

# Blue Star Families **2014 Annual Report**



Connect. Strengthen. Lead.



## Dear Friends,

One of our favorite references for describing our work is “If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a nation to support its military”. By amplifying our unique role as solution brokers for strengthening military families and connecting Americans to the military, Blue Star Families marked a milestone fifth year for new membership engagement, public and private partner collaborations, and innovative programming.

From sharpening our insight through the 2014 Military Family Lifestyle Survey to bolstering our membership by using emerging technologies, we continue to elevate our capacity to serve more than 1.5 million military family members annually on the ground, online, in the cloud, and at 47 chapters at home and overseas.

The largest of its kind, our Annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey garnished national attention as one of the most important resources for understanding the current state of the military community. In 2014 we partnered with Syracuse University’s Institute for Veterans and Military Families - recognized as a leader in military, veteran, and military family research - to develop, field, and analyze the survey. Their expertise helped us reach a record number of participants; resulting in numerous high-profile citations including First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden’s Joining Forces initiative, the Military Compensation and Modernization Commission, and major media outlets.

In 2014 our members benefited from an array of expanding programs and initiatives, generously supported by our donor partners. Our very successful Blue Star Museums program, funded in part by the MetLife Foundation and in collaboration with the National Endowment for the Arts, caught the attention of 449 new museum partners who welcomed military families free of charge through our summer campaign. AT&T helped further develop our Careers track through our new Networks Live! initiative, and opened doors to valuable professional networking opportunities for military spouses seeking employment.

With more than 91% of children living without one or two parents due to deployment, and 58% suffering from separation anxiety, our Books on Bases partnership with Disney has never been more relevant. In 2014 we offered a sense of continuity, safety, and belonging through the magic of reading; increasing our impact by 39% to almost 164,000 military children at bases and chapter locations around the country.

Developing our infrastructure, technology, and staff expertise advanced our membership tracking and engagement. We reached more than a half million people every month in 2014 through programming, events, and traditional and social media. As noted in the report, we also exceeded our membership goal by 58% and raised our volunteers’ hours to an impressive 3096 hours.

These accomplishments and the many more listed in the Annual Report are only possible because thousands of Americans who believe that strengthening military families makes our country stronger. Thank you for your generous support and pride of service – in every capacity – for our military community and Blue Star Families.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kathy Roth-Douquet". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "K" and "D".

Kathy Roth-Douquet  
CEO



# **Blue Star Families connects communities and fosters leadership, strengthening military families and our nation.**

## **We Are Military Families Supporting One Other**

Millions of active duty, National Guard, and Reserve members currently serve our country, and millions of veterans served before them. Each service member has a family, including parents, siblings, partners, children, and friends who participate in the service member's sacrifice. Yet families often are left behind to carry on without their loved one present or without the support of government and civilian organizations. That's where Blue Star Families steps in to connect America to the military and support military families.

Created in 2009 by military spouses determined to empower military families everywhere to speak as well as engage our civilian community with their local military families, Blue Star Families (BSF) is now the largest and fastest growing chapter-based military family engagement organization in the country. We are demand-driven organization, forging extraordinary partnerships and serving 1.5 million military family members annually through innovative programs and resources with 47 chapters at home and overseas.

BSF welcomes spouses and families from all branches of service, past and present, including National Guard and Reserve, as well as civilians who strongly support their military communities.





## **We Are Connecting, Strengthening, and Leading**

We rely on the hard work and dedication of our staff and volunteers across the globe to bring military families' most important issues to light. At the heart of the organization are BSF's volunteers and staff living on or near military bases, interacting with their communities, and bringing our goals to fruition.

With a mission to connect communities and foster leadership to strengthen military families and our nation, these dedicated people host interactive and issue-based programs and events, morale-boosting activities, and children's literacy initiatives.

## **Connect.**

Through our local chapters and our vibrant online community, Blue Star Families connects military families locally and internationally. Our outreach into the civilian community also bridges the gap between military and civilian life, bringing families together and connecting America to our military.

## **Strengthen.**

With our wide array of resources and research into military family life and partner organizations, Blue Star Families empowers military families to create the best personal and family life possible. Educating military caregivers, military families reintegrating, and those facing the daily challenges of military life, strengthens military families and our nation.

## **Lead.**

Fostering leadership among our members is one of the principles of Blue Star Families. We have a network of volunteers across the globe that spend countless hours working with Congress and the White House or local community organizations to increase understanding of the unique challenges of military service.





