

UNITED FORCES & FAMILIES ENGAGE

Empowering Guardians
and Their Families



Brought to you by  **AFA** AIR & SPACE
FORCES
ASSOCIATION

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GUARDIAN SPOUSE

As the spouse of an Active-duty U.S. Space Force Guardian, Nicole's personal experience has ignited a deep-seated commitment to serving military families. This dedication has also guided her career, as she advises brands and organizations on the best ways to support these families.

Nicole served 14 seasons with the Washington Nationals Baseball Club (Major League Baseball). As the Director of Community Relations, she focused on the team's military outreach and programming, building an industry-leading military outreach platform.

To read Nicole's full biography, go to "Meet the ENGAGE Team" on page 30.

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The AFA Perspective

In today's world of overflowing inboxes, social media influencing, and countless off-camera virtual meetings, genuine connections can seem few and far between. We are surrounded by endless opportunities, and yet many of us feel less connected than ever.

To truly make a difference, connections must come from the heart. The founding Guardian leaders were leading with their hearts when they put "connection" at the forefront of our United States Space Force core values. The culture of connection that has been established over the last five years will continue to grow to nurture stronger Guardian families for years to come.

The Air & Space Forces Association (AFA) remains committed to supporting our Guardians, Airmen and Families. We believe that family readiness is directly linked to stronger families, united forces and the mission effectiveness of the Air and Space Forces. That's why we created United Forces & Families (F2).

Our United Forces & Families vision is a culture where strong families continually build stronger forces. We accomplish this through [listening](#), [amplifying](#), [connecting](#) and [building](#). We formed an incredible F2 Task Force in 2022 to [listen](#) to the needs of our Space Force and Air Force families while providing actionable recommendations such as expanding our professional development events to include family readiness topics and military spouse participation. This United Forces & Families ENGAGE edition seeks to both [amplify](#) Guardian stories and promote meaningful [connection](#) opportunities.

In 2023, we [built](#) a new F2 grant program to improve family readiness and support quality of life initiatives. One of our favorite grants is the Space Force family pins which you will read about in the pages to come.

Our AFA team will continue these efforts through this proven model of listening, amplifying, connecting, and building. We're just getting started, friends!

Through our United Forces & Families initiatives, it's been an honor to witness profound Guardian connections first hand. I've been inspired watching incredible Guardian spouses come together to create an opportunity for meaningful engagements where there was a strong need. I've smiled when my Guardian friends wrote a personal note ... or even a book ... to support the Guardians who will follow them. I've cried along with parents, friends, and spouses as they received their USSF family pin from their brand-new Guardian during BMT graduations.

These connections matter. They directly impact the recruitment, retention, and mission readiness of our Guardians. These connections shape a stronger United States Space Force.

In this edition of ENGAGE, Nicole's words bring to life many stories of connection. We hope these stories will inspire you to form deeper connections, tell the Space Force story, and help shape the Guardian experience. *To quote Nicole, "Let's get to work."*



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*

Empowering Guardians

As a new, leaner service branch, the United States Space Force community has a unique opportunity to shape the Guardian experience. In not being tied to the “that’s the way we’ve always done it” mindset, senior leaders encourage innovation to find new ways to address old issues such as recruitment, engagement, and retention.

“Senior leaders understand that the Space Force IS different,” said Jennifer Saltzman, spouse of Gen. B. Chance Saltzman, Chief of Space Operations. “We are smaller, operationally focused, and face challenges in a newly contested domain. It is important that we explore new, tailor-made approaches to get our jobs done.”

“We are all in this together...there are roles for all of us to play to find the best answers for our families.”

“Our Guardians are diverse, bringing unique skills and perspectives to the Space Force,” said Col. Jason Schramm, Deputy Commander of U.S. Space Forces Indo-Pacific, who previously served as the commander of Space Delta 1. “Our age is several years older than the other services, our percentage of females is higher, and the number coming in with bachelor’s degrees is higher. All those things mean we must train, motivate, and retain Guardians differently.”

When the service stood up, service members from all military branches were accepted. With Guardians being commissioned directly into the Space Force, we now have control over recruiting and training these newest Guardians.

“Our Guardians come from all walks of life, with rich and diverse experiences,” said Debbie Schiess, spouse of Lt. Gen. Douglas A. Schiess, Commander of U.S. Space Forces—Space. “We need to use those different experiences to build a strong foundation for what we want the Guardian experience to be.”

“Everyone has an opportunity and a voice to do something. With a smaller force, we can create connections in ways that the other services cannot,” said Schiess.





Shaping the Guardian experience will not come from the top, but leadership must encourage and empower Guardians to build culture organically.

