



Blue Star Families Outdoor Explorers for all

Impact Report 2024



Executive Summary

Outdoor Explorers for All is a transformative program that addresses the unique challenges of military families, especially around social isolation due to frequent relocations. These moves can disrupt a sense of belonging, which research shows is essential for mental resilience.

Our annual Military Family Lifestyle Survey (MFLS) has highlighted the connection between the outdoors and mental health. 95% of active-duty family respondents participate in outdoors activities, and those that do report higher well-being, according to the 2023 MFLS. Further research from our [Connected Communities Impact Study](#) shows a direct link between participation in BSF programming and improved social connections, and an indirect link to improvements in mental health. This research emphasizes the vital role belonging plays in mental health. Despite these benefits, fewer than half (41%) of active-duty families reported feeling a sense of belonging to their local civilian community in the 2023 MFLS.



As part of Blue Star Families' mission, **Outdoor Explorers for All** connects military families with public lands, fostering healthy habits, environmental stewardship, and community integration. Through virtual and in-person experiences, the program encourages confidence and connection in outdoor settings.

In 2024, the program brought together more than 120 families across seven regions, making a lasting impact on their mental and physical health while deepening community ties.



2024 by the Numbers



“We loved this experience, and will tell all of our people to be on the lookout for future opportunities. Definitely a highlight of our year. It is extremely difficult to find programs that are of equal interest to all members of our family, but this was fantastic for us all!”

— 2024 OEA Cohort Family

403

Applications across all five Chapters

35

Events

262

Military kids

5

Planned in-person events at NPS-managed sites in all participating Chapters

121

Families enrolled in seven states

5

Zoom-based sessions led by program staff and National Park Service rangers



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— 2024 OEA Cohort Family





Outfitting Families for Lasting Impact for Outdoor Success



What did participants take away from the event? (n=32)

- **45%** reported obtaining or learning how to obtain an America the Beautiful Pass
- **76%** of participants said the program deepened their knowledge of local outdoor opportunities
- **57%** felt more prepared to plan an outdoor activity in the future

Net Promoter Score:

91



Through this program did you receive an America the Beautiful Pass? (n=32)

- **34%** said yes
- **28%** said no but indicated they already have a pass
- **9%** said no but they learned how to access one
- **28%** said no



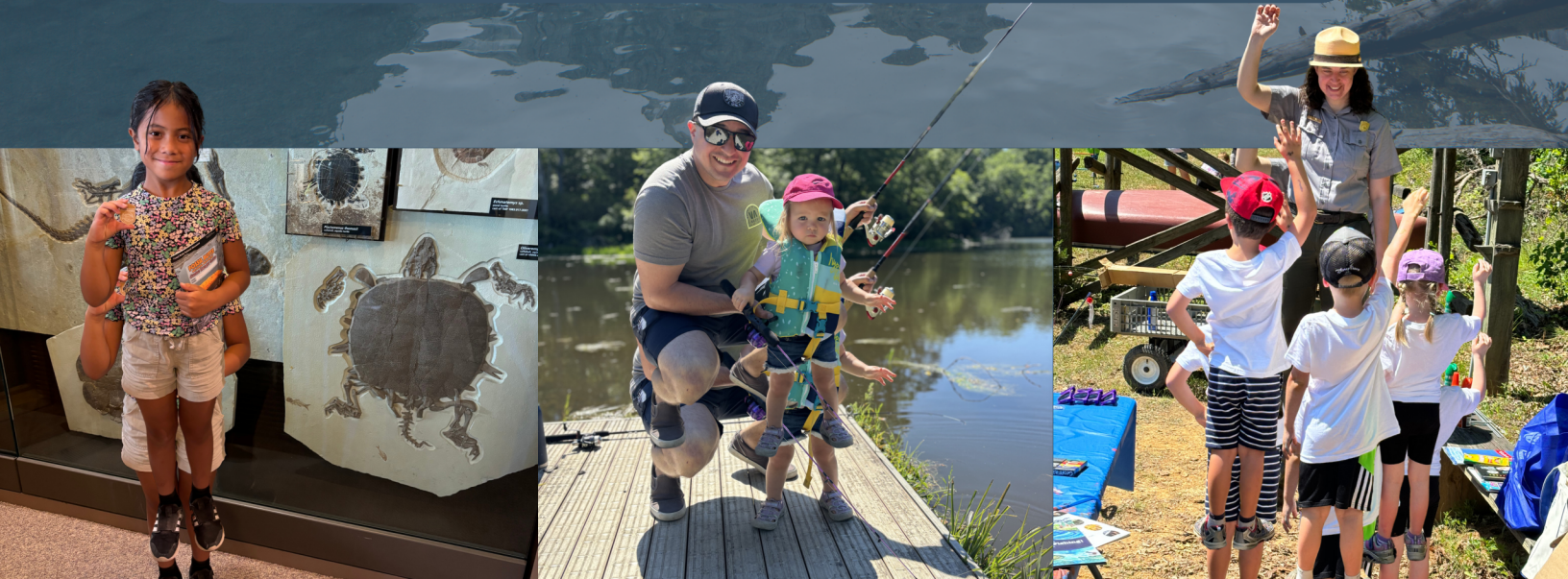
How welcome did participants feel? (n=32)

