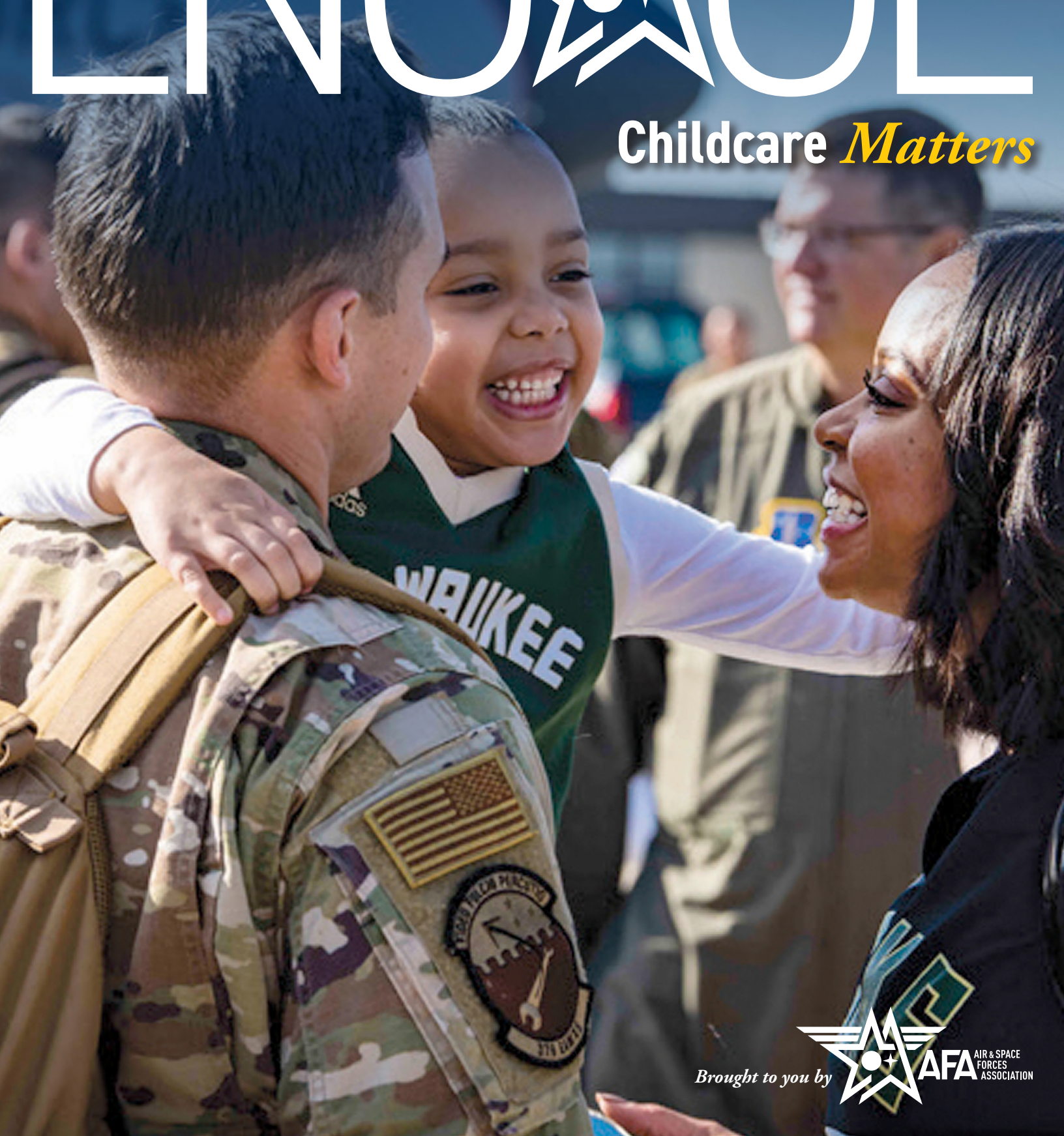


UNITED FORCES & FAMILIES ENGAGE

Childcare *Matters*





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After graduating from the University of South Carolina in 2016, with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Public Relations, and commissioning as a Public Affairs Officer through Air Force ROTC Detachment 775, she went on to serve 7 years on Active Duty. On AD, she had 3 assignments, 1 deployment, and completed her Master's of Arts in Mass Communication at the University of Florida before switching over to the Reserve.

To read Savannah's full biography, go to "Meet the ENGAGE Team" on page 26.

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The AFA Perspective

The mental load of parenthood is heavy. It's so heavy, the Surgeon General recently issued an Advisory on the Mental Health & Well-Being of Parents.

We plan. We juggle. We worry. We dream big. We love hard. We do our best but often fear it's not enough.

We think about childcare a LOT when our kids are young. Daycare waiting lists create an uncertainty that stays in the back of our minds for months. A meeting invitation at 6:30 at night for a mandatory 8am meeting causes panic. The ever-increasing costs of quality childcare require prudent financial management and sacrifices. News stories of inadequate childcare keep us up at night. We constantly pray that we have made the right decisions.

And this small sampling of concerns does not even take into account the added stressors of military family life. If our families do not have reliable and safe childcare, they are not ready to do the work we are asking them to.

Family readiness is mission readiness.

