

# Corporate Resumé

## National Veterans Services Fund, Inc.

Two Decades  
of Service  
to Veterans  
and Their Families

*formerly  
Vietnam Veterans  
Agent Orange Victims, Inc.*



Toll Free: (800) 521-0198  
Dial Direct: (203) 656-0003  
Fax: (203) 656-1957  
e-mail: NatVetSvc@aol.com

P.O. Box 2465  
Darien, CT 06820-0465

**National  
Veterans Services  
Fund, Inc.  
P.O. Box 2465  
Darien, CT 06820-0465**

**◆◆◆◆**

***Formerly Vietnam Veterans Agent Orange Victims, Inc.***

**◆◆◆◆**

***Assisting veterans and their families since 1978***

**◆◆◆◆**

NVSE, Inc. assisted with negotiations for heating and air conditioning for their expanded home. NVSE, Inc. obtained specially-sized garage doors to accommodate the van. Materials were provided by a lumber company and a donation from the Joe Hardy Foundation assisted with costs.

- Lucy, who lives in the southwest, had complicated health problems that could only be treated in New York City. The family had no financial resources above and beyond health insurance. NVSE, Inc. was able to secure airplane tickets for the family. They stayed at the Ronald McDonald House. A local supermarket contributed food vouchers. With consideration for the pressure the family was under, family entertainment activities were also provided.

- Tom, the severely handicapped son of a deceased veteran, was able to purchase a wheelchair because NVSE, Inc. was able to secure the services of an elevator company that provided a lift for the family's trailer. The trailer door was widened and the porch adapted for the lift. Renovations were provided at minimal cost as was the lift.

- Nate, a Gulf War veteran, reached NVSE, Inc. through our nationally-publicized Gulf War Hotline. He was suffering from severe PTSD, had an other-than-honorable discharge from the military, and was in marital crisis and was suicidal. Over the course of the ensuing weeks, we provided peer counseling over the phone, which resulted not only in his admission to a VA Medical Facility, but his wife wants to assist other Gulf War veteran families by starting a spousal support group in their area.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The legacy of the Vietnam War and the Gulf War should be the valiant determination of their veterans to turn adversity into a new way of serving our country. This is being accomplished through programs that have taken the lead in establishing social services that meet their own needs, that are community-based, case-managed and family-focused. It should be the veterans' progressive view of community development and the goal of making the system more accessible to those who are traditionally isolated. Programs such as NVSE, Inc., have been determined to make sure that the struggle with physical and emotional problems, does not continue for one more generation, but that partnerships develop to sustain families during their darkest days and help them self-advocate for the services they continue to require.

With the sunset of major funding, NVSE, Inc.'s future will depend upon its ability to secure financial resources. There is still much to be done to strengthen veteran families, particularly the children and grandchildren who are disabled. The continuation of NVSE, Inc.'s programs is critical because these families have so few alternative options as they move toward becoming full contributing members of society once again.

# NATIONAL VETERANS SERVICES FUND, INC.

NVSE, Inc.: Two Decades of Service to Veterans and Their Families

## I. INTRODUCTION

National Veterans Services Fund, Inc. (NVSE, Inc.) is a national, non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization, incorporated in the State of Connecticut that provides case managed social services and limited medical assistance to Vietnam- and Gulf War veterans and their families. Located in Darien, Connecticut, NVSE, Inc. exists to address the special needs of Vietnam- and Gulf War veterans and their families. NVSE, Inc. programs uniquely combine family-guided case management (service coordination) and advocacy assistance while building social and community support.

*NVSE, Inc. serves veterans' families in several ways:*

- It administers a national hotline for veterans and their families who have inquiries or who need assistance. More than 300 inquiries are received each month.
- A special fund provides limited emergency economic assistance and relief for veteran families in crisis.
- Partnerships with other agencies make it possible to secure services and equipment at reduced rates or at no-cost for families in need.

*Staff members are veterans who are committed to providing a supportive environment that responds to the special concerns of veterans' families:*

- Staff members work in respectful partnership with families, incorporating their culture, values and structure into the case management process.
- Peer counselors work with veterans who are isolated from traditional social services support and enable family members to work together to determine their own course of action to resolve their problems.