- **97%** of respondents say they agreed or strongly agreed that they were engaged at events (n=32)
- **75%** of respondents say they agreed or strongly agreed that they were able to relate to other people (n=32)



Outdoor resources (n=32)

- **90%** of respondents say they agreed or strongly agreed that the program deepened their knowledge of local outdoor opportunities (n = 32)
- **78%** of respondents say they agreed or strongly agreed they were introduced to new resources through this program (n = 32)
- **91%** of respondents say they agreed or strongly agreed they learned how to better navigate outdoor spaces (n = 32)
- **81%** of respondents say they agreed or strongly agreed that they feel more prepared to plan an outdoor activity in the future (n = 32)





OEA Highlights for 2024



About Our Program

In 2024, **Outdoor Explorers for All** provided military families with a wide range of outdoor recreation events designed to meet diverse needs and abilities. From birding and stargazing to fishing, families discovered new ways to connect with nature while building the confidence to embark on their own adventures.

Gear & Experiences

To support their journey, we offered free, specialized gear and hosted immersive experiences at national park sites. These activities combined outdoor exploration with hands-on education, inspiring stewardship and a deeper appreciation for the natural world.

Blue Star Neighborhood

Participants also connected through a dedicated online group, fostering a sense of community, sharing stories, and forming lasting bonds. By breaking down barriers and increasing access, **Outdoor Explorers for All** empowered military families to embrace the mental, physical, and emotional benefits of nature well beyond the program's conclusion.





OEA Highlights for 2024



OEA Chapter Cohorts

- Utah
- New England
- Jacksonville
- Tennessee
- National Capital Region
- Puget Sound
- New York Tri-State



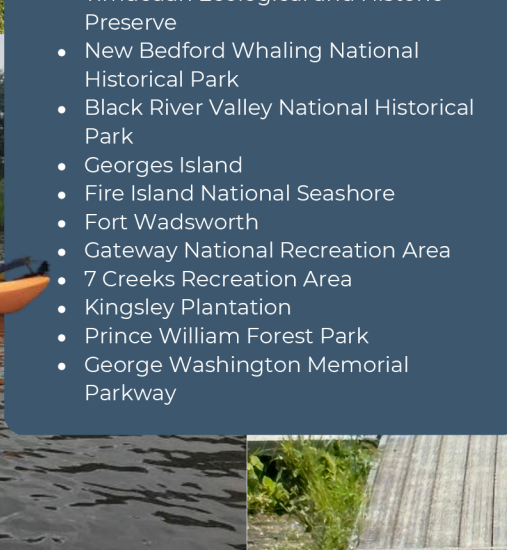
National Park Sites Visited

- Mammoth Cave National Park
- Olympic National Park
- Acadia National Park — Virtual
- Glacier National Park — Virtual
- Timpanogos Cave National Monument
- Fossil Butte National Monument
- Theodore Roosevelt Island
- Fort Hunt Park
- Jones Point Park
- Timucuan Ecological and Historic Preserve
- New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park
- Black River Valley National Historical Park
- Georges Island
- Fire Island National Seashore
- Fort Wadsworth
- Gateway National Recreation Area
- 7 Creeks Recreation Area
- Kingsley Plantation
- Prince William Forest Park
- George Washington Memorial Parkway



Activities

- Guided Tours
- Beachcombing
- Tide Pooling
- Birding
- Stargazing
- Hiking
- Invasive Species Walks
- Seining
- Nature Walks
- Kayaking





Testimonials

"Last week's event was fantastic! We are a group of three adults, and while most attendees had children, including teenagers, I was still grateful to be a part of it. It had been years since we'd visited Roosevelt Island, and we'd never participated in a ranger-led event before, so that was a real treat. Nancy was so welcoming, and it felt like the whole group had a wonderful time. To be honest, we wouldn't have planned this activity on our own if it hadn't been part of the program, so I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunity to spend time together as a family. The day was absolutely perfect, with beautiful weather for the event. Our son is especially excited about the upcoming fishing trip! This is such a wonderful program, and we feel lucky to be included. Thank you!"