I'm proud of the way the Air & Space Forces Association (AFA) has prioritized childcare in our legislative priorities and made childcare a key focus of our United Forces and Families (F2) programs. Many of our F2 grants have supported childcare needs at installations around the world.

When we were deciding what topics to cover in our inaugural ENGAGE editions, we knew we wanted to amplify the successes, challenges, and opportunities with childcare

for military families. We also knew that Savannah Stephens was the perfect choice to take on this challenge. Since her days of interning with AFA nearly a decade ago, Savannah has lived the Air Force life in many ways. She has the first hand perspectives of an Active-duty member, dual military family, Reserve Public Affairs Officer, DAF civilian, and an amazing mom to three of the cutest kiddos. Our AFA team is so proud of everything Savannah has accomplished and the stories she's brought to life in the pages that follow.

The title of this edition is Childcare Matters. It matters for everyone.

Childcare is not an issue exclusive to military spouses. It is not an issue for female service members. It is not an issue that only parents need to consider. It is an issue for Air Force and Space Force leaders, community supporters, and advocates like you.

The responsibility and opportunity to ensure our Air Force and Space Force families have access to reliable and safe childcare solutions is ours.

We are all part of the village it takes to raise children. As Savannah points out, these children are our next generation of Airmen and Guardians ... and they're watching us. Let's do this together, friends.



Kari

Kari Voliva
AFA Vice President, Member & Field Relations

MISSION

AFA's mission is to promote dominant U.S. Air and Space Forces as the foundation of a strong National Defense; to honor and support our Airmen, Guardians, and their Families; and to remember and respect our enduring Heritage.

The F2 Mission

To unite forces and families, strengthening quality of life for Air and Space communities.

The F2 Vision & Values

A culture where strong families continually build stronger forces.

Inclusion | Family | Community | Education | Advocacy

VALUES



*where strong families
build stronger forces*

Childcare Matters

As a military parent, choosing the right childcare option for your family may be one of the most important decisions you make. With every PCS and military assignment, we know childcare is at the forefront of your mind when the time comes to move. The Department of Defense offers a variety of quality childcare options at installations worldwide, and has taken steps to keep standards high, such as requiring national accreditations and supporting military-specific childcare needs.

Statistically, families are happy with the quality of care but there are lingering concerns about long waitlists and overall costs, especially for families of junior service members. To address these concerns, the DoD is expanding the pool of community-based providers, building more child development centers, and increasing the amount of fee assistance available to families.

But the demand for on-installation center-based childcare and family childcare homes exceeds current capacity. In 2022, the Air Force reported over 4,800 children, who were under the age of five and dependents of Air Force personnel, were unable to enroll in on-base child development programs. The average wait time for enrollment was 130 days. ***That is 130 days too long for our military families to stress over the care of their children.***

In a recent survey of Active Duty Spouses*, the civilian spouse unemployment rate was 21%. The No. 1 reason spouses said they were unemployed was due to caring for children not in daycare or school. The data showed that having children younger than 6 years old, which accounts for 46% of military families, significantly increases the spouse's odds of unemployment.

*https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/BSF_MFLS_Comp_Infographic_Feb24.pdf & https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/BSF_MFLS_Comp_Report_Full_Digital-042424.pdf





Unemployment, juggling multiple children at home, and often relying on a single income are driving factors behind food insecurity, mental health struggles, and a profound dissatisfaction with life among our Airmen and Guardian families. This dire situation underscores the urgent need for dedicated intervention to support these families and ensure their well-being. Immediate and continuous action is critical to provide the resources and stability they need to thrive.

These disparities have an obvious impact on the morale, retention, and effectiveness of servicemembers whose children are adversely affected. We have to take better care of our families holistically.



Savannah

Savannah Stephens
Air Force Reserve PAO Airman

An impactful way to engage in this initiative is by joining the F2 Community. By connecting with our supportive network, you can help advocate for meaningful solutions to the top quality of life challenges facing our families. With the strength of AFA's 120,000+ members, a dedicated grassroots organization, and a mission-driven staff, the F2 Community is here to ensure our Air Force and Space Force families and ultimately, our children, receive the support and care they deserve. Your voice and action are essential and together, we can make a difference.

Join F2: www.AFA.org/F2

WHY IT MATTERS

The stark reality is that some of our military spouses are having to choose between growing their family or working. Military spouse unemployment is an ongoing problem and childcare is the primary contributing factor. In many situations, childcare has become an expense that just doesn't make sense for many families.

How Can I Engage?

Taking care of our military families is essential to mission readiness. Our families face long waiting lists for childcare on installations, and the lack of affordable care exacerbates financial struggles and high spouse unemployment rates. These challenges place immense pressure on military families, undermining their stability and well-being.

It's not just about finding care, it's about finding QUALITY care. Our Air and Space Forces children are amazing. They're strong and resilient, and we want to trust that they're growing and thriving in quality environments. These are our future Airmen and Guardians. We must address these challenges to ensure our military families can thrive and continue to contribute to our society's strength and prosperity.

Current Successes

What's Working

Over the last year, the Air and Space Forces have focused on improving access to childcare including staffing initiatives for childcare centers, adding more family childcare providers, and increasing community-based fee assistance along with targeted construction investments.