*The partnership between NVSE, Inc. and veteran families is critical because:*

- Social service agencies often cannot address the special needs of veteran families because they are unaware of the complexities of veteran problems.
- Veteran families have been unable to secure services from any other source.
- Families feel burdened, isolated and overwhelmed by this country's fragmented system of services. Many tend to "give up."
- Health insurance income-eligibility requirements often limit family access to particular services. Sometimes sheer persistence or simply changing the wording on an application can bring positive results for a family.

*NVSE, Inc.'s unique approach to serving veteran families is based on establishing long-term trusting and credible partnerships with the families with:*

- An understanding that the impact of war does not always end on the battlefield, but continues to affect veterans and their families.
- Sensitivity to and respect for the unique issues of Vietnam- and Gulf War veterans and their families.
- Respect and support for the integrity of the family and of each family member.
- A process of empowerment that builds on the family's inner strengths and capabilities.

*NVSE, Inc.'s ultimate goal is to empower the family to act on its own behalf, relying on its own strengths and resources. This is achieved through these components:*

#### • **Case Management Process**

A case management approach makes it possible to involve family members in the determination of their own course of action and solutions. Case managers research all services available through health and social services agencies to make sure that the veteran family has sought appropriate assistance. They provide support in determining why the family may have been denied particular benefits or service and work with the family to decide what course of action should be followed.

#### • **Leveraging: Partnerships with Health and Social Services Agencies, Community, and Business**

The cost of care can be overwhelming and can easily deter a family. NVSE, Inc. has established partnerships with a range of health care providers, the business community and others who provide support and reduce the cost of care. This type of assistance is known as leveraging. NVSE, Inc. encourages providers to discount or donate services or equipment in order to lower medical costs for families. With business, industry and health provider partners, we find creative ways to cover costs of operations, orthopedic and therapeutic devices, remedial programs for the learning disabled, computers — even care-giver relief. Airlines may fly families across country for much-needed treatment that is not available in their own regions.

## II. BACKGROUND

Many veterans returned from Vietnam with a range of unusual physical and emotional conditions. An unwelcoming public and a social services system that was ill-prepared for the complicated problems left veterans isolated and unattended. A fragmented social and health services system was unable to respond to their needs.

out the nation. New Mexico, Connecticut, Florida, Missouri, Maine, are but a few of the states where NVSE, Inc. members have served as keynote speakers, trainers and distributed information on Agent Orange programs and services for families.

G. Our Director of Persian Gulf Services has testified before Congress and the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Illnesses. Thousands of Gulf War veterans have been outreached, and NVSE, Inc. has developed a Personal Data Questionnaire (PDQ), which has resulted in a statistical survey cited not only for research and advocacy conducted by several veterans organizations nationwide, but also before the Senate.

H. Created legislation forming the Persian Gulf Information and Relief Commission for Connecticut veterans and their families. Our Director of Persian Gulf Services was then named to serve a five-year term on this Commission.

#### DIRECT CASE MANAGEMENT SERVICES TO FAMILIES ENHANCED BY LEVERAGING

At the heart of NVSE, Inc.'s efforts is its direct services to children who are disabled or have severe health problems, whether or not they are directly attributable to the Agent Orange exposure of their parent. The total value of services provided to veterans' families is nearly \$725,000.00 in five years.

A. NVSE, Inc. has spent over \$500,000 on direct services to hundreds of children nationwide.

B. In addition, NVSE, Inc. develops partnerships with service providers and the business community. This leveraging effort, enables the organization to secure donated aid in various forms to reduce the costs of services to families. More than \$225,000 in direct donations has been provided to benefit veteran children and their families.

C. Families are provided with necessary information and referrals to work within systems — Social Security, Medicaid, Veterans' Benefits. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been acquired by families, because of NVSE, Inc.'s support and assistance.

D. Also, NVSE, Inc. has provided direct and measurable services for over 7,000 veterans, 1,500 children, and 1,700 significant others since 1990.