"With the other services, cultures are forged during wars," said Schramm. "People may scoff when we talk about a warfighter mindset, but we can't afford to lose the first war in space."

The question becomes, "How do you build something that's never been built before?" One aspect is to use our agility to our advantage, taking the best practices from military history and adapting them to fit the needs of Guardian families. We can engage community partners to develop creative solutions by borrowing the most successful methods from the business world.

As we explore how to best engage and support Guardian families throughout a Guardian's career, the adage "recruit the soldier, retain the family" should serve as a touchstone. "The decision to stay or leave the military gets made around the kitchen table," said Sue Hoppin, founder of the National Military Spouse Network.

What are families saying about the Guardian experience around those tables? In the age of digital communication, feedback comes swiftly, for better or worse. Are we listening? Are we asking the right questions?

Our all-volunteer force depends on it.

Nicole

Nicole Murray
Edition Author | Guardian Spouse



WHY IT MATTERS

Guardians and their families can forge new paths that honor where we've been, where we are now, and where we want to go. Military families are working in new ways to make the lifestyle easier to navigate, working to ensure that the next generation of military families doesn't hit the same pain points.

Tradition isn't doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results – that's Einstein's definition of insanity. Traditions can evolve as we do, adapting to meet the needs of the Guardian family in an ever-changing world.

But traditions have to start somewhere. Do you want to make history? Do you want to improve the Guardian experience for everyone who will come after us?

Me too. Let's get to work.

Current Successes

What's Going Well

It started with a conversation between Col. Peter Norsky, commander of Delta 1, and Maj. Clinton Emry, the commander of the 1st Delta Operations Squadron. With a smaller graduating class than the other services, was there a better way to engage the families of Guardians graduating from basic military training?

"We wanted to bring in the people who are important in the Guardians' lives," said Maj. Emry. It could be their parents, grandparents, fiancé, or high school coach. We wanted to connect them to their Guardians' journey as early as possible and acknowledge their role in preparing the Guardian."

"That's where the next Space warfighter is going to come from — the influence of a fourth-grade science teacher."

The idea of a family pinning ceremony has evolved organically since the tradition started in December 2023. Each Guardian is provided with two pins to share with loved ones, affixed to a card with a handwritten note on the back thanking them for their support. The card also provides the means to view the patching ceremony video, which is closed to the public, and a QR code linking them to the Guardian One app.



"It may seem simple," Emry said, "but the metal has meaning. Their 22-year-old son or daughter will be commanding GPS for the globe, working on a \$7B satellite constellation. It can be hard to talk about, but we need to help them understand what that means."

"When we first heard the idea of a USSF family pinning ceremony, we knew this was the perfect fit for a United Forces & Families grant," said Kari Voliva, AFA's Vice President for Member and Field Relations. "We worked quickly to design and produce the pins for the December 2023 BMT graduation and haven't looked back since."

"We've witnessed the powerful impact these pins can have on bringing in family members and recognizing their sacrifices and contributions. These pins are small but mighty ... an inch of Guardian family pride with the unlimited power of connection!"



Beyond the smaller class size (500 annually, compared to the tens of thousands in other services), Emry noted that USSF graduates are different from their counterparts, with a lower attrition rate.

"We need to treat our Guardians like a weapons system," Emry said. "That means self-care and mindfulness. We need to ask, 'How do we maintain this person so that they can and will stay in?'"

The family pinning ceremony is not the first change made to the Space Force's BMT graduation ceremonies. When the first all-Guardian flights graduated in June 2022, they received their first USSF patch — one previously worn by a currently serving Guardian.



"We wanted to build meaningful connections between the graduate and a Guardian who was already serving on Active duty," said Col. Jason Schramm, who was serving as commander of Space Delta 1 at the time.

Patches were distributed to leadership to wear, then distributed via ceremony with a handwritten note from the Active-duty Guardian offering congratulations and welcome. The senior leader who was presiding over the ceremony took part, including then Maj. Gen. Shawn N. Bratton, who was serving as the Commander, Space Training and Readiness Command. The practice has spread beyond BMT to ROTC detachments and for Guardians graduating from the United States Air Force Academy.

"As a smaller service we can break away to connect with Guardians and their families differently," said Schramm. "In rebuilding BMT we needed to sit back and ask, 'What do we want this to look like?' and, 'Does this work for what we are asking our Guardians to do?'"

"It's a different mindset. We need to explain the 'why' and connect the Guardians to our purpose."

Both Schramm and Emry credit USSF leadership for providing the freedom and encouragement to let the culture be built deliberately and organically.

"We wanted BMT to be shaped by Guardians," Emry said. "We're not done growing, but there's no barrier to intent — if an idea adds value, let's go. I love that we can go from a conversation to an idea to an executed plan."