## 2014 Military Family Lifestyle Survey

Widely regarded as the gold standard among military family surveys, the 2014 Annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey drew over 6,200 participants - a 12% increase from 2013. This valuable insight into the daily lives of our military families, friends, and caregivers revealed five top issues:

1. military pay/benefits
2. changes in retirement benefits
3. the impact of deployment on children
4. military spouse employment
5. lifestyle uncertainty

Additionally, the survey noted many families are concerned about the impact of post-traumatic stress disorder, combat stress, and traumatic brain injury. To successfully leverage these results and build on past survey findings, BSF serves as a focused solutions broker sharing research findings and curating new partnerships with other organizations to address key issues together.

The 2014 Survey also received prominent media coverage and cited by MSNBC, NPR, C-SPAN, Al-Jazeera America, CNN, and USAA Magazine.

Top Military Issues	Active Duty Spouses	Veteran	Active Duty Member
Military pay/benefits	73%	64%	75%
Change in retirement	63%	69%	75%
Impact of deployment on children	43%	22%	25%
Military spouse employment	42%	17%	29%
Military lifestyle uncertainty	32%	20%	41%
Op tempo/deployment/training time	27%	28%	40%
PTSD/Combat stress/TBI	18%	30%	15%
Disconnection between military and civilians	19%	41%	24%
Disability claim backlog	7%	42%	23%





## **Blue Star Arts**

Blue Star Museums and Blue Star Theatres comprise our Blue Star Arts programs and two of our most popular initiatives for supporting military families. With continued support from the MetLife Foundation, and through advanced use of our Salesforce modules for volunteer coordination and communications, we significantly elevated the programs' reach and impact by 78% in 2014.

More than 700,000 military service members and their families visited our nation's museums through the Blue Star Museums program; a collaboration with National Endowment for the Arts and the Department of Defense. Most notably, 449 new museum partners joined the summer campaign for the first time - an impressive 60% increase from 2013. To further engage military families across the country, BSF held 10 signature museum events for more than 890 military participants and marked another notable increase of 44% more attendees than in 2013.

In addition, we worked in collaboration with the Theatres Communications Group (TCG) to host four signature Blue Star Theatres events for military families, veterans, and military spouses in 2014. These events were the first of their kind, and hosted at the La Jolla Playhouse (San Diego, CA), The Wilma Theater (Philadelphia, PA), Florida Studio Theatre (Sarasota, FL), and at the TCG National Conference in San Diego, CA. Additionally, Paula Vogel, an American Pulitzer-prize-winning playwright, partnered with TCG to host a gathering of theatre professionals from across the country working with in collaboration veterans.

***"MY HUSBAND WAS GONE ALL SUMMER,*** so it was a busy time for me with two toddlers. It was such a blessing when I was in another town and found a children's museum participating in the Blue Star Museums program... Even all the way up here in Montana! I really appreciate when people thank me for my or my husband's service and kind words of support, but BSF has action behind those words. I really was thankful for the tangible way Blue Star Families supported me as an Air Force officer and wife while my husband was gone. I hope it continues!"

***"WE LOVE YOUR BLUE STAR ARTS PROGRAMS.*** It allows us to take our young children to places that would otherwise be too expensive for our tight budget..."





## **Books on Bases**

Inspiring a love of reading is at the heart of every Blue Star Families' Books on Bases event. With support from Disney, through First Book - a nonprofit organization that connects book publishers with nonprofit organizations - the program allows children to harness the power of storytelling to better cope with the challenges and stressors often present in their lives.

In 2014, BSF's Books on Bases delivered more than 45,000 new books into the hands of military children; a 39% increase over 2013. Research demonstrates that reading calms children and promotes increased communication and family bonds. Through the program, more than 163,700 children gained access to a wonderful collection of books that allowed them to better acclimate to new experiences such as multiple moves, school transition, and community culture changes.

In addition to hosting dozens of classroom-sized read alongs in military communities throughout the world, Books on Bases hosted two large national events; one in Hawaii and the other in Washington DC. Collectively, these two events brought the magic of Disney and reading to 1,000+ military children and their families with a distribution of more than 7,500 books.