#### FAMILY CASE STUDIES DEMONSTRATE NVSE, Inc.'s COMMITMENT TO SUPPORTING FAMILIES

*These case studies provide examples of a few of the ways that NVSE, Inc. has assisted families:*

- The Rodney family, with two children who have multiple handicaps, have become contractors themselves in order to support their children's needs.

- I. Provided expert information to the White House and legislative branches of government which led to 17 medical and scientific studies.
- J. Provided testimony and information to every Congress from the 96th to the present Congress on Agent Orange and Gulf War Illness. The delineation of some Agent Orange-related illnesses resulted from this information.
- K. Created the Brandie Schieb Children's Fund in 1984 to directly address the range of physical problems that challenge veteran families. Vietnam veteran children who have treatable illnesses may not receive services because they do not have financial resources or health insurance and do not qualify for federal or state health benefits.
- L. NVSF, Inc. was the first veterans organization in the nation to recognize health problems in returning Gulf War veterans. As early as April, 1991, NVSF, Inc. began intake on Desert Storm veterans presenting symptoms of Gulf War illnesses, which resulted in the creation and development of the National Gulf War Research and Registry Project for Veterans and their Families.

**In 1994 and 1995, NVSF, Inc. members and staff have actively continued to develop new ways of improving services to veterans and their families:**

- A. NVSF, Inc. is currently working with the State of Connecticut to assure that veterans' families and their children are included in the new Child and Family Services Plan and Family Preservation/Family Support Initiative.
- B. NVSF, Inc. arranged for the local VFW to host a meeting of the Northeastern Alliance, an outgrowth of the New England Consortium to inform, educate, and train all grantees in the northeastern region about financial opportunities becoming available through the Family Preservation and Support Services Program. Presentations were made by representatives of major national veterans associations, as well as experts from the Family Preservation and Support Services Program.
- C. NVSF, Inc. Members participated in a national conference in Kansas City, Missouri to design and develop a national service-delivery program for Vietnam veterans and their families.
- D. In 1995, NVSF, Inc. hosted a regional training session for Agent Orange Class Assistance Program members, focusing on the Family Preservation Act, AmeriCorps, and additional resource opportunities.
- E. The NVSF, Inc. director gave a keynote address on the current status of the Department of Veteran Affairs' policies and legislation with regards to the Agent Orange issue at the official Memorial Day Ceremonies at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC.
- F. NVSF, Inc. members have participated in conferences and training through-

Through the efforts of NVSF, Inc. founder and member Paul Reutershan, a young veteran dying of an unusual cancer, a national movement was begun that united veterans to fight for desperately needed services and treatment. The struggle was not only for the veterans, but for their families whose suffering was profound. Only now, two decades later, is there an understanding of the impact of veterans' problems on their families. Many family members suffer a high incidence of chronic health conditions and problems that affect the family's physical, psychological, social and economic well-being and productivity.

Veterans' Families of America (VFA) board member and Chairman Gary E. May substantiated the need for an innovative service delivery system, stating that, "Until 1989, no health or social system existed to focus on the whole family and the numerous problems with which they struggle. Existing systems were exclusionary and uncoordinated, often geographically distant from the family needing service."

A growing body of research demonstrates that the veterans' post-traumatic stress disorder and other problems are transgenerational. The continuing effects on veterans' children are similar to those of children who have directly suffered traumatic experiences, such as the Holocaust or war. Other children – now grandchildren, as well – who are born with disabilities have historically been excluded from services by established health and social systems because of an assumption that they are covered by veterans benefits.

The government now acknowledges that several cancers and physical conditions can be attributed to the effects of Agent Orange. Veteran families continue to give birth to children and grandchildren who have a high incidence of birth-defects and disabilities. There is a growing recognition that Vietnam War- and now Gulf War veterans returned with a host of physical and emotional problems.

There is, however, no long-term plan to provide the support families in need, medically or emotionally, as they struggle to become fully contributing members of society. It has been veterans' organizations that have initiated changes in social services systems. Veterans have successfully demonstrated better service models and ways to strengthen and involve communities and social service networks to benefit families. The success of the network of veterans' programs is applicable to other human services programs and merits financial support.