Let's Go.

Making a Difference



Aimee Selix (L) and Sheila Rupp at the 2023 Military Spouse of the Year event.



Can't find the right path? Make your own. At least, that's one lesson to draw from Guardian spouse Aimee Selix and Maj. Kelly Caggiano-Hollyfield.

Aimee Selix

Aimee Selix has made it her mission to make things easier for the next generation of military families. The 2023 Armed Forces Insurance Space Force Spouse of the Year has been advocating for Air Force and Space Force Families for nearly 20 years, drawing on her experiences as both an enlisted spouse and officer spouse.

"There are so many beautiful things about the military lifestyle," Selix said. "My family has experienced so many things that we wouldn't have otherwise. Because of this military life, our lives are richer, and we are closer as a family."

That isn't to say that there aren't challenges. When she reaches a pain point, Selix gives herself a grace period to sit in her frustrations.

"I let myself be mad, but then I have to either let it go or work to find a solution. If everyone is going through the same negative experience, that's a failure."

Selix recently collaborated with fellow Guardian spouses including Sheila Rupp to create "Guardian Spouse Candid Conversations." The grassroots effort aims to help build community, connection, and support in the Space Force family community. They host virtual engagements monthly, featuring seasoned spouses and Active-duty Guardians who address topics such as the USSF mission and organizational structure, the challenges we face in our relationships, and what resources are available for military families.

Full presentations and highlight videos from past Conversations are available on the Guardian Spouse Candid Conversations YouTube Channel. While monthly live Conversations are restricted to spouses of Space Force Guardians, anyone can subscribe to the Guardian Spouse Candid Conversations newsletter and access videos.



Find GSCC Online:



@SpouseCandidConversations



@GuardianSpouseCandidConversations

— Maj. Kelly Caggiano-Hollyfield —

When Maj. Kelly Caggiano-Hollyfield was pregnant with her son, she looked for books to read to him that talked about moms working in the military, particularly in career fields that resembled hers.

Spoiler alert: She couldn't.

"I found a lot of options for dads in the military or books where the parent was a pilot or a soldier, Caggiano-Hollyfield said. "But I couldn't find anything that represented the work I was doing."

So, she wrote her own story.

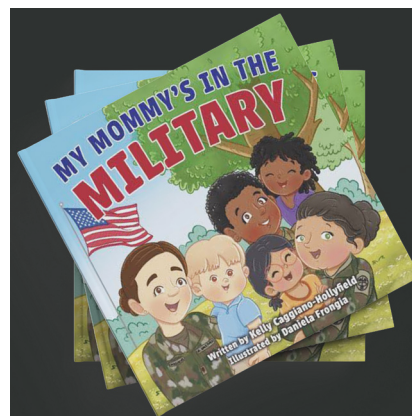
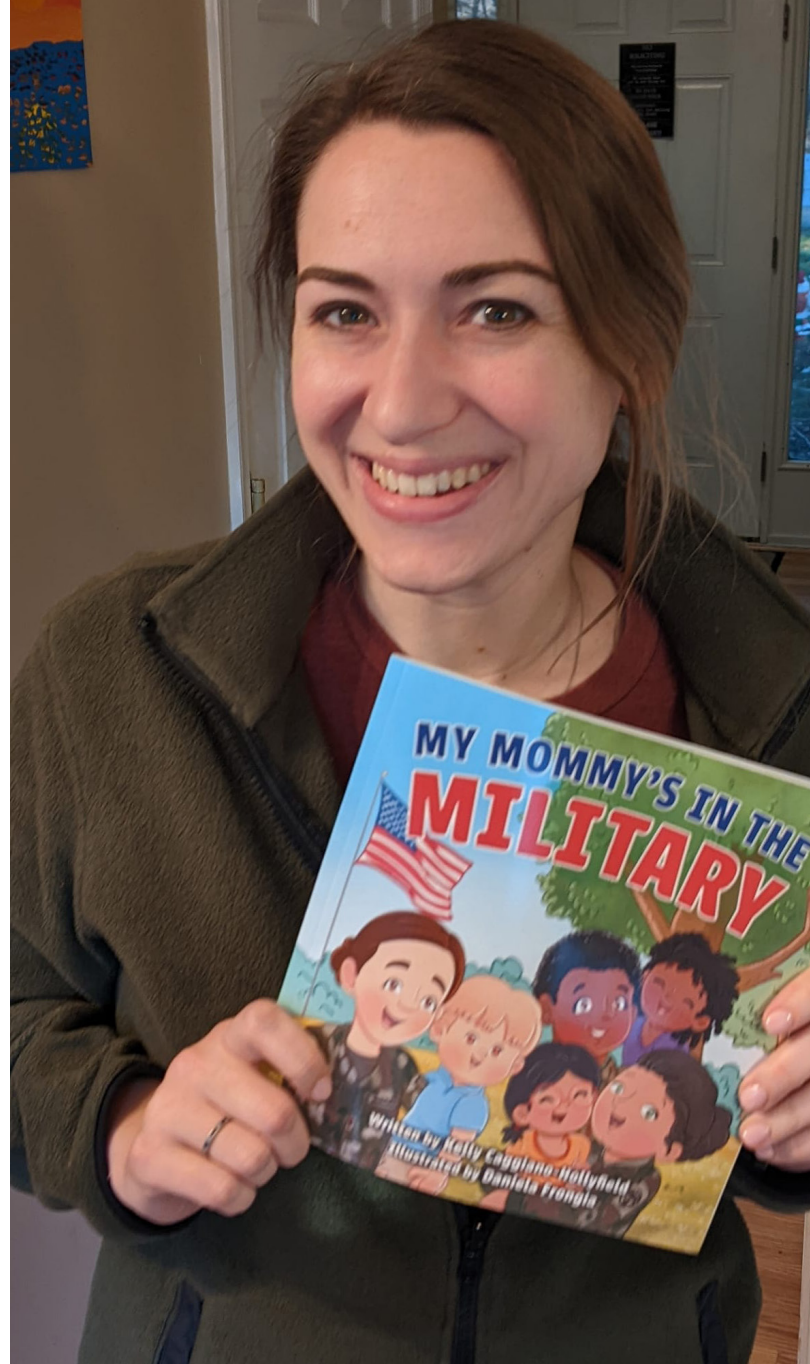
While her undergraduate degree was in journalism, Caggiano-Hollyfield had never considered writing a children's book. The idea came together during her commute to the Pentagon, and her train rides became an opportunity to develop the concept and pitch it to publishers. While she debated self-publishing, she found the right fit in Publish Authority, an independent book publisher that uses the hybrid publishing business model. They connected her with Daniela Frongia, a Sardinian-born digital illustrator.

