Blue Star Families
Campaign for Inclusion

Research Series

Unity in Diversity: Fostering Inclusive Communities for Military Families

Funding for the Campaign for Inclusion Research Series is provided through the generosity of our sponsors, The USAA Foundation, Lockheed Martin, Booz Allen, JP Morgan Chase, Pritzker Military Foundation, AARP, BAE Systems, and Synchrony Foundation, with the additional support of Blue Star Families from craig newmark philanthropies and CSX.

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Blue Star Families (BSF)

Blue Star Families was founded with the mission to strengthen military families by building robust communities of support. Through our research and data, we identify the greatest needs within the military family community and create programs and solutions that will empower military families to thrive, such as career development tools, local community events, and caregiver support. Since its inception in 2009, Blue Star Families has engaged tens of thousands of volunteers and impacts more than 1.5 million military family members annually. With Blue Star Families, military families can find answers to their challenges anywhere they are.

D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF)

Syracuse University's D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) was founded in 2011, as a partnership between Syracuse University and JPMorgan Chase & Co. Headquartered on the campus of Syracuse University and located in the Daniel and Gayle D'Aniello Building at the Syracuse University National Veterans Resource Center, the IVMF was founded as higher-education's first interdisciplinary academic institute singularly focused on advancing the lives of the nation's military, veterans, and their families. The IVMF team designs and delivers class-leading training programs and services to the military-connected community, in support of the transition from military to civilian life and beyond. Each year, more than 20,000 service members, veterans, and family members engage IVMF programs and services, which are provided at largely no cost to participants. The IVMF's programs are informed by the Institute's sustained and robust data collection, research, and policy analysis team and infrastructure. The D'Aniello Institute's work on behalf of the military-connected community is made possible by gifts and grants from individuals and corporations committed to those who served in America's armed forces and their families. For more information, please visit **ivmf.syracuse.edu**.

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Blue Star Families

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Executive Summary

A sense of belonging is essential for the resilience and well-being of military families, but frequent relocations often lead to social isolation, making it challenging to establish this connection. This challenge is particularly pronounced for diverse military families, who may struggle to find others in their community with similar experiences.

Built on the social organization theory of action and change,[1] this research highlights that both formal systems (community resources) and informal support networks (neighbors, friends, family) are foundational for creating a sense of belonging. These systems help set the conditions for military families to form connections, but how this is achieved varies.

Key Findings

1. Feeling valued, understood, and having commonalities with others have the strongest correlation to a sense of belonging. Having shared identity is important for building connections[2] — a step to feeling belonging. While military affiliation is a significant commonality, it is not the only one. Race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, cultural affinities, and family/parental status are also opportunities for shared experiences that create belonging.
2. Among the three communities, a greater proportion of respondents of color felt a sense of belonging in communities that were perceived as diverse and welcoming to people of color by all respondents.
3. The presence of the military — both the military installation(s) and when military families stayed in the community after they transitioned out of military service — brings welcome diversity to the area.
4. Communities that demonstrate an understanding of the military and Veteran lifestyle help diverse families feel welcome.[3,4] Military-specific community connections are important for both service members and spouses.[5]

[1] Mancini, J. A., O'Neal, C. W., Martin, J. A., & Bowen, G. L. (2018). Community Social Organization and Military Families: Theoretical Perspectives on Transitions, Contexts, and Resilience. Journal of Family Theory & Review, 10(3), 550–565. https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12271

[2] O'Neal, C. W., Lucier-Greer, M., Mancini, J. A., Ferraro, A. J., & Ross, D. B. (2016). Family relational health, psychological resources, and health behaviors: A Dyadic study of military couples. Military Medicine, 181(2), 152–160. https://doi.org/10.7205/milmed-d-14-00740

[3] Blue Star Families. (2023). Campaign for Inclusion research 2022: Building bridges to belonging for Military Families of Color. https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/BSF_CFI23_Comp_Report_FULL-5.pdf

[4] Blue Star Families. (2020). 2019 Military Family Lifestyle Survey comprehensive report. https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/BSF-2019-Survey-Comprehensive-Report-Digital-rev200305.pdf

[5] O'Neal, C. W., Lucier-Greer, M., Mancini, J. A., Ferraro, A. J., & Ross, D. B. Family relational health psychological resources

5. In all communities, individual acts, rather than community or installation efforts, were most commonly cited as an indication of welcome and belonging — or conversely, indicated that respondents were not welcome. Neighbors waving hello, giving welcome baskets, or offering assistance, or community members simply introducing themselves and being friendly were the key signs that a community was welcoming.
6. Community events were another common community resource or activity that made people feel like they belonged and that the community embraced diversity. Across all communities, respondents most commonly identified social events and activities as what they'd like to see in the community to welcome families. This was true among both white respondents and respondents in families of color. These events signal welcoming to military families and offer opportunities to connect military families with civilians in the community.

