSMR ASAP team produced a 2-minute commercial titled, WSMR Let's Talk with the assistance of community members and the visual information branch to enhance suicide prevention efforts in minimizing suicide behavior.

The premise of the commercial represents the community, as the actors finished each other's sentence to emphasize how we should pay attention to warning signs and not be afraid to ask about suicide. The video ends with closing remarks from the WSMR commanding general and the post command sergeant major.

Connect to Protect: Train Your Mind, Challenge your Body

This event was held Sep. 1, 2021, to kick-off Suicide Prevention Month. According to Sandra Class, WSMR ASAP program manager, this event was intended to challenge participant's physical all while learning about the resources available at WSMR.

"This is a great opportunity not only to include the military population but also the civilian population and the Family in a joint activity that is both competitive and at the same time they will learn what is offered on the installation," said Class.



“The Department applauds these recipients for their steadfast commitment and imaginative efforts to advance awareness and emphasize support for service members, their Families, and DOD civilian personnel,” said Cisneros.