"We worked really well together," Caggiano-Hollyfield said. "I was very particular with the way the uniforms came out, so I had a lot of notes for her. I knew we had to get that right!"

My Mommy's in the Military: A Reader Book for Military Moms was released in January and celebrates some of the lesser-known roles women play in the armed services. She aimed to be inclusive, creating characters from across the service branches. When brainstorming underrepresented career fields to include, she turned to her "military mom" Facebook groups for suggestions.

Caggiano-Hollyfield hopes that the book will help moms in the military connect with their children and that those children might someday pursue similar paths.

When asked if she had plans to write another book, Caggiano-Hollyfield noted that it wouldn't be soon. She and her husband are a dual-military couple serving in the Space Force, and she's busy balancing her day job as an Active-duty Guardian, promoting her book, and of course, being a mom to her 3-year-old son and 12-year-old stepdaughter.



Matthew's mommy is in the United States Space Force, and all his friends in daycare have mommies that work in one of six branches of the Armed Forces. Join Matthew and his friends as they explain the important roles that women have in the military.



Get your copy on Amazon



CURRENT CHALLENGES

What We're Working On

"Space Force, huh? So that's a real thing?"

"You mean like...Star Wars?"

"Wasn't that a television show?"

If you've donned a Space Force uniform in public or proudly worn USSF apparel in your communities, you've likely gotten some version of this question. It can be frustrating, particularly for those who have been working in the career field before the standing up of the service.

"People don't always realize that Space is not new; it's been around for decades to support space missions," said Aimee Selix (see "Making a Difference" on page 10). "People don't always realize how we support all of the other branches."

"It's not a joke. It's not science fiction. It's a service that is provided to the entire world."

More than in other services, Guardian families are being called on to serve as ambassadors for their service branch, advocating and educating others on the importance of the USSF. How are we preparing them to have those conversations in the communities where they live, work, and play?

"We want all members of the USSF including families to start those conversations and create opportunities to educate the broader public," said Jennifer Saltzman, spouse of Gen. B. Chance Saltzman, Chief of Space Operations. "Something as simple as wearing a USSF T-shirt in an airport can start a conversation. Then we want to make sure the USSF members and families have access to the information they need to talk meaningfully about the Service."

"No one can tell our story better than our Guardians and family members...we count on them to spread the word enthusiastically about our critical role."



Selix's Guardian Spouse Candid Conversations has taken on the challenge, hosting Conversations that discuss topics like "Why the Space Force Exists" and focus deeper on Space Delta 1, the impact of Space capabilities, and the threats faced. Active-duty Guardians serve as guest speakers to help explain issues and answer questions from Guardians' spouses.