A common theme across communities is that while institutions and organizations can lay groundwork and provide the forums for individuals to come together and create community with one another, the responsibility for finding connections and belonging largely rests with individuals and families — both military families relocating to a new community and the community members that welcome them. This aligns with theoretical work suggesting that a community's capacity to support resilience depends on interpersonal relationships. While community antecedents like social and physical infrastructure and social organizational processes (such as network structure, social capital, and community capacity) can foster a sense of community and resilience,[6] the power to increase belonging ultimately lies with individuals and families.

To increase a sense of belonging, communities should focus on offering diverse opportunities for engagement, highlighting commonalities, and creating spaces where military families can have a voice and contribute to the community. Research such as that required by Congress in the 2022 NDAA[7] to understand relations between members of the armed forces and military communities can also illuminate more clearly the path to supporting diverse military families in all the communities that the military takes them to.

[6] Mancini, J.A., Walker O'Neal, C., Martin, J.A., and Bowen, G. Community Social Organization
[7] National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal year 2022. Pub. L. No. 117-81, § 1051, 135 Stat. 1541

Introduction and Research Review

Addressing disparities affecting diverse military families remains a matter of national security, but while it has large-scale implications, it also has local roots. Many of the experiences that impact diverse military families — both positively and negatively — are based in local communities, where most military families live. This report, building on the social organization theory of action and change,[8] explored how community factors influence diverse military families' sense of belonging, and what community resources and strategies families use to develop that sense of belonging within a community. Having a sense of belonging and community is a critical component in family resilience and adaptation,[9,10] but also influences families' likelihood to recommend military service,[11] thereby sustaining recruitment and retention to the All-Volunteer Force. Community characteristics and both formal and informal support networks form the basis for this resilience,[12] so further understanding what contributes to this foundation, particularly for diverse military families, is the focus of this research.

The first report in the Campaign for Inclusion Research Series focused on the diverse experiences of military and Veteran families of color,[13] uncovering both the benefits of military service for people of color and also unique challenges they experience during their military service. For example, active-duty families of color make decisions about their military life — such as which installation they should go to next, or even whether to stay in military service — based on perceptions about discrimination and fear for their families' well-being. Many reported being "not at all comfortable" being stationed in certain regions of the country.

[8] Mancini, J.A., Walker O'Neal, C., Martin, J.A., and Bowen, G. Community Social Organization

[9] Bowen, G. L., Mancini, J. A., Martin, J. A., Ware, W. B., & Nelson, J. P. (2003). Promoting the adaptation of military families: An Empirical test of a community practice model*. Family Relations, 52(1), 33–44. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2003.00033.x

[10] Mancini, J. A., & Bowen, G. L. (2013). Families and communities: A Social organization theory of action and change. In Handbook of Marriage and the Family. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-3987-5_32

[11] Blue Star Families (2024). 2023 Military Family Lifestyle Survey comprehensive report. https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/BSF_MFLS_Comp_Report_Full_Digital.pdf

[12] Mancini, J. A., & Bowen, G. L. Families and communities: A Social organization theory of action and change. In Handbook of Marriage and the Family. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-3987-5_32

[13] Blue Star Families. (2022). The diverse experiences of military and Veteran Families of Color.https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/BSF_MFC_REI_FullReport2021-final.pdf

Introduction and Research Review

The second report in the Campaign for Inclusion Research Series[14] explored how exposure to racially/ethnically-motivated discriminatory behaviors impacted belonging, willingness to recommend local civilian communities, and willingness to recommend military service, and found that those who reported any experiences of discrimination were significantly less likely to feel a sense of belonging, to recommend the community to others, or to recommend military service overall. These findings reaffirmed the need to address racially- or ethnically-based discrimination to support continued recruitment of our All Volunteer Force.

Furthermore, this research highlighted attributes that helped contribute to respondents' sense of belonging to the community. Understanding of the military lifestyle, friendship, and safety are key contributors for most families, but for military families of color, a community that embraces diversity is also important — more so than for their white peers. This research reaffirmed that building bridges to belonging — common ground on which to connect — required collaboration "across the fence line."

