

Executive Summary

Military families move frequently – every two to three years, on average.¹ Moving often lands these families far from friends and extended family, leaving them isolated from support networks and with a lack of “belonging” to their community. Having a sense of belonging is strongly associated with mental health benefits, including lower levels of depression,² and is a strong protective factor against suicidal ideation.³ Therefore, when the 2017 Military Family Lifestyle Survey found that about half of military families did not feel a sense of belonging to their local civilian community,⁴ it became clear that a purposeful model was required to fundamentally improve military families’ well-being at the local level.



Focus on Outcomes

Belong: Improve Sense of Belonging to Local Community

Drive cultural and systemic changes in community

- Increase sense of belonging to local civilian community
- Improve or change military family policies

Engage: Improve Member Engagement

Lead local civil-military integration

- Increase volunteerism
- Diversify program options
- Improve Blue Star Families’ role as a thought leader in the local community
- Improve self-reported member engagement

Welcome: Develop and Maintain Sustainable Chapters

Build capacity

- Grow membership
- Diversify membership
- Develop partnerships
- Improve brand recognition
- Build infrastructure
- Deliver BSF core programs
- Support Chapter sustainability

¹ Drummet, A. R., Coleman, M., & Cable, S. (2003). Military families under stress: Implications for family life education. *Family Relations: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies*, 52(3), 279-287. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2003.00279>

² Malone, G. P., Pillow, D. R., & Osman, A. (2012). The General Belongingness Scale (GBS): Assessing achieved belongingness. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 52(3), 311-316. <https://doi-org.sandiego.idm.oclc/10.1016/j.paid.2011.10.027>

³ Stone, D. M., Holland, K. M., Bartholow, B., Crosby, A. E., Davis, S., & Wilkins, N. (2017). Preventing Suicide: A Technical Package of Policies, Programs, and Practices. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

⁴ Blue Star Families. (2017). 2017 Military Family Lifestyle Survey Comprehensive Report. <https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/MFLS-ComprehensiveReport17-FINAL.pdf>

To address this challenge, in 2018, Blue Star Families began transitioning from volunteer-led Chapters to a funded, staff-led Chapter model. These Chapters were purposefully built with a specific and

measurable social impact goal: **improve military families' sense of belonging to their local communities.** Our suite of available programs is designed to build stronger families and stronger communities. Furthermore, each Chapter is equipped with a geographic cross-section of local Military Family Lifestyle Survey data to help tailor program implementation to the needs of their local communities.

Our Chapters use a data-informed, long-term framework to improve military family belonging:



Welcome: Develop and maintain sustainable Chapters by growing membership and delivering Blue Star Families' core programs for military families

Engage: Improve member engagement and lead local civil-military integration

Belong: Improve sense of belonging to the local community, and drive cultural and systemic changes in the community

As part of our commitment to ensuring evidence-based programming, Blue Star Families evaluated the effectiveness of the Chapter model in San Diego and the New York Tri-State region as part of the Connected Communities Impact Study (CCIS). CCIS was funded by the Bristol Myers Squibb Foundation and conducted in partnership with the Sorenson Impact Center. Results were released in early 2021.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH?

Contact survey@bluestarfam.org

WANT TO SUPPORT OUR CHAPTERS?

Contact giving@bluestarfam.org