Connected and informing families of new Guardians is also being addressed by 1st Delta Operations Squadron (1 DOS). As part of the graduation ceremonies for basic military training (see "Current Successes" on page 8) Guardians are provided with two pins to present to loved ones, marking them as USSF family. They are provided a QR code where they can view the patching ceremony and learn more about what their Guardian will be doing after graduation, as well as connect them to the Guardian One app. The family pins were made available through a United Forces and Families grant.

"As these people return to their communities, wearing their pins proudly and sharing on social media, they become advocates for the service," said USSF 1st Delta Operations Squadron Commander Maj. Clinton J. Emry. "But they don't always know what they do."

"We share with them 'This is what your loved one has been doing. This is what they signed on to do.'"

For those looking for a resource to share with interested audiences, earlier this year the USSF Public Affairs team developed a [Space Force 101 guide](#) and [briefing](#). Providing a useful overview of the service branch, the guide covers the history of the military in space, the mission and organization of the USSF, and information on ranks, locations, functions, and official seals, symbols, and motto.

So next time you get the question, you'll be prepared to say, "Yes, the Space Force is a real thing. Let me tell you more about it."

"It's not a joke. It's not science fiction. It's a service that is provided to the entire world."

-Aimee Selix





EXPERT INSIGHTS

The Issues Military Families Face

The likelihood that a military family will recommend military service to others is declining. The proportion of Active-duty family respondents who were likely to recommend military service has dropped by nearly half from 2016, when it was 55% to just 32% in 2023¹.

Five & Thrive has identified five top issues that military families face: Childcare, Education, Healthcare, Housing, and Spouse Employment. These issues are interconnected; education is often tied to where you live, housing is impacted by spouse employment, and childcare is a critical need for those seeking jobs — more than 80 percent of Active-duty families reported difficulty finding childcare². All these stressors affect the physical and emotional well-being of our military families, with nearly 1 out of every 4 Active-duty families reporting that they do not receive mental healthcare, but they would like to³. Military spouse unemployment is stagnant at 21 percent⁴. That's statistically unchanged from nearly a decade ago. It also doesn't consider underemployment or those spouses who have changed or chosen careers and jobs based on their portability.

We cannot ignore the role of family satisfaction and well-being in military readiness and national security. Our military families need help, and solutions can't all come from military leadership; we must create community and corporate partnerships to develop creative solutions.

As we come together to shape the Guardian experience, we must examine non-government perspectives. The issues of recruitment and retention aren't exclusive to the military. Organizational culture is being studied and discussed in boardrooms and classrooms across the globe. We need to follow that conversation and be a part of it. We need to evaluate what the alternatives look like for our Guardians and learn from them to aid in retaining Guardian families. What can be borrowed from the corporate world that can be adapted to fit the needs of the Space Force?

Five & Thrive's Military Community Quality-of-Life Experience (or QX) strategy focuses on the positive outcomes that can be the result of a collaborative



Five and Thrive is an organization designed to bring military leaders, community partners, and military families together to tackle the top five quality of life issues: Childcare, Education, Healthcare, Housing, and Spouse Employment. The grounding purpose behind Five and Thrive is that "Military family quality of life has strategic implications for our military and national security as it directly impacts recruitment, readiness, and retention."

Five and Thrive reaches communities by producing Thrive Guides, a resource and support guide written by military spouses for military families, and catered to each branch of service.

Learn more at FiveAndThrive.org.

model made up of military leaders, community partners, and military-connected families who come together to find creative solutions to quality-of-life challenges. Best practices from across global communities are highlighted on the Five and Thrive Community Spotlight page. These programs need to be reviewed, and the methodology examined, to determine whether they can be scaled for amplified impact.

We need to create resources to teach civilians how to work with us – but we also need to develop strategies that make us more accessible. Navigating the military landscape can be difficult for community and corporate partners who don't speak our language, don't understand our organizational structure, and don't have insights into our needs.

How do we engage community partners in a way that still meets ethical regulations? How can they provide support in a way that isn't going to trigger the need to review 700 pages of policy?

- Military and veteran service organizations can help bridge this gap and should be included in the conversation. They have more experience working with the military and can more easily translate that to potential partners.
- Engagement programs like DAF Civic Leaders and the Marine Corps Executive Forum are powerful but can be adapted. They need to be scaled to engage not only executives but the directors, managers, and coordinators who will be working on these partnerships at the tactical level.
- Community and corporate partners should review assets

and operations to identify ways to be trusted resources for addressing the needs of military families in their market. That starts with an invitation to local military leadership to have a conversation. What are common challenges and goals? How can current outreach and programming be adapted for military audiences?