***"THIS EVENT WAS ABSOLUTELY AMAZING!"***

*I actually had tears in my eyes when I heard them announce that our children could each choose five books to take home. This was so amazing! And the looks on my children's faces when Mickey Mouse himself came out was priceless! Being a military family and not having the ability to plan for a trip to Disney due to my husband's crazy schedule; this meant the world to our kids. It is greatly appreciated and also made us feel very loved by the community!"*





## **White Oak Conference**

In February 2014, Blue Star Families hosted the America Joins Forces with Military Families Summit Series - "White Oak III". This was the third in a series of retreats bringing together a cross-sector nonprofit thought leaders, senior government officials, and influential non-governmental leaders to engage in candid, collaborative, and confidential discussions on how to work together and harness available resources to support service members, veterans, and military families.

In addition to Blue Star Families, steering committee hosts included representatives from the American Red Cross, Armed Forces Services Corporation, Hiring our Heroes/U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, Military Child Education Coalition, Military Officers Association of America, Points of Light, Truman National Security Project, and the USO.

White Oak III promoted three primary objectives:

- (1) sharing knowledge, perspectives, needs, and opportunities for working together,
- (2) building on trusted relationships to support operational and intellectual partnerships; and
- (3) identifying new, scalable "big ideas" that can serve as galvanizing action items moving forward.

The Summit's ongoing commitment to collaboration, innovation, and solution oriented outcomes led to renewed engagement on several core issues including resource multipliers, resource mapping, decentralized services, and positive messaging.







## Caregivers Empowering Caregivers

In 2014, Blue Star Families delivered Caregivers Empowering Caregivers (CEC) workshops to military communities across the country. Hosted as private, forum style experiences for caregivers of wounded service members, these workshops provide direct peer-to-peer connections to discuss the caregiving lifestyle, education needs, and networks for advice. The program offers caregivers an unparalleled opportunity to bond within local communities, share stories, and return home with positive reinforcement and a network of neighborly peer support.

In June 2014, BSF successfully expanded its online caregiver focus. By providing on-demand access to diverse resources and aligning with partner organizations, BSF continued to impact military-connected caregivers no matter their geographic location. Our monthly recorded webinars covered relevant topics such as caring for a wounded warrior with Traumatic Brain Injury or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, navigating holidays as a caregiver, and substance abuse issues. We also developed a schedule of quarterly live Google Hangouts. Facilitated by a subject matter expert, each Hangout served as a live forum for caregivers to receive similar CEC in-person workshop benefits from the comfort and convenience of their homes.

***"I PREFER THE INTIMATE SETTING.*** *If there had been a large group, I would have been the caregiver sitting in the back silently crying. This setting empowered me to share my story. Thank you."* - Caregiver

## Operation Appreciation and Operation Honor Corps

As many Americans seek ways to go beyond saying "thank you" to America's service members and their families, we know that 95% of military family members feel the general public does not truly understand or appreciate their sacrifices. Through Operation Appreciation, Blue Star Families bridges this gap by providing a direct link between military families and civilian friends and neighbors.

What started as one letter from a neighbor to a local military child grew into 15,000+ letters of heartfelt gratitude written to a military spouse, child, parent, veteran, or active duty service member. In 2014, Blue Star Families' Operation Appreciation program experienced its biggest activity year. Implementation of new public awareness and volunteerism strategies ensured the scalability of the program and our increased ability to deliver each and every letter into the hands of a deserving military service member or his/her family.

Combining volunteerism with honoring military members and their families is an ideal way for a community to thank its service members. Operation Honor Corps makes it easy for the American public to find and participate in these targeted service projects. Many individuals and organizations are already volunteering in their communities, and through Operation Honor Corps, are dedicating service hours in honor of military communities.

In 2014, Blue Star Families' Honor Wall was displayed at several high-visibility public events, allowing Americans to highlight their service hours. Most notably, our wall was displayed at the movie premiere of *Fury* in Washington D.C. and at a holiday party for the Danish Embassy.



**"OPERATION HONOR CORPS** is a "wonderful initiative that asks Americans to honor our military families by pledging service of their own." - Michelle Obama, First Lady of the United States






## **Blue Star Careers**

Blue Star Families experienced great success in 2014 delivering our Blue Star Careers resources to military spouses. By implementing new email marketing and social media strategies as well as actively hosting in-person presentations at hiring fairs across the country, Blue Star Careers greatly expanded the program's reach.

Most notably, our Careers team developed and launched Blue Star Networks Live! in December 2014. Funded primarily through the generosity and commitment of AT&T, the Networks Live! model is a highly-engaging format that includes a guest speaker, a panel of experienced military spouses, and a speed mentoring session amongst stakeholders. By providing military spouses with the proper tools, resources, and opportunities to expand their local professional network, spouses feel more confident pursuing their career goals, and are more likely to land a job in their desired career field. Likewise, stakeholders with commitments to hire a veterans and military spouses leave our events with a greater understanding of this unique market and how to leverage this knowledge to ensure their hiring goals.