With increasing availability and affordability of the Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood (MCCYN) program, they were able to provide almost \$30 million in assistance across 4,400 spaces for 6,752 children.

Currently, over 30% of CDC direct care providers are receiving a discount for working at a CDC while their children are enrolled, totalling more than \$3.1 million per quarter.

Last year, the Department of Defense hosted its first-ever Child Care Summit to give a voice to military families and childcare providers. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III has prioritized efforts to strengthen support for DoD personnel and families under his "Taking Care of Our Service Members and Families" initiative.

These programs directly impact the readiness and retention of Airmen, Guardians, and their families. These initiatives support spouse employment, and because of that, provide greater financial stability for our families.

Improving access to childcare is a need and AFA is ensuring we're ready to support and advocate however we can.

"I hope you all know that you've got someone at the very top in your corner ready to fight for the issues that you're working on and take childcare to the very top within the Pentagon."

Grier Martin, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs during the Child Care Summit.

The infographic features the Kinderspot logo at the top left, with the tagline "care we can share". Below it is a QR code with the text "Scan to learn more" and buttons for "GET IT ON Google Play" and "Download on the App Store". The main content is divided into three numbered steps: 1. BECOME A VERIFIED USER (CDC Admin will verify all users to make sure they are eligible to share spots), 2. OFFER AND/OR RENT A SPOT (Week-long intervals can be offered and rented by children of the same age), and 3. CDC HANDLES THE PAYMENT (Spot Renters pay their rate to the CDC directly, and Spot Holders are credited at their existing rate). At the bottom, two smartphones display the app's interface, showing a calendar for selecting weeks to offer or rent spots. The infographic is branded with Odball, BESPIN, and the Air Force logo, with the text "An Official United States Department of the Air Force Application" at the bottom.

Boasting over 6,200 users and facilitating nearly 3,700 short-term childcare arrangements as of last Fall, the Kinderspot app, developed by Air Force Maj. Jacque Vasta, was implemented across all Air Force child development centers in July 2024. This helps DoD families on Air and Space Force bases offer or find week-long blocks of time for rent at the CDC. A win-win situation allowing military families to save on childcare costs during absences and ensure fellow military members have access to much-needed services.



The DoD now offers a dependent care flexible spending account to help families pay for dependent care expenses. The benefit is available to Active-duty members, members of the Active Guard Reserve on Title 10 orders, and DoD civilians. Service members can contribute up to \$5,000 per household per year, lowering taxable income and reducing out-of-pocket costs for childcare.



The Department of Defense Education Activity began implementing full-day, universal pre kindergarten with the 2024-2025 school year in all 80 DoDEA schools, marking the first phase of a comprehensive three-phase plan. [Watch the video.](#)



DoD implemented a new fee schedule for on base childcare designed to reduce fees for lower income military families while maintaining high quality care at CDCs worldwide. The new fee structure followed President Biden's executive order in April directing the DoD to improve childcare affordability.

Child development program direct-care staff, including military spouses, will benefit from a 100% childcare fee waiver for their first child enrolled in installation Child Development Programs, and all additional children will receive a 25% discount. Job postings for your local installation can be found on [usajobs.gov](#).

Nonprofits, like Operation Child Care Project, provide resources and forums to allow military families to gain fee assistance for childcare quicker, ask personal questions about childcare programs available to them, and research current policies and legislation affecting spouses and service members alike.



Making a Difference



M meet Kayla Corbitt. A dedicated Army wife who has a passion for helping military families apply for and find affordable childcare.

Kayla started Operation Child Care Project (OCCP) as just an idea. After studying psychology in graduate school, she realized the issue with childcare was much larger than it seemed, but everyone's lives in the military are so chaotic that people didn't have any energy left to fight the problem.

"I would go to installation leadership, I would go to child and youth services and be like, 'hey guys have you noticed these issues?' Other spouses would join me sometimes, but everyone's lives are so chaotic whether it be emotionally, physically, or mentally that they didn't have the capacity to continue this fight."

After having her own child and experiencing these issues firsthand, she dedicated herself to thoroughly understanding the intricacies of military childcare programs. Her focus was on identifying the critical gaps

that need to be addressed immediately to better support our service members and families.

"The only spouses working either didn't have kids, or had school aged kids and didn't need childcare. I had student loans, that wasn't going to work for me. I needed to work."

A lot of what OCCP focuses on from the sociological advocacy aspect is encouraging people to keep childcare in the conversation. When they hear about programs being developed for spouse employment, they ask if childcare or stipends are involved because it doesn't matter how many programs there are if childcare is still an issue.

Kayla spearheaded a groundbreaking pilot program in Norfolk, VA, revolutionizing how military families access childcare. This innovative initiative enables families to go online and find nearby accredited childcare resources, both on and off-base, significantly increasing their chances of securing a spot. It stands as the sole program providing a comprehensive view of all accredited options, setting a new standard for military childcare accessibility.

“I wanted something accurate, up-to-date, and done monthly. I found that the military childcare websites were only updated annually... that’s not often enough when people are on waitlists for months at a time.”

OCCP is a fully volunteer run non-profit and they specialize in case management, advocacy, and policy research for military families. They can take families who have been waiting for months for fee assistance and secure the help they need in about a week, delivering swift and impactful support when it matters most.