— 2024 OEA Cohort Family

"We enjoyed it so much! My 4-year-old was thrilled to receive his ranger badge and loved doing the scavenger hunt. We can't wait for the next outing!"

— 2024 OEA Cohort Family

"We had a great time exploring the outdoors in Utah. This was our first summer here, and we made lots of wonderful memories. Thank you for organizing these excursions for us!"

— Spouse/Domestic Partner of Active-Duty Service Member, Army, National Capital Region

"I enjoyed all the variations, different activity ideas (more than two were something I had never tried), and new locations. However, I will say the staff and volunteers made me feel very welcome. They were so informative—great staff! I do wish there was more attendance from individuals."

— 2024 OEA Cohort Family



Outfitting Families for Lasting Outdoor Success



This essential gear goes home with families, empowering them to continue their adventures and make outdoor exploration a lasting part of their lives.

What was your favorite part of the activity/event you participated in?

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“Being able to go to different places that I probably wouldn't want to do on my own with my son.”

— Spouse/Domestic Partner of Retired Service Member/Veteran, Air Force, Utah

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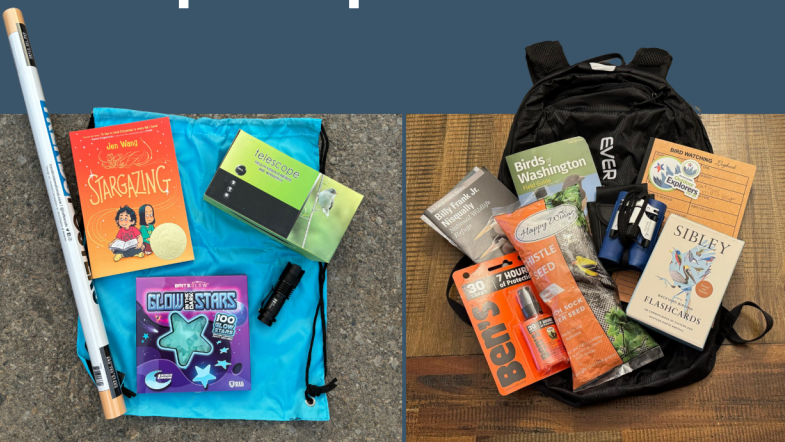
“Exploring new outdoor locations and having the rangers there for my family to talk with”

— Spouse/Domestic Partner of Retired Service Member/Veteran, Air Force, Utah

“

“The weekend events, park stewardship activities, and outdoor exploration experiences were enriching and fun. The virtual community was a great bonus, allowing us to share our adventures and connect with other families. Overall, “Outdoor Explorers for All” is a fantastic, family-oriented program that fosters a love for the outdoors. Highly recommended for military families!”

— Spouse/Domestic Partner of Retired Service Member, Army, National Capital Region





We asked participants what they loved about this season's programming and here's what they had to say:

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“I enjoyed the meeting together with other families and enjoying the activity that was planned for us. I appreciated the cold beverages after our hikes and the plentiful snacks. I am more confident in venturing outdoors.”

“

“I truly enjoyed the program and having a set event to go to over multiple weekends. I got to know a few other families and would highly recommend this to others.”

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“This was a wonderful offering. It allowed us to participate in things we wouldn't normally and helped us place a higher priority on outdoor time. Thank you!”

“

“Exploring new outdoor locations and having the rangers there for my family to talk with.”

“

“That we were exposed to things we wouldn't have done on our own without trying it first.”

“

“The shared experience with my family and meeting other families with shared interests.”

“

“All of it! I love that it was close to my house, gave me the supplies I needed, taught us how to use them responsibly, and the dates were spread out enough that we had chances to discuss and practice what we had learned. The 7-Creeks Fest was AMAZING, and my son got to experience kayaking for the first time, which he instantly fell in love with. We have gone four times in the last month and plan on buying our own kayaks.”



Lasting Impact

The impact of the **Outdoor Explorers for All** program goes beyond benefiting individual families — it extends into communities and strengthens bonds with parks and public lands. By offering a diverse range of outdoor recreation events, the program has inspired families to discover new outdoor passions, equipping them with the skills and confidence to continue exploring independently. We're proud to have facilitated these meaningful connections and overcome barriers to access, especially by providing free gear and increased access to the America the Beautiful Military Pass.



As we move into 2025, we're excited to expand our focus to include more camping-related experiences, such as campfire safety, stargazing, campsite setup, and the 'Great Family Camp Out.' With the continued support of the National Park Service and outdoor education specialists, we will provide tailored guidance and enriching events that emphasize environmental stewardship and the joys of spending time in nature.

Here's to another year of positive impact, deeper connections, and unforgettable adventures together!



Blue Star Families
**Outdoor
Explorers**
for all