This report extends this work by identifying what those bridges look like in a variety of communities, digging deeper into what specific resources and strategies families report create a sense of welcome in local communities and which resources set the conditions for families to feel a sense of belonging. Three distinct communities — Hill Air Force Base and surrounding communities in Utah, San Antonio, Texas, and the Hampton Roads area in Virginia — were selected to explore the impact of community characteristics such as region, military presence, and community demographics on feeling welcome and belonging, particularly for diverse military families.[15] Previous research demonstrates that formal systems and informal networks can directly influence a sense of community,[16] and that formal systems have a role in setting the conditions for critical informal support networks to develop.[17]

To better understand what makes diverse military families feel at home in the communities where they live and work, this primarily qualitative study explored how personal, military-specific, and community attributes intersect in the lives of diverse military families in three distinct military communities. Selected quotes are used throughout the report to illustrate important themes and include perspectives from a variety of respondents, including participants of color, white respondents in multiracial or multiethnic families, families with lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender members, and straight/heterosexual respondents. Using a comparative case study approach, regional surveys and individual interviews were employed to examine how elements in the community influence the degree to which diverse military families in each community feel welcomed and belonging, factors which ultimately are needed to not just survive, but thrive.

[14] Blue Star Families. (2023). Building Bridges to Belonging for Military Families of Color. https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/BSF_CFI23_Comp_Report_FULL-5.pdf

[15] Fort Gregg-Adams and surrounding communities were also included in the research effort, but was ultimately excluded from community-level analysis due to a low sample size.

[16] Bowen, G. L., Mancini, J. A., Martin, J. A., Ware, W. B., & Nelson, J. P. Promoting the adaptation of military

[17] Mancini, J.A., Walker O'Neal, C., Martin, J.A., and Bowen, G. Community Social Organization

Intersectionality and Belonging

In addition to collecting new data to better understand belonging among diverse military families, previously collected data from Blue Star Families' annual Military Family Lifestyle Surveys were also analyzed for this report.

Our previous research has demonstrated that diverse military families — families who have a member of color or a member who identifies as part of the LGBTQ+ community — report feeling less belonging in their communities. Intersectionality theory[18] examines how various social identities, such as race, gender, class, and sexuality, intersect to create unique experiences of discrimination and privilege. It highlights that these overlapping identities can lead to compounded forms of inequality that cannot be fully understood by analyzing each identity in isolation. Studying the intersection of multiple social identities is challenging,[19] but this exploratory research sought to approach belonging for diverse military families through an intersectional approach — in this case, exploring how identifying as both a person of color and lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer may affect developing a sense of belonging to the community. For this exploration, data from active-duty military family member respondents to the 2022 Military Family Lifestyle Survey (MFLS) was analyzed. See Methodology for more details on this sample.

Among active-duty family respondents[20] to the 2022 MFLS (n=3345), the average belonging score was 3.79, with a standard deviation of 1.59 and a range from 1-7. Among active-duty family respondents who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer (LGBQ, n=173) the average belonging score was lower — 3.32, compared to 3.81 (n=3148) among those who do not identify as LGBQ. This pattern continued, but was much less pronounced, among respondents who had a child or children (age 20 or younger) who identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB) (n=128), when compared to those with children but who did not have children who identified as LGB[21] (n=1767) 3.6 versus 3.81.

[18] Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989(1), 139–167. https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=uclf

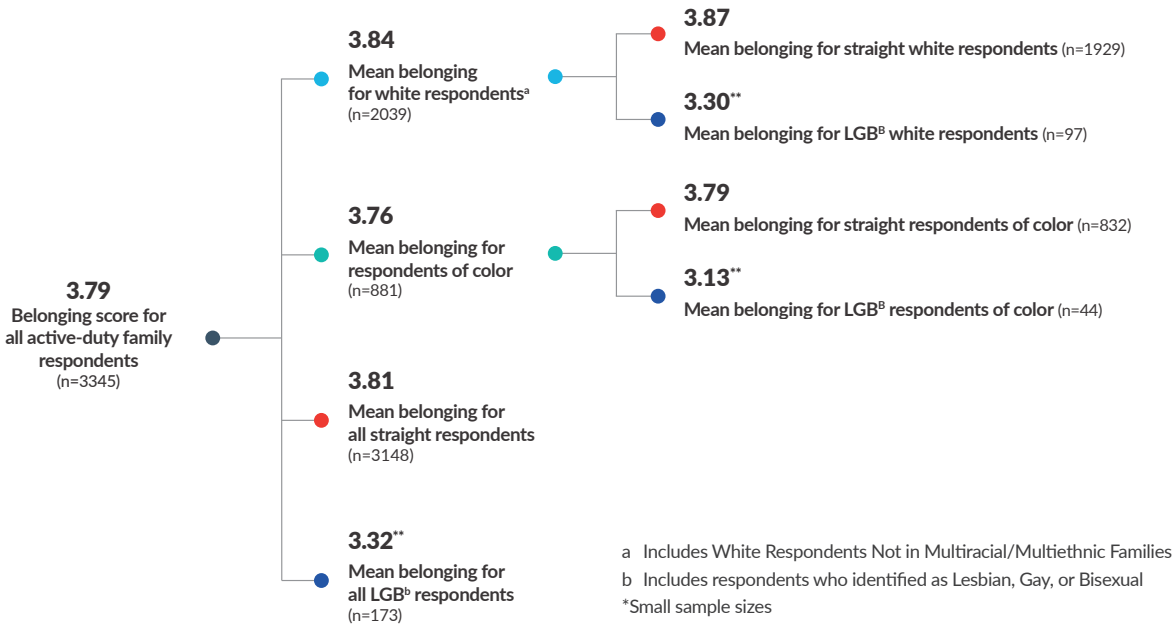
[19] Bowleg, L. (2008). When Black + lesbian + woman ≠ black lesbian woman: The methodological challenges of qualitative and quantitative intersectionality research. Sex Roles, 59(5-6), 312–325. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-008-9400-z