They run Facebook live events to share educational resources and answer questions in a larger group setting. They have experts on the board able to answer questions about regular care such as CDCs and FCC providers, and non-traditional questions about au-pairs, nanny, and other more personalized childcare options.

By engaging directly with the community and providing expert guidance, OCCP empowers military families to make informed decisions about their childcare needs.

Our mission at Operation Child Care Project™ is to provide active duty military families with access to high-quality childcare resources.



Find OCCP Online:



@OCC_Project



@TheOCCProject



www.OCCproject.com



Grand Forks AFB breaks ground on \$8.4 million addition to CDC. Photo by Senior Airman Raisa Christie. Used with permission from DVIDS.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

What We're Working On

Despite recent strides in the military childcare system, significant challenges remain as we continue to advocate for meaningful change. For decades, childcare has been a critical quality of life issue for military families. Today, families applying for fee assistance through programs like Child Care Aware face waits of 7-8 months for monetary support. Additionally, a nationwide shortage of qualified workers exacerbates the problem, leaving more than 9,000 military children on wait lists around the globe.

The battle for accessible, timely, and high-quality childcare is far from over, and the stakes have never been higher for our military families of today.

Demand for childcare exceeds supply and the cost makes it unattainable for many. Within the military, irregular hours, frequent moves, and living far away from

extended family creates extra challenges that take away focus from the mission.

We know that nearly 40% of service members have children (under the age of 18 and living at home) and that our military families commonly struggle to find high quality, affordable childcare. When families can't find childcare, the burden falls onto the military spouse. Now, we have spouses, who are already moving every two to three years, unable to find work without childcare, creating an overwhelming strain on families and highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive support.

SUPPORT DURING PCS

Frequent relocations are a hallmark of military life. Moving to a new base or area often means starting the search for childcare from scratch, which disrupts routines and creates stress for both the parents and children. For military spouses, these frequent moves often hinder

career progression, and adding the stress of childcare creates an additional burden.

Unaffordable or limited childcare options force many spouses to sacrifice their careers or put their dreams of pursuing higher education on hold to be able to care for their children. When childcare costs are too high, there is less disposable income for other essentials like food, housing, and savings for unexpected emergencies.

The number one issue* in today's military family is spouse unemployment, but we've never addressed the core issue: childcare. Our families need to be equipped with the right education, resources, and tools to make the childcare decisions best for their loved ones.

For families with children who have special needs, finding appropriate childcare can be even more challenging. Specialized care and support systems are extremely limited at certain installations, and locating caregivers who are trained to meet their specific needs can be a

*https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/BSF_MFLS_Comp_Infographic_Feb24.pdf

complex and time-consuming process. There is a lack of personnel in the military to provide EFMP services at the installation level, and that creates a strain on resources outside the gate.

CHALLENGES FOR CDC'S

Even at bases where there are child development centers, the pandemic and staffing shortages have exacerbated the shortage. Childcare websites aren't updated frequently enough to accurately reflect availability.

The Department of Defense has received funds to build 17 new CDCs since 2019, but many of those are not complete yet. New centers will help close the wait list gaps, but they have to find the qualified workers to fill those slots. The struggle of finding qualified workers is felt nationwide, not only in the military but also in the civilian sector.

The DoD is offering wages comparable to civilian employers, but they still aren't high enough. Direct care staffing in the Air Force went from 72 to 77 percent in 2023 after the service began providing 100% discounts to the first child of staff members at the CDC.

Our military families also face the unique struggles of geographic variability and the impact of deployments. Depending on where you are stationed, availability can vary significantly depending on the location of the base. Frequent relocations and deployments can disrupt continuity of care for our children which makes the need for quality care even greater.

Military families need non-traditional care. Our service members are expected to work odd shifts and be on-call, and we have to have a childcare structure in place that can support those needs. Families need help now, they need help today. Until we tackle this head-on, we're leaving a critical gap in support that undermines the stability and resilience of our military families.





Photo from MacDill AFB Military Child Parade, April 2024.
Photo by Senior Airman Lauren Cobin. Used with Permission from DVIDS.

EXPERT INSIGHTS

Readiness & Quality of Life Suffer from Lack of Childcare

Let's go back to 2020. Imagine being a single parent, struggling to find childcare that meets the demands of your military schedule, and then the pandemic happens. Now, the childcare crisis is even worse. Since February 2020, the childcare industry has lost nearly 10% of its workforce.

We dealt with this in our own family in Florida. During the pandemic, classroom rules felt like they were continuously changing, teachers were in and out, and it was such a stressful season of life for various reasons.

THE MILITARY CHILDCARE SYSTEM

The Department of Defense (DoD) stands as the largest childcare provider in the nation, serving over 950,000 children. In 1989, the Military Child Care Act (MCCA) laid the foundation for today's system, establishing essential standards and funding.

Did you know the priority structure for military childcare is standardized across the DoD? This ensures that every family, regardless of location, has a clear understanding of their childcare options.

Over the last 30 years, military demographics have shifted dramatically, but there have not been many childcare structure changes to meet the shift.

The number of single Active-duty parents has increased by more than 60%. Dual-military families have doubled. The number of female service members has risen significantly.