Americans perceive military families favorably – 90 percent, according to a survey by Blue Star Families – higher than their perception of the military as an institution. Seventy-one percent feel that Americans, not just the government, have a responsibility

*Our military families
need help... we must
create community and
corporate partnerships to
develop creative solutions.*

to care for military families. Yet only 38 percent reported doing something to help military families in the past year⁵.

We have an opportunity to address that gap by connecting military families to their civilian counterparts. Military families increasingly rely on non-military resources, live in civilian communities, and attend civilian schools. Even in communities with a significant military population, more can be done to bridge the military-civilian divide.

This is a critical need for the Space Force as we educate audiences on our essential role in sustaining the modern way of life and global economy. As a service, we are younger, smaller, and more agile than our counterparts. Let's use that to our advantage as we develop blueprints for forging strong community partnerships.



STATS AND FACTS



32%

AD families who would recommend military service to others in 2023.



80%+

AD families report difficulty finding childcare.



1-in-4

AD families report they don't receive mental healthcare, but would like to.



21%

Military spouse unemployment rate.



38%

Participants reported doing something to help military families in the past year.

Sources:

¹ [Blue Star Families Military Lifestyle Survey](#)

² 2021 Military Family Advisory Network: Military Family Support Programming Survey Executive Summary

³ Blue Star Families Lifestyle Survey 2022 Comprehensive Report Executive Summary

⁴ Department of Defense. 2022 Demographics Report: Profile of the Military Community. 2022. Chapter 5.44, Active-Duty Civilian Spouse Unemployment Rate Trends: 2010-2021, page 137. [Link](#).

⁵ [Blue Star Families Americans' Perspectives on Military Families](#)



OPINION

Evolution is Vital to Meeting New Spouses & Families' Needs

"When in doubt, go Stepford."

That was the advice I received from a veteran spouse early in my husband's career. She was of the mindset that there was a certain way a military spouse should look and act. Dated? Yes. Shocking? Probably not for many of you.

Thankfully, the role of the military spouse is changing, and Space Force leadership and families must be mindful of this as we collaborate to shape the Guardian experience. Military spouses have more of a voice than ever before, and new technologies and virtual communities are helping to amplify that voice and connect them in new ways.

Faced with an issue, Guardian spouses aren't waiting for solutions from others. They are moving away from the complaint of, "They need to fix this," and increasingly rolling up their sleeves and saying, "I need to fix this," finding creative ways to address concerns.

Perhaps even more significant is the idea that they are being encouraged to do so — and celebrated when they succeed.

"The Space Force knows it faces a lot of challenges, and more importantly, it knows that best answers and most effective 'fixes' can come from anywhere," said Jennifer Saltzman, spouse of Gen. B. Chance Saltzman, Chief of Space Operations. "The key is actively searching for and listening for the ideas that can help address challenges."

"The USSF leadership is committed to maintaining open lines of communication with all members and families so that we have the best chance to hear the ideas as they are formed and then support their implementation wherever we can. We've seen many examples where people have taken the initiative to solve problems — not just raise them. We greatly appreciate this and take any chance we can to highlight those efforts."

"Guardian Spouse Candid Conversations" (see "Making a Difference" on page 10) is a grassroots effort

led by Space Force spouses, not USSF Public Affairs or STARCOM. But leadership has regularly offered support and expertise to further discussions and learning.

Chief Master Sergeant of the Space Force John F. Bentivegna is one such leader. He and his wife Cathy participated in February, lending their voices to the topic of military marriages and relationships. Cathy, who also works full-time, has prioritized mentoring and advocating for younger military spouses.

"When I was a young military spouse, I was too intimidated to speak up or ask questions," Cathy said. "I want to be accessible to junior spouses. I want to help them learn to let go of what and who they think they should be."

"The more authentic we are, the more we can resonate with others."

While we should respect the traditions of the services and families who have come before us, we must evolve to better meet the needs of this generation of Guardian families—and those who will follow us. We wouldn't expect to see a "Space Force Spouses Handbook" that focuses on etiquette and protocol but rather a compilation of resources that offer multi-faceted support to military families throughout their journey.

The resources available to military families are extensive, coming from government programs and community and corporate partners. However, this can be overwhelming to navigate for a family facing the emotional and physical challenges that come with the military lifestyle. We need to better know and understand what help is available if we want to support others.

Five & Thrive has become a leader in this space, providing "one-stop shopping" for an overview of available resources based on service branch. Written for military families by military spouses, we trust their guidance more because they have lived it and come through to the other side.