### III. NVSF, Inc.'s ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND FUTURE PLANS

From the beginning, it was apparent that veterans felt isolated except when in the company of fellow veterans. NVSF, Inc. veterans developed an intricate process of case management that became a model for other programs.

They research and maintain profiles of each community, identifying services that were available to improve the condition of their lives. As community-based experts, they are proficient in tapping often-fragmented social service systems in each community. Through a peer counseling process, they help individual families clarify their needs, identify and request the services that best helped resolve their problems. NVSF, Inc. members are skilled in seeking appeals when services had been denied.

Most NVSF, Inc. clients have fallen through the cracks of America's social services system. Veterans and family members may not qualify for federal, state or veterans' safety net services. Many have meager financial resources, are under-insured or have no health insurance. In most cases, they have exhausted most of their resources trying to solve their health issues in isolation.

### **BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE**

NVSF, Inc. plans to continue those crucial and unique programs in the future for an estimated 40,000 Vietnam veteran children who need services as well as 100,000 Desert Storm veterans who now have 30,000 children identified as needing the same type of assistance.

**NVSF, Inc.'s future will depend upon its ability to secure financial resources to continue, enhance and expand these efforts:**

- *Continuing the national hotline*
- *Public Education, Legislative Support and Advocacy*
- *Partnership efforts with veterans service organizations, health and social services organizations, and public/private sectors*
- *Leveraging the services and support of the private sector and health or social services organizations*
- *Direct Services to families enhanced by leveraging*

### **THE NATIONAL HOTLINE**

During the past year, NVSF, Inc. received 3,000 phone calls on its toll-free number from veterans and their families around the nation. Callers receive information and/or assistance for medical, medically related, legal or social service needs. NVSF, Inc. placed an equal number of calls on behalf of the veterans and their families to medical professionals, health-care professionals, service providers, manufacturers and distributors of assistive technology. More than 1,000 informational packets and applications for assistance were disseminated.

### **PUBLIC EDUCATION, LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT, AND ADVOCACY**

Public education will continue. Veterans need to be kept aware of new services

and any new support that becomes available. Congress and federal, state and local policy makers require the most advanced information so that their program and policy decisions respond appropriately to veteran needs.

In a public education and advocacy capacity, NVSF, Inc. has been a leader and important resource for federal, state and local initiatives. Some of NVSF, Inc.'s most significant accomplishments include:

- A. Initiated the class action lawsuit that resulted in a major settlement in behalf of veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange. As a result, the Agent Orange Class Assistance Program (AOCAP) and a national network of veterans service organizations was established, changing the way this country provides veterans health and social services.
- B. Provided resources and technical assistance to AOCAP and other veterans programs throughout the country.
- C. Contributed financial support to non-profit organizations serving the veterans' community: Agent Orange Veterans' Network, Veterans' Outreach Center, the YMCA, National Hispanic Veterans Network, and The Children's Make A Wish Foundation.
- D. Provided expert resource information to the Environmental Protection Agency and the scientific community in a successful effort to ban Dioxin-related products in the United States. Nine thousand products were called off the market.
- E. Led a 27-state campaign to create new laws regarding Vietnam veterans and the health consequences of exposure to toxic substances. The National Association of State Agent Orange Commissions was created as a result of these efforts.
- F. Conducted medical and scientific seminars and symposiums about Dioxin, Agent Orange, Vietnam veterans and their families at major universities, including Harvard and New York University Law School. Held medical outreach conference designed for health care professionals at the University of Connecticut Health Center.
- G. From October 1982 through June of 1989, NVSF, Inc. was contracted by the Connecticut Department of Health Services and the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs to identify Vietnam veterans who may have been exposed to herbicides. During that period, NVSF, Inc. outreached over 7,000 Connecticut Vietnam veterans and referred them to the appropriate state and federal agencies for medical, administrative, legal, and social assistance.
- H. Were instrumental in creating the Connecticut Vietnam Herbicides Commission, which, from 1982 to 1987 gathered data on thousands of Vietnam veterans and their families.