What does all of that mean? It means our childcare system needs a overhaul. We need a more robust childcare system to support the growing number of single parents, working parents, and all of those who need reliable and safe childcare options to perform their duties effectively.



**UNITED FORCES
& FAMILIES**

Your involvement can make a significant impact. Working with local communities and the Air & Space Forces Association (AFA) chapters, you can offer assistance to military families through volunteer work, donations, or providing support networks. By raising awareness and sharing stories about the childcare crisis, you can help build public support for the necessary changes. By simply being a vocal advocate, childcare change can happen.

Join us at F2 to help strengthen both our military families and our Air and Space Forces. Together, we can make a difference.

[Join the F2 Community](#)

A READINESS AND QUALITY OF LIFE ISSUE

Childcare is more than just a convenience; it is a critical component of military readiness. The DoD has voiced that childcare services are a quality-of-life benefit essential for force readiness.

When military families struggle to find reliable childcare, it can pose significant repercussions on the service members performance and overall well-being.

Think of the stress it causes. We have all been there. When you are sitting in the office thinking about your child's daycare situation or receiving a phone call that they need to be picked up early, and you have no emergency contacts, it is hard.

For our single parents and dual-military families, deployment and training requirements can be particularly challenging without childcare that meets the demands of unique schedules.

There are also so many other burdens. It creates retention issues. In our own family, we have sat around the table and talked about childcare issues when one of us deployed, we have had the hard talks about the emotional strain it causes, and we had to discuss if it was worth it for both of us to continue to serve.

What about the wrench childcare throws into spouse employment? According to the Blue Star Families' 2023 Military Family Lifestyle Survey, 68% of Active-duty spouses need childcare to work, but over one-third cannot find suitable options. This lack of childcare affects spouses' ability to maintain employment, which can contribute to financial strain and lower household income, further impacting service member morale and readiness.

A CALL TO ACTION

Former Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, JoAnn Bass, aptly stated, "We recruit the service member, and we retain the family. To be the Air Force our Nation needs, we must prioritize the quality of life of our service members and their families."

Addressing the childcare crisis is not just a matter of convenience; it is a mission-critical imperative. Our military families, who sacrifice so much for our country, deserve our unwavering support.

To truly support our service members, we must increase investments in childcare infrastructure, enhance childcare programs and services, expand fee assistance programs, support spouse employment initiatives, and prioritize policy reforms.

"We recruit the service member, and we retain the family ... we must prioritize the quality of life of our service members and their families."

Everyone has a role to play in advancing childcare solutions. You can do your part by supporting the F2 Mission. At F2, we believe that stronger families continuously build stronger Forces. By taking action, we can help create a more supportive environment for our military families, ensuring their well-being and enhancing our nation's defense capabilities.

Consider joining the F2 Community and supporting our initiatives to truly make a difference.



DOD PRIORITY FOR CARE

- 1A Child Development Program Staff
- 1B Single/Dual Military & Military w/Full-Time Working Spouse
- 1C Military w/Part-Time Working Spouse or Spouse Seeking Employment
- 1D Military w/Spouse Enrolled as Full-Time Student
- 2 Single/Dual DoD Civilians or DoD Civilian w/Full-Time Working Spouse
- 3 Space Available, which includes:

1. Active Duty Military/Coast Guard or Guard/Reserve on Active Duty with Non-Working Spouse
2. DoD or Coast Guard Civilian with Spouse Seeking Employment
3. DoD or Coast Guard Civilian with Full-Time Student Spouse
4. Gold Star Spouse
5. Single/Dual DoD Contractor or DoD Contractor with a spouse who is Full-Time Working, Seeking Employment, or a Full-Time Student
6. In no order of precedence:
 - DoD or Coast Guard Civilian with Part-Time or Non-Working Spouse
 - DoD Contractor with Part-Time or Non-Working Spouse
 - Deactivated Guard/Reserve Personnel or Inactive Guard/Reserve in a Training Status
 - Other Federal Employees
 - Military Retirees



OPINION

When Childcare Must Adapt to the Mission

When they say it takes a village to raise children, they aren't kidding. In the military, that has a whole other meaning.

As a dual Active-duty family for almost 7 years, and now managing the dual working-parent and balancing the Reserve life for me, our village has evolved over time. We have been blessed with great experiences in the Child Development Centers at Hurlburt Field and Eglin Air Force Base in Florida, but we've also had seasons of having to get creative.

We've had to rely on church friends for emergency daycare pick-ups while my husband was flying and I was on a five-month deployment. The heartbreak of

being an ocean away, trying to solve life problems via Facetime... it's so hard. We've had to rely on local babysitters when TDYs have overlapped, and during COVID closures when hours and care was inconsistent. We had to look to friends to take care of our six-month-old when the CDC was closed and I worked an aircraft mishap for over two straight weeks. I tossed and turned at night because of anxious thoughts surrounding the care of my daughter, and just missing my husband while he's on the other side of the country. A non-traditional work environment requires a non-traditional childcare structure.

Childcare is a necessity for our family.

Childcare affects our mental health.

Childcare affects the mission.

When we are focused on finding care for our children, we aren't focused on our mission at work. When we're worried about the safety and well-being of our children in particular care situations, we aren't able to be the spouse, the parent, the friend, or the service member we know we can be.