***"ONE OF MY FAVORITE*** types of networking events is speed networking. It really provides a great opportunity to meet everyone that attends the event. I really enjoyed having an event to meet other career oriented spouses in the local area."





***"AS A FELLOW*** *I have been in charge of managing programs, guiding volunteers, planning and implementing events, and community relations. I've also deepened my technology skills by learning many business and social media platforms. Thanks to the BSF Fellowship experience I have the abilities and confidence to reach out to prospective employers and let them know ahead of time that I'm coming, I'm capable, and I'm ready to be an asset in their community."*

*- Paulette Williams*

***"BLUE STAR FAMILY*** *has been an incredible resource for our military families here at Hanscom. The organization provides military support in so many ways over the past few years to our families - from Books on Bases to military spousal employment and deployment support. We truly valued this partnership and enjoyed the evolution of its presence here at Hanscom."*

*- Kelley Casey, Community Director at Hanscom AFB*



## Membership

Blue Star Families had a milestone year in 2014, exceeding our goal of 100,000 members with a 58% increase in membership compared to 2013. In addition to this incredible growth, Blue Star Families experienced a significant increase in engagement by their Chapter Directors, located at nearly 47 bases at home and overseas.

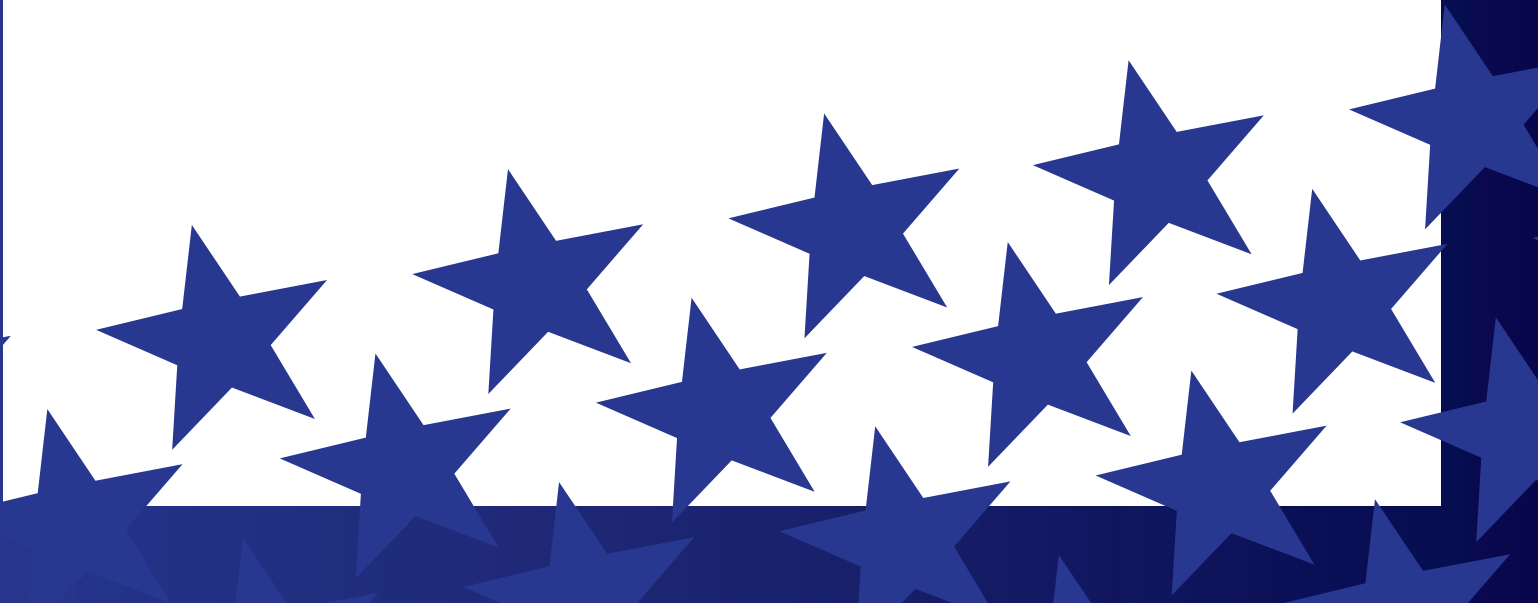
Our volunteers contributed an unprecedented 3096 hours their time and talents in support of our mission! To amplify and prominently recognize their dedication, we developed our Salute to Distinction award program and are proud to highlight the stellar commitments of our 2014 quarterly award winners—Kate Pennington, Wendy Hayes, Maria Mahoney, and Rheanna Bernard—for their outstanding efforts as ambassadors for Blue Star Families. In addition Wendy Hayes, our Chapter Director at Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas, received our 2014 Annual Salute to Distinction Volunteer of the Year award.