[20] The sample for the 2022 MFLS analyses was restricted to active-duty family respondents, while the samples for the rest of this report most commonly include all respondents, including Veterans and spouses of Veterans, National Guard and Reserve families, and DOD civilians in some cases. In prior samples, the mean sense of belonging has varied among these groups, and typically belonging among active-duty family respondents is lower than other groups.

[21] See Methodology for definitions of LGBQ in different samples.

Mean Belonging by Race/Ethnicity and Sexual Orientation

Active-duty family respondents



a Includes White Respondents Not in Multiracial/Multiethnic Families
b Includes respondents who identified as Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual
*Small sample sizes

Having shared identities or characteristics can be an important "bridge to belonging" for military families. While respondents of color report slightly less belonging than white respondents not in multiracial/multiethnic families, respondents who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual report less belonging than their straight/heterosexual peers. However, a shared military affiliation provides an important commonality upon which to build belonging, even when other commonalities — such as race/ethnicity or sexual orientation — are not present. Previous research has found that when military families feel others in their civilian community understand and support the military lifestyle, they feel a greater sense of belonging,[22] and military culture can be an important commonality.

Feeling Welcome

Feeling welcome is a necessary antecedent to developing a sense of belonging to a community. Blue Star Families' previous research has also focused on helping military families feel welcome and develop a sense of belonging, and in the 2023 Military Family Lifestyle Survey, we asked respondents the open-ended question, "What has made you feel welcome in your community?" A new analysis of the qualitative responses revealed similar common responses among all groups — respondents of color, white respondents, and lesbian, gay, or bisexual respondents.

[22] Blue Star Families. Campaign for Inclusion research 2022

Findings

Testifying to the social isolation that often accompanies highly mobile military families, one of the most common themes among responses was that they did not feel welcome in their new communities. However, another top common response was that individual acts of kindness made them feel welcome. Other common themes included having a military presence and shared military experience, and a willingness from the community to understand the military lifestyle, as well as community events for military families. Among those who reported they did not feel welcome, many described a lack of understanding from the civilian community about their military lifestyle. Finding connections outside of the military community helped them feel welcome.

Table 1.1: Feeling Welcome
Active-duty family respondents to the 2023 Military Family Lifestyle Survey

	White respondents (n=1010)	Respondents of color (n=373)	Lesbian, gay, bisexual respondents (n=95)	Example response
I do not feel welcome in my community	22%	23%	26%	"It is difficult to make friends because when locals find out you are affiliated with the military, they don't want to invest time in a friendship that will only last a couple of years at best. Employers want to know how long we have been here/will be here. I have had to reassure my employer that we are going to be staying longer before receiving promotion support." — Space Force Spouse
Living in civilian communities/ general kindness	22%	21%	16%	"We entered a neighborhood where people have lived 30 plus years. I had two neighbors, whom I've never met before, mow my grass before my belongings arrived from a recent overseas move. Everyone has been friendly, but I've also introduced myself to everyone first with a gift and to share my family's story and how we came to be in this new home." — Army Spouse
Military presence/ shared experiences	12%	16%	14%	"Our community has a very large population of service-connected individuals and families. To be surrounded by so many people with a degree of shared military experience helps us to feel like we belong." — Air Force Spouse
Willingness to understand military lifestyle	9%	11%	13%	"The local community has welcomed us with open arms at my husband's current duty station. The city is very military-friendly and appreciates us being here." — Army Spouse
Community events for military families	10%	13%	8%	"Lots of local parades and events honoring military and their families." — Air Force Spouse
My child's school/ extracurriculars	12%	7%	6%	"Trying to relate to civilian families regarding similarities in hobbies and our children." — Navy Spouse
Non-military affiliated orgs	9%	6%	12%	"I am fortunate to live in an area that values education, green spaces, public libraries, etc. There are many groups/clubs/organizations for every interest in our upbeat suburban area." — Navy Spouse
Religious community	11%	5%	4%	"My church, who has women who have taken me under their wing and has checked in on me, planned lunches and dinners for me, and included me in many things." — Air Force Spouse

Question text: What has made you feel welcome in your community?