So what should we do about it? How do we make childcare for our military members a priority? How do we highlight that childcare isn't a want, but a need?

We get involved and we make our voices heard. We build our village, whatever that may look like. We have to be loud.

Even when it's uncomfortable, we have to get out and meet our neighbors.

- Go to the local park, get to know the parents there, talk to them about the childcare set-up they may or may not have.
- Volunteer to watch their kids or volunteer to be someone's emergency contact!
- Attend your local Military Affairs Council meetings and advocate for our kids.
- Could you volunteer at your local childcare center?
- Could you find military families with high school students that have babysitting experience?
- Ask for help. Look into the different fee assistance programs and ask how it can benefit your family.
- Contact your local politicians in your congressional districts.

When you show you care and how important these issues are, so will others.

It is beyond frustrating knowing that spouse employment and childcare are the top quality of life issues facing our service members. It breaks my heart seeing posts in local Facebook groups asking for a complete stranger to watch someone's kid because they're at their absolute last resort.

These issues and more are why AFA's F2 mission is so critical. They are working day-in and day-out to ensure our Airmen, Guardians, and their Families receive the support they deserve.

Childcare must be a leadership priority at every level. As a military member myself, and being a military spouse, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges faced by our families. Our leaders need to be advocates for change at local installations and understand the true burden childcare issues places on our families. We



Finding childcare after maternity leave can be a significant challenge for working parents. This was certainly my experience when my son was born. The stress of balancing income needs with quality childcare was really wearing on me, with many options seeming financially prohibitive. Fortunately, exploring employment opportunities at the Eglin Air Force Base CDC proved to be a huge turning point. The ability to work and contribute financially while having access to on-site childcare has transformed our family life. This benefit provides us with financial freedom, allowing us to cherish family time without worry. I have complete confidence that my son is receiving excellent care in a safe and nurturing environment.

*Ryann Stuart
Air Force Spouse & CDC Worker*

all signed up to serve our country — whether as a service member or a devoted spouse — the very least we could do is ensure families are taken care of, providing the support they so deserve.

To learn more about F2's Mission & how you can get involved, visit www.AFA.org/F2



How Can I ENGAGE?



It all begins with one common denominator: our military children. When we bring together our voices, our passions, and our talents, we can make a difference, but what exactly does that look like?

There have been a lot of successes and challenges over the years in the military childcare arena. Change is trending in the right direction, so how do we keep that positive momentum?

“Family Readiness IS Mission Readiness, and when leaders invest in the quality of life for military families—across areas like childcare, education, healthcare, housing, and spouse employment—and creatively partner at the local, state, and national levels, we build a stronger, more competitive force ready to fight and win in the Great Power Competition.”

*Leslie Janaros
Co-Founder, Five & Thrive*



UNITED FORCES
& FAMILIES

Join United
Forces & Families



LEARN MORE

Learn about the childcare options available for our Air and Space Force families.

- Start with the [MCC website](#)
- Check out the [Military OneSource Podcast](#) on accessibility, affordability, and availability
- Read the break down of options through the [THRIVE Guide](#)

UNDERSTAND

Understand that every family dynamic is unique and the challenges they face finding the right childcare varies.

- Explore non-profits that have been created to make finding childcare and getting fee assistance easier like [The Operation Child Care Project](#)
- Review the most recent [Blue Star Families survey](#) to see what's weighing on the mind of our military families
- Collaborate with childcare providers to understand their challenges and find ways to address them together.



GET INVOLVED

Get Involved in your local community to make a difference.

- Volunteer with your installation's youth programs. Be on the Parent Advisory Council, coach a youth soccer team, help set-up the Easter egg hunt. All of these things put you closer to the people who are decision makers for our children. To find these opportunities, contact the local military youth center near you.
- Be a good neighbor. Tell your friends you'll be their child's emergency contact for school. Talk to the other parents at the playground and see if they're facing any childcare challenges. Volunteer to trade babysitting services with another family for date nights or just a day to run errands!



TALK IT OUT

Keep the conversation going.

- Participate in town hall meetings that your base may host.
- Contact your local representatives to learn where they stand on children and family issues, and what they're doing to address the needs in your community.
- Be active in local social media groups and forums when people post that they need childcare, are looking for recommendations, or even need a home cooked meal after having a baby!
- Promote trainings, grants, and opportunities you hear about that impact military childcare, like [AFA's F2 Grants](#) that exist to execute programming supporting Quality of Life initiatives for DAF families



AIR COMBAT COMMAND'S SWORD ATHENA HOLDS FAMILY READINESS SUMMIT

Back in February, AFA funded an event at Joint Base Langley-Eustis using a United Forces & Families Focus Grant. Air Combat Command's Sword Athena and military families participated in a Family Readiness Summit to discuss on-base challenges, including critical issues such as childcare, and potential solutions to those challenges.

ACC's Sword Athena is a group of volunteer Airmen passionate about finding solutions to female-and family-centric barriers to readiness. Their goal is to take the proposed solutions up the chain of command to make a difference at JBLE.

Some of the challenges discussed included spouse employment, household goods, wing protocol, family mental health care, and inclusivity issues.