## BSF Fellowship Program

One of the many ways BSF strengthens families is through its prestigious Fellowship Program. Launched in 2013 in response to a widening unemployment gap among military spouses, the Fellowship Program made significant strides in its first year. A unique leadership opportunity for military spouses across the country, the BSF Fellowship Program provides corporate and foundation partners with opportunities to make a tangible, positive impact on the lives of military spouses through employment.

In 2014, Fellows served as ambassadors for Blue Star Families by representing the organization on a local levels and creating vital links to military and civilian community leaders. Each Fellow also participated in numerous leadership training and professional development opportunities in preparation to compete in the marketplace following tenure with Blue Star Families.

Additionally, each Fellow actively engaged projects that elevated the overall growth and capacity of the organization. From developing an email marketing content strategy to implementing staff wide training for our Salesforce customer relationship management platform, the Fellows were vital to our success this year.





### **Officers and Principal Salaried Executives**

**Kathy Roth-Douquet**  
President and CEO  
Falls Church, VA

**Scott Allen**  
Treasurer  
Bethesda, MD

**Noeleen Tillman**  
Executive Director,  
Corporate Secretary  
Encinitas, CA

### **Directors**

**Sheila Casey**  
Chair, Board of Directors  
Washington, DC

**Les Brownlee**  
Arlington, VA

**Whit Cobb, Jr.**  
Sandy Spring, MD

**Sinclair Cooper**  
Washington, DC

**Laura Dempsey**  
Arlington, VA

**SSgt (Ret.) Charles J. Eggleston**  
Bowie, MD

**Sherri Goodman**  
Washington, DC

**Doug Belair**  
Arlington, VA

**Connie Milstein**  
New York, NY

**Diane Powell**  
Washington, DC

**Douglas Wilson**  
Washington, DC

## **Top Donors**

Fulfilling military family lifestyle is made possible only with the encouragement, support, and resources provided by fellow military families and the many organizations devoted to supporting Blue Star Families. We are proud to partner with strong organizations and are appreciative of the generous contributions from the following companies, foundations, and organizations.

**AT&T**

**BAE Systems**

**Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation**

**CJM Foundation**

**Got Your 6**

**Health Net Federal Services**

**Hunt Companies, Inc.**

**JPMorgan Chase Foundation**

**La Quinta Inns & Suites**

**McCormick Foundation**

**MetLife Foundation**

**Rent-A-Center, Inc.**

**Tecovas Foundation**

**U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation**

**UnitedHealthcare Military and Veterans**

**USAA**

**Veterans United Foundation**

**The Walt Disney Company Foundation**

**WWE**

## Connecting Communities and Fostering Leadership

Blue Star Families continues to lead military family nonprofits in the online space, engaging members and building community through integrated social media platforms. In 2014 our social media presence grew rapidly, with a 37% increase in Facebook likes and 12% growth in Twitter followers. Blue Star Families also maintained a popular presence on Pinterest and ventured into Instagram to attract younger stakeholders. In addition, our website served as engaging platform for delivering valuable resource and education materials to hundreds of thousands users.

Through key media placements in 2014, in major outlets such as NPR, MSNBC, Military.com, Spousebuzz, Stars and Stripes, and CNN, we raised our profile as a thought leader on military families and their unique challenges.



## Statement of Financial Position December 31, 2014

### Assets

#### Current assets

Cash and cash equivalents	\$223,507.00
Accounts receivable	1,000.00
Prepaid expenses	10,493.00
	235,000.00
Property and equipment, net	83,256.00

Other asset	
Security deposit	65.00

**Total assets** **\$318,321.00**

### Liabilities and Net Assets

#### Current liabilities

Accounts payable	\$796.00
Accrued expenses	66,541.00

**Total liabilities (all current)** **67,337.00**

#### Net assets

Unrestricted (deficit)	(157,678.00)
Temporarily restricted	408,662.00

**Total net assets** **250,984.00**  
**\$ 318,321.00**