White Respondents only selected white (and no other answer choices) to the race/ethnicity select-all question.

Active-duty family respondents of color include those who selected American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic or Latino/a/x or of Spanish origin, Middle Eastern or North African, or Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. They could also select white and/or a write-in option, but not as the only option.

Lesbian, Gay, or Bisexual Respondents included those who selected Lesbian/Gay/Homosexual, Bisexual, or Sexual Orientation Not Listed to the question "Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?"

Percentages are calculated based on the number of participants in each category that responded to the open-ended question.

Identity

Building on this analysis of historical data, the 2024 Campaign for Inclusion Regional Survey gathered responses from active-duty family respondents, Veteran and spouses of Veteran respondents, National Guard and Reserve family respondents, and DOD civilians in four communities — Hill Air Force Base, Utah, and surrounding communities; San Antonio, Texas; Hampton Roads, Virginia; and Fort Gregg-Adams, Virginia,[23] and explored the degree to which diverse military families saw themselves reflected in the community, to understand whether representation in the community is associated with a sense of belonging. To better understand how they saw themselves reflected in the community, respondents were asked to select the top five characteristics that were most important to their sense of identity.

Among all respondents in all selected communities, military and Veteran affiliation was second only to relationship/marital status in terms of importance. Of all respondents, 60% (n=491) included "military/Veteran affiliation" in their top five, while 71% included "marital/relationship status." While the survey's focus on military-connected families may have prompted respondents to consider that characteristic first, this evidence reaffirms that military or Veteran affiliation can be central to one's identity, and therefore can be a critical commonality upon which to build a sense of belonging.

For diverse military families, other aspects of their identity are also very salient. Among respondents of color (n=109), race/ethnicity was one of the top characteristics important to their identity (62%), and among lesbian, gay, or bisexual respondents (n=23), sexual orientation was considerably more important than their straight peers (n=300; 43% versus 7%). Similarly, a greater proportion of female respondents (n=251) included "gender" among their top identities, compared to male respondents (n=82; 69% versus 35%), and a majority of respondents (n=227; 73%) who had at least one child living at home with them ranked "parental status" as one of their top three characteristics, much more so than their peers without children living at home with them (23%).

Representation Within the Community

A critical piece of this research is building an understanding of the factors associated with developing a sense of belonging, particularly for diverse military families, and the relative importance of having characteristics

[23] Fort Gregg-Adams was later excluded from the community analysis due to a low sample size, but respondents are still included in the full sample of 2024 CFI Regional Survey.

in common with others in the community. Among respondents in all communities, having others in the community like them and having opportunities to connect with others like them in their community was associated with a sense of belonging to the community as well. Diverse representation in the community may be one way to signal to diverse military families that they have commonalities with their neighbors.

"Through social media I was able to find people [in the local community] who are similar to me. They have made a huge difference in my attitude and made me feel welcome. However I know I'm lucky and many don't have that support system." — LGBTQ+ Family Respondent

However, for some, adding multiple layers of identity — race, gender, and military affiliation — made it more difficult to find others with common ground.

"A big part of my life has been military, so that's reflected. But then, when you start adding, like the other identifiers, like a military female. [...] So then you start adding, you know, being African American on top of that, and so just kind of furthers the distance away from other people." — Interview Participant

The three items that were most strongly correlated with the item "I feel a sense of belonging to my local community" were feeling valued, understood by others, and having important things in common, which aligns with other research into belonging that defines belonging as a subjective feeling of value and respect from a reciprocal relationship, built on shared experiences, beliefs, or personal characteristics.[24] These commonalities could be, but are not limited to, race and ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. For many respondents in the qualitative data, the most important characteristics were having a military affiliation in common or a similar family structure, such as having kids at similar ages, or simply, sharing values in common. This aligns with previous research which found that feeling belonging to a community was associated with feeling close to other community members, feeling one's own circumstances are similar to others in the community.[25]

[24] Mahar, A. L., Cobigo, V., & Stuart, H. (2013). Conceptualizing belonging. Disability and Rehabilitation, 35(12), 1026–1032. https://doi.org/10.3109/09638288.2012.717584