"Sword Athena's focus on family readiness is driven by an understanding that resilient families lead to resilient Airmen. *We want our families to know that we see them and want to hear from them because when our uniformed members know their families are taken care of, they can focus on the mission,*" said Lt. Col. Sharon Arana, the Sword Athena team lead and

the branch chief for ACC's Distributed Common Ground Systems Futures.

Additionally, the event included a panel representing the diverse demographics of a military family. Panelists highlighted the unique challenges they face — such as difficulty finding safe spaces for military dependents after multiple deployments.

AFA was also able to provide an F2 grant to the 133rd Air Wing with the Minnesota Air National Guard, in partnership with the AFA General EW Rawlings Chapter, to help establish a program for spouses and children within their wing similar to the [Air Force HeartLink program](#). This program will allow the Military Family Readiness Center to provide training on all services available to military members and their families while the member is deployed. The funding provides childcare services for 10 families, and supplies and refreshments for each Heartlink event.

The ANG does not have a Heartlink program like the Active Duty force, and this grant will make that happen for the 133rd AW. Fifty families will be supported by this new initiative.



Excited to get started? United Forces & Families is ready to help.



Get Funding

Grants are available to support family readiness initiatives in your community. Bring your ideas to your local AFA chapter who can apply for a Field grant. Additionally, several focus grants are executed each year as pilot programs for future programming. Contact F2@AFA.org for more information.



Keep Going

Have other suggestions? Contact F2@AFA.org to share your ideas.

Did You Know? Airmen, Guardians, and military spouses can receive a free AFA membership to join the F2 community. [Join today.](#)



Help Us Amplify Impact

Your [donation](#) can help grow our initiatives promoting the quality of life for our Airmen, Guardians, and their Families.

UNITED FORCES & FAMILIES

2 Year Complimentary Membership

We're excited for you to join our AFA family!

Supporting our Air Force family has been an important piece of AFA's mission since our inception in 1946. More than 75 years later, we remain committed to supporting all DAF families. We believe that improving the quality of life for Airmen, Guardians, and their Families is directly linked to stronger Families, united Forces, and the mission effectiveness of our Air and Space Forces.



Photo from af.mil. Taken by Airman
1st Class Jade Caldwell

Scan to Join

By joining AFA, you are strengthening our united voice advocating for our DAF families. Here are a few ways your AFA membership will strengthen your leadership:

1

Opportunities to apply for F2 Grant funding to improve the quality of life for Airmen, Guardians and families in your community

2

Constant updates and education on the issues facing our Air and Space Forces including a subscription to Air & Space Forces Magazine and the Daily Report

3

Invitations to special events including our 20k+ national conferences and special F2 celebrations

4

Opportunities to connect with local AFA leaders and chapters who are ready to support you!

Photo from af.mil. Taken by Senior Airman Anna Smith

Engage Online

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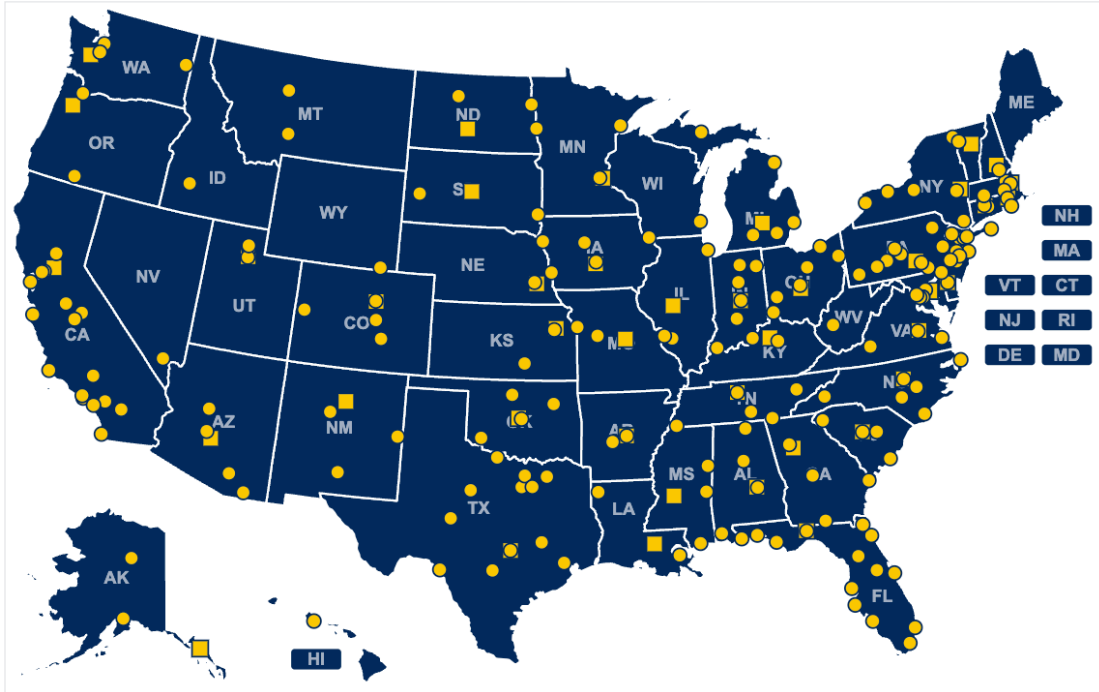
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JOIN THE F2 COMMUNITY - FIND YOUR CHAPTER

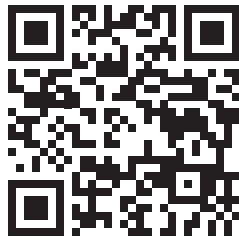


We have locations around the world, including three in the Pacific region, and five in the European region. To find your chapter on our interactive map, click the image to the left, or visit afa.org/field!