Military spouses have seemingly limitless ways to share that guidance. Our village may not be able to PCS with us, but virtual communication options help us maintain connections with our family, friends, and professional networks as we relocate.



CMSSF John F. Bentivegna
& wife Cathy Bentivegna

Faced with an issue, Guardian spouses aren't waiting for solutions from others. They are moving away from the complaint of "They need to fix this," and increasingly rolling up their sleeves and saying, "I need to fix this," finding creative ways to address concerns.

Perhaps even more significant is the idea that they are being encouraged to do so – and celebrated when they succeed.

Sharing our experiences is powerful. It signals to others that they are not alone and that their struggles are not insurmountable. Social media and virtual engagement technologies that became more commonplace during the pandemic have provided a platform for military families. For a family on the move, Facebook communities can be a critical resource to gain insight on their new duty station and connect with neighbors before they even pack out. That headstart can make a huge difference during a difficult transition. "Who has advice for packaging 425,000 Lego sets (number approximate, asking for a friend)?"*

Opportunities to raise your voice and effect change are available to those who are ready for them. But we can't help others navigate the road if we've never looked at a map.

*The answer was Saran Wrap, for those interested. But make sure you detach and tape down any protruding lightsabers or quidditch hoops.

How Can I ENGAGE?



It begins with a common purpose: a desire to impact Guardian families. We all bring unique perspectives and expertise to the table, but where do we start? What does it look like?

Shaping the Guardian Experience isn't going to come from one direction — and it won't happen overnight. Five & Thrive promotes a collaborative model where military leadership, community partners, and military-connected families come together to develop creative solutions to address the top issues that affect the quality of life for military communities: Childcare, Employment, Housing, Education, and Healthcare.



UNITED FORCES
& FAMILIES

Join United
Forces & Families



Are you ready to help shape the Guardian Experience?

Start here.



LEARN MORE

Learn more about what the Space Force is.

- For an overview, start with [Space Force 101](#) (to read) or [watch](#).
- For a deeper understanding and discussion, check out the [Guardian Spouse Candid Conversation YouTube channel](#), particularly the presentation on “[Why the Space Force Exists](#)” with Col. Casey Beard, Executive Officer to the Chief of Space Operations.
- Stay in the know with the Guardian One app for [Apple](#) or [Android](#) devices.

UNDERSTAND

Understand what resources are available and how communities come together to develop creative solutions.

- The Thrive Guide from Five & Thrive serves as a comprehensive resource for issues that affect military families.
- On the Five & Thrive Community Spotlight page, you can review best practices for collaborating between installations and community partners to develop innovative solutions.



CELEBRATE SUCCESSES

Celebrate and amplify the successes.

- As advocates for the Space Force, we all play an important role in not only shaping the experience - but communicating it.
- People share negative experiences more than positive ones, which can significantly impact how the military lifestyle is perceived. What are you sharing with your networks?
- Consider: What are the unique aspects of being a Guardian where you are stationed? Are there partnerships or programs that have become part of what it means to serve on your base?
- In talking about these experiences, we allow for innovation and scale.

JOIN THE CONVO

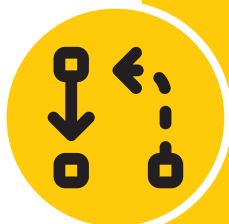
Join the conversation — or start your own — to identify and address pressure points.

- While it makes sense to start locally (unit, base, or regional social networks, spouse groups), advances and adoption of new communication technologies allow us to converse on a much wider stage. Guardian families can take best practices and adapt them to serve the needs of their local community.
- Community partners and military leadership should come together to identify common challenges and goals. What assets and operations can be utilized to address those needs? Treat this as an exchange rather than a one-sided benefit for the military. When done well, these partnerships can help organizations achieve their strategic goals.
- Join United Forces & Families to strengthen the voice of our community as a force for change.

EVALUATE AND EVOLVE.

The needs of the Space Force community will change over time, and we must reflect on whether our solutions are still serving us.

- How has the landscape changed since we last evaluated?
- What new resources are available?
- Are there new partners to consider?
- Have additional best practices emerged?