[25] Mancini, J. A., Bowen, G. L., Martin, J. A., & Ware, W. B. (2003). The community connections index: Measurement of community engagement and sense of community. Paper presented at the Hawaii International Conference on the Social Sciences, Honolulu, June 2003

Table 1.2: Items Associated with Feeling a Sense of Belonging
All regional survey respondents (n=444)

Items correlated with the item "I feel a sense of belonging to my local community"	R value
I feel valued by others where I live.	.695**
I feel understood by others where I live.	.651**
I have important things in common with others in my community.	.639**
I have the opportunity to be involved in community decisions.	.614**
I have opportunities to connect with other people like me in my community.	.593**
I have opportunities to participate in my culture where I live.	.560**
There are other people like me in my community.	.498**
I trust my neighbors.	.498**
I feel safe where I live.	.452**

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Community Findings: Hill Air Force Base and Surrounding Communities

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Hill Air Force Base and Surrounding Communities

Hill Air Force Base (AFB) was selected as a target community for this study as a smaller community with a single military installation in the Western region, with limited racial/ethnic diversity in the community. It also has a unique history of both challenges and resources allocated to support diverse military families assigned to the base. The Davis County School District, serving families stationed at Hill AFB in Utah, has faced significant scrutiny over issues of racial discrimination and racial bullying, particularly affecting Black, Hispanic, and Asian military children.[26] This issue came to light through numerous reports and complaints from parents and students, highlighting a pervasive problem within the district.

The issue gained national attention when the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) initiated an investigation into the Davis County School District's handling of racial discrimination and bullying complaints. The investigation, which began in July 2019, was prompted by multiple reports from parents and advocacy groups who alleged that the district was failing to address repeated incidents of racial harassment and discrimination against students, especially those from Black, Asian, and Hispanic backgrounds. These incidents included racial slurs, physical assaults, and exclusionary practices by both students and staff.

The DOJ's investigation revealed a pattern of discriminatory behavior and a lack of appropriate response from the school district. The investigation revealed pervasive racial harassment, both student-to-student and staff-to-student, and an inadequate response by the school district when complaints of discrimination or racially-based harassment were raised. Furthermore, there was a significant lack of training for both staff and students to recognize and prevent racial discrimination and bullying.

Following the investigation, the DOJ and the Davis County School District reached a settlement agreement in October 2021.[27] The district committed to implementing a comprehensive action plan to address the issues identified, including enhanced training, improved reporting and response procedures, increased support for students, community engagement, and monitoring and accountability.[28,29]

The implementation of these measures aims to create a safer and more inclusive environment for all students in the Davis County School District, with particular attention to the needs of military children and other vulnerable groups. The district's commitment to these reforms represents a significant step toward addressing the longstanding issues of racial discrimination and bullying, though continued vigilance and community involvement are essential to ensure lasting change.

[26] U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division. (2021, Sept. 15). Notice of findings of race discrimination in the Davis school district. https://www.justice.gov/opa/press-release/file/1443856/dl?inline

[27] Cortez, M. (2023, December 20). DOJ investigation reveals "serious and widespread racial harassment" in this Utah school district. Deseret News. https://www.deseret.com/utah/2021/10/21/22739206/doj-investigation-reveals-serious-and-widespread-racial-harassment-in-utah-school-district-davis

[28] https://www.facebook.com/kslcom. (2017). "A huge assignment": Davis school district announces partnership to address racism. Ksl.com. https://www.ksl.com/article/50322005/a-huge-assignment-davis-school-district-announces-partnership-to-address-racism

[29] Harris Gurr, A. (2023, January 12). Davis school district has support team for military-connected children. KSLNewsRadio. https://kslnewsradio.com/1982017/davis-school-district-has-support-team-for-military-connected-children

Furthermore, the Davis County Health Department has done substantial work exploring equity in the local community,[30] including assessing overall equity through a variety of lenses[31] and exploring populations of interest, such as the LGBTQ+ population.[32] Findings from this research emphasize the importance of having an accepting and understanding family and community support as a contributing factor to resilience, as well as some social and cultural norms that create barriers to inclusion.