Upcoming Events

We hope you will join fellow AFA members, Airmen, Guardians, senior DAF leaders, and industry experts at some of AFA's professional development opportunities. At events like our Air, Space & Cyber Conference and AFA Warfare Symposium, you will engage in rich discussion and gain unique insights into aerospace power, opportunities, and challenges for our Air Force, Space Force, Airmen, and Guardians.





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www.AFA.org/F2
F2@AFA.org



Meet the ENGAGE Team



Kari Voliva

VICE PRESIDENT, MEMBER & FIELD RELATIONS

Kari Voliva has served in a variety of roles at AFA over the last two decades supporting her chosen Air Force and Space Force family. Her current role as Vice President of Member & Field Relations oversees all of AFA's family readiness and quality of life initiatives, membership operations, volunteer components, governance support, scholarships, and wounded warrior support programs. Kari likes to roll all that up as Chief Kindness Officer because her job is all about helping others and putting more kindness into the world.

Kari holds a Master's of Public Policy with a concentration in Non-Profit Management and a Bachelor's Degree in Communications and International Politics. Both degrees are from George Mason University.

Kari is laughing her way through life with her husband Mike and their sweet family in Virginia. Her most cherished title is Mama to Rosie and Maddie Grace who inspire her to experience wonder every day and spread even more kindness into the world around us.



Find Kari Online

✉ kari@AFA.org

🌐 AFA.org/F2

in [linkedin.com/in/karivoliva](https://www.linkedin.com/in/karivoliva)



Kristin M. Walker

AFA ENGAGE CREATIVE DIRECTOR FOUNDER, WALKER BRAND STRATEGY

Kristin is a seasoned Marketing Communications Executive with over 20 years of experience leading communications and branding campaigns. She has extensive expertise in creative and project strategy, working with national and international clients and is passionate about partnering with organizations that support our service members and their families.

Kristin is also a full-time faculty member at the University of South Carolina's School of Journalism and Mass Communications, where she teaches Advertising Strategy and Integrated Campaigns. She holds a B.A. in Communications from the University of Alabama, an MBA from Northeastern University, and certifications in National Security Studies, Marketing Artificial Intelligence, and Teaching with Artificial Intelligence.

As an active-duty Air Force spouse for over 20 years, Kristin has served as a Key Spouse Liaison in various roles, including as the Director of Operations Spouse and Command Spouse for the 16 WPS at Nellis AFB. She currently serves as the Deputy Command Spouse for the 20 FW at Shaw AFB.



Find Kristin Online

in <https://bit.ly/4fZVA7J>



Jenn Montgomery

AFA ENGAGE GRAPHIC DESIGNER
OWNER, JEMOY CREATIVE

Jenn founded Jemoy Creative in 2022 while working remotely from Europe for a full-service marketing agency - she got up every day at the crack of dawn to squeeze in a few hours of 'her own thing'. She's spent her entire 15+ year career working at print shops and marketing agencies, and has had her hands in practically every role - receptionist, account and project manager, creative director, operations director, and graphic designer.

Jenn is a difference maker for solopreneurs and small business owners who are putting everything they've got into just making it. The difference is that she knows how to level up the marketing and design assets they're using so they're way beyond "good enough."

She is a proud Army veteran, Army wife, and Navy brat - the military runs in her blood, and she fiercely supports the heroes of our country.

Away from work, Jenn is keeping busy! She can be found selling hand-sewn wares at craft shows, experimenting in the kitchen with scratch-made goodies, gardening, and reading. Whenever she can, she loves exploring and experiencing new places and cultures, and considers herself a language junkie, proudly able to get around and feed herself in 5 languages!



Find Jenn Online

 JemoyCreative.com
 [@jemoycreative](https://www.instagram.com/jemoycreative)



Savannah Stephens

AUTHOR
AIR FORCE RESERVE PAO, DAF CIVILIAN

Savannah Stephens is an Air Force Reserve Public Affairs Officer and Department of the Air Force Civilian currently serving as the Public Affairs Advisor for the 24th Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field, Fla.

After graduating from the University of South Carolina in 2016, with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Public Relations, and commissioning as a Public Affairs Officer through Air Force ROTC Detachment 775, she went on to serve 7 years on Active Duty. On AD, she had 3 assignments, 1 deployment, and completed her Master's of Arts in Mass Communication at the University of Florida before switching over to the Reserve.

She was an Air Force Association intern in the Summer of 2015 spending time in the communications department and at the Air Force Memorial.

In her free time, you can find her listening to Taylor Swift, reading on her Kindle, or traveling with her family.

Savannah currently resides in Fort Walton Beach, Fla., with her husband, Drew, and 3 children, Emersyn (4), Robert (2), and Caroline (newborn).

Find Savannah Online

 savannahgstephens@gmail.com
 <https://bit.ly/4g3PKCi>

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