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

Read the first three issues digitally



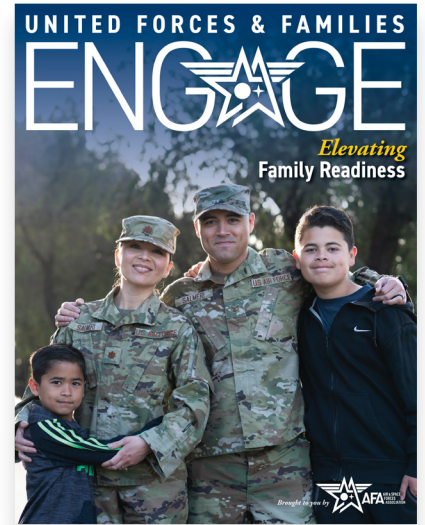
Empowering Guardians and Their Families

Read Now



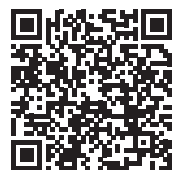
Childcare *Matters*

Read Now



Elevating Family Readiness

Read Now



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UNITED FORCES & FAMILIES



*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.](#)



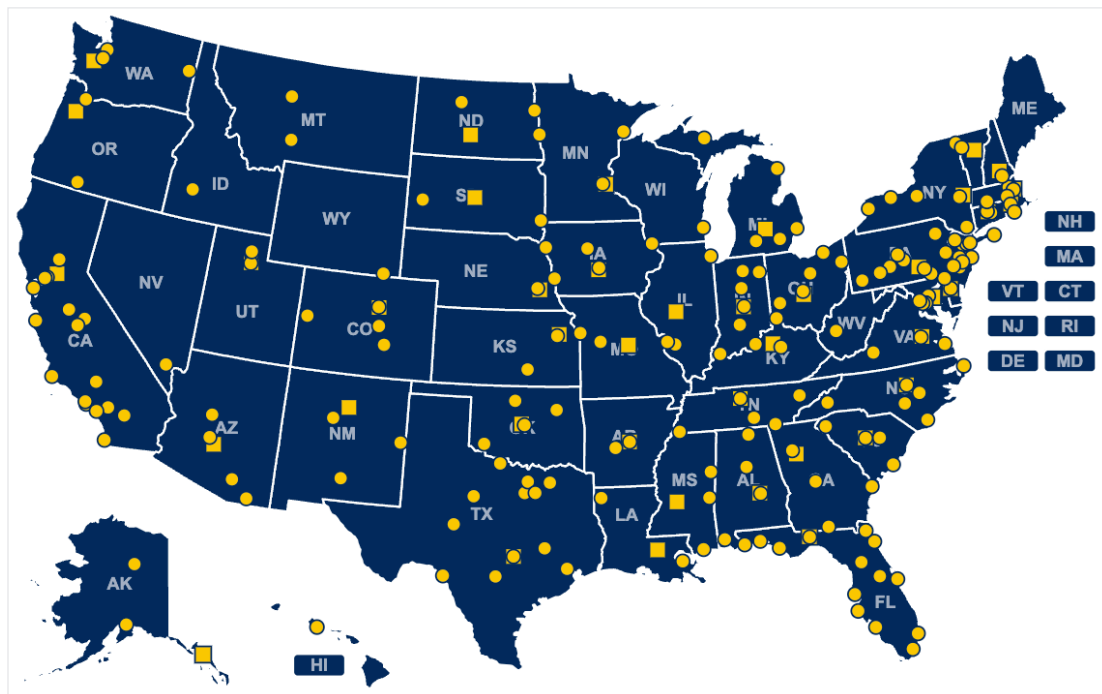
Help Us Amplify Impact

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



Connect & Support

JOIN THE F2 COMMUNITY - FIND YOUR CHAPTER

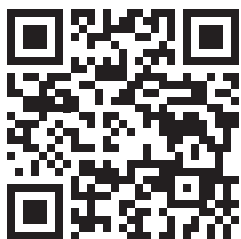


We have locations around the world, including three in the Pacific region, and five in the European region. To find your chapter on our interactive map, click the image to the left, or visit afa.org/field!



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.





Connect With Us

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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



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 CONTRACT 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)



Nicole Murray

**AUTHOR
GUARDIAN SPOUSE**

As the spouse of an Active-duty U.S. Space Force Guardian, Nicole's personal experience has ignited a deep-seated commitment to serving military families. This dedication has also guided her career, as she advises brands and organizations on the best ways to support these families.

Nicole served 14 seasons with the Washington Nationals Baseball Club (Major League Baseball). As the Director of Community Relations, she focused on the team's military outreach and programming, building an industry-leading military outreach platform. She left the organization when her Active-duty military family received orders to Joint Base Pearl Harbor Hickam.

In 2024, Nicole started Seven Seat Consulting to provide business development and marketing services, working with brands to engage audiences to meet business objectives and philanthropic goals.

Nicole has an MBA from the University of North Carolina's Kenan-Flagler Business School and a bachelor's degree in communications from the University of Connecticut, where she was a Division 1 varsity rower. She is stationed in Hawaii with her husband and their two young boys—a postseason baby and an All-Star Game baby. She spends any free time on her Peloton, playing board games, and writing.

Find Nicole Online

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

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