Community Demographics

Hill AFB, located in Davis County, Utah, is the Air Force's second largest installation. It hosts the 75th Air Base Wing, the Ogden Air Logistics Complex, Air Force Life Cycle Management Center, and the 388th and 419th Fighter Wings. It is the largest single-site employer in Utah.[33] The installation employs more than 25,000 personnel, including more than 5,000 military personnel, and hosts more than 5,000 military family members.[34] Davis County is also home to more than 17,000 Veterans, comprising 7.6% of the county population.[35] Nearby Weber County also has more than 13,000 Veterans, 6.8% of the population.[36]

Hill AFB is situated 30 miles north of Salt Lake City, in Davis County, bordering Weber County. Bordered by the Wasatch Mountains and the Great Salt Lake, Davis County has the smallest land area in Utah but the third largest population — more than 350,000 people in 2020.[37] Unlike many military installations that are situated near a single, larger city, Hill AFB is bordered by 15 small, independent cities, each with their own mayor and city council. One important feature of Davis County is the prevalence of one religious group; 71% of all county residents affiliate with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS), compared to just 2% of the U.S. population.[38]

[30] Davis County Health Department (2023). Community Health Assessment. https://www.daviscountyutah.gov/docs/librariesprovider5/reports-and-assessments/community-health-assessments/2023-davis4health-community-health-assessment.pdf?sfvrsn=805fe753_10

[31] Davis County Health Department (2023). Community Equity Assessment. https://www.daviscountyutah.gov/docs/librariesprovider5/reports-and-assessments/reports-by-topic/2023-community-equity-assessment.pdf?sfvrsn=5d9fee53_6

[32] Davis County Health Department (2023). Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Pplus Population Health Report. https://www.daviscountyutah.gov/docs/librariesprovider5/reports-and-assessments/reports-by-population/2023-lgbtq-population-health-report.pdf?sfvrsn=90971a53_13

[33] About Us. (n.d.). Www.hill.af.mil. https://www.hill.af.mil/About-Us

[34] Hill Air Force Base economic impact statement 2022. (2022). https://www.hill.af.mil/Portals/58/documents/Hill-EIS-2022.pdf

[35] Explore census data: Veterans in Davis County 2023. (2024) Census.gov. https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2020. 2101?q=Veterans&g=050XX00US49011&moe=false

[36] Explore census data: Veterans in Weber County 2023. (2024) Census.gov https://data.census.gov/table?q=Veterans&g=050XX00US49057

[37] Explore census data: Hispanic or Latino, and not Hispanic or Latino by Race in Davis County 2023. (2024) Census.gov https://data.census.gov/table?q=p2&t=Populations+and+People&g=050XX00US49011_040XX00US49_010XX00US&tid=DECENNIALPL2020.P2

[38] Davis County Health Department (2023). Community health Assessment

Davis County has a similar proportion of the population who identifies as LGBTQ+ to both the Utah and the U.S. population, and has significantly less racial/ethnic diversity than the U.S. as a whole, though similar to Utah. However, Utah is an interesting case study in LGBTQ+ acceptance. While the state remains strongly conservative, it has also passed state legislation to prevent discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in housing and employment — the first time in the country's history that this type of legislation was passed by a Republican legislature and signed by a Republican governor.[39,40] Additionally, Salt Lake City, the state capital, ranks among the top 15 metropolitan areas in the country in percentage of LGBT population.[41]

Table 2.1: Proportion of the Population, by Gender, Sexual Orientation, Race, and Ethnicity[42]
Davis County, Utah, United States

	Davis County, Utah	Utah	U.S.
Female[C]	49.3%	49.3%	50.5%
Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender[A]		3.7%	4.5%
Transgender adults[B]		0.6%	0.5%
Transgender youth[B]		0.8%	1.4%
White alone[C]	91%	90%	75%
American Indian/Alaska Native alone[C]	0.9%	1.6%	1.3%
Asian alone[C]	2.4%	2.9%	6.4%
Black/African American alone[C]	1.6%	1.6%	14%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander alone[C]	0.9%	1.2%	0.3%
Two or more races[C]	3.2%	3%	3.1%
Hispanic or Latino[C]	11%	16%	20%

[A] Data drawn from The Williams Institute. https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/visualization/lgbt-stats/?topic=LGBT#density

[B] Data drawn from The Williams Institute https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/subpopulations/transgender-people/

[C] Data drawn from the US Census Bureau. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US,UT,webercountyutah,daviscountyutah/PST045223

[39] Anti Discrimination and Religious Freedom, S.B. 296 (2015) https://le.utah.gov/~2015/bills/static/sb0296.html

[40] Equality Utah. (2015). Nondiscrimination laws | Equality Utah. Equalityutah.org. https://www.equalityutah.org/nondiscrimination-laws

[41] Newport, F., & Gates, G. J. (2015, March 20). San Francisco metro area ranks highest in LGBT percentage. Gallup.com. https://news.gallup.com/poll/182051/san-francisco-metro-area-ranks-highest-lgbt-percentage.aspx

[42] Davis County Health Department (2023). Community health Assessment

Community Sample

For this regional survey, the Hill AFB and surrounding communities sample included 226 respondents, generating more than 800 open-ended responses, and two interviews. The survey sample was composed of 31% spouses of active-duty service members, 20% Veterans/retired service members, 14% active-duty service members, 14% DOD civilians, and 13% spouses of Veteran/retired service members, as well as a few National Guard and Reserve service members and spouses. The largest age groups were 35-44 years old (33%), 25-34 years old (27%), and 45-54 years old (20%).

In terms of sexual orientation, 90% of the sample identified as straight/heterosexual, 6% of the sample identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and 4% reported their sexual orientation was not listed. Of the sample, 66% of respondents were women, 32% were men, and 2% reported their gender identity was not listed. However, 15% reported they had an immediate family member who identifies as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and 4% reported they did not know. One percent reported they had an immediate family member who identified as transgender, and 3% reported they did not know. Overall, 18% of the sample were part of an LGBTQ+ family — meaning they or an immediate family member identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

Table 2.2: Age Groups
All Hill AFB and surrounding community respondents (n=226)

Under 18 years old	0%
18-24 years old	8%
25-34 years old	27%
35-44 years old	33%
45-54 years old	20%
55-64 years old	9%
65 years or older	5%

Table 2.3: Length of Time in Community
All Hill AFB and surrounding community respondents (n=222)

Less than 1 year	14%
1-3 years	27%
3-5 years	15%
More than 5 years	44%

Table 2.4: Respondent Race/Ethnicity All Hill AFB and surrounding community respondents (n=146)	
American Indian/Alaska Native (For example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe, Mayan, etc.)	3%
Asian (For example, Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipino, Korean, Asian Indian, Japanese)	8%
Black/African American (For example, African American, Nigerian, Jamaican, Ethiopian, Haitian, Somali)	6%
Hispanic or Latino/a/x or of Spanish origin (For example, Mexican or Mexican American, Salvadoran, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Cuban, Colombian)	10%
Middle Eastern or Northern African (For example, Lebanese, Syrian, Iranian, Moroccan, Egyptian, Israeli)	1%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (For example, Native Hawaiian, Tongan, Samoan, Fijian, Chamorro, Marshallese)	3%
Some other race or ethnicity	4%
White (For example, German, Italian, Irish, Polish, English, French)	78%

Question text: How do you describe yourself? If you identify with more than one racial and/or ethnic identity, please select all that apply. Race/ethnicity was a select-all question so respondents could select multiple options and therefore, percentages do not equal 100%.

Thirty-one percent identified as a member of a multiracial/multiethnic family (e.g. they have a spouse or child of a different race/ethnicity) (n=153). In total, 42% of the sample either identified as a person of color or had an immediate family member who was a person of color, referred to in this report as families of color. In comparison, 58% of respondents were white respondents not in multiracial or multiethnic families.

Table 2.5: Respondent Religion All Hill AFB and surrounding community respondents (n=150)	
I do not identify with any religion	25%
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints	21%
Catholic	12%
Protestant	10%
Agnostic	7%
Evangelical Christian	6%
Other	6%
Christian/Nondenominational Christian	5%

Question text: What is your present religion, if any?

Because religious affiliation is a distinguishing feature of Utah and the local communities — Weber and Davis Counties, participants were also asked about their religious affiliation. The sample for this community had a higher proportion of respondents who were affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) than in other communities, but a lower proportion than Davis County residents (71%).[43]

Community Representation and Belonging

The majority of both white respondents and respondents of color in Hill AFB and surrounding communities agreed there were others like them in their community, although fewer respondents of color (55%) than white respondents (67%) agreed. Fewer respondents of color (n=38) than white respondents (n=82) also agreed they had important things in common with others in their community (47% versus 56%), and that they had opportunities to connect with other people like them (53% versus 63%).

About half of white respondents in Hill AFB and surrounding communities (52%) agreed that they felt a sense of belonging to their local community, but this was lower among respondents of color (40%, n=38). Substantially fewer respondents of color reported feeling safe where they live, in comparison to white respondents (79% versus 92%). Additionally, a smaller proportion of respondents of color felt valued (40%)

Table 2.6: Community Perceptions, by Race/Ethnicity
Hill AFB and surrounding community respondents | Proportion who somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree

	White Respondents* (n=82)	Respondents of Color (n=38)
I feel a sense of belonging to my local community.	52%	40%
I feel valued by others where I live.	49%	40%
I feel understood by others where I live.	54%	42%
I have important things in common with others in my community.	56%	47%
I have the opportunity to be involved in community decisions.	43%	42%
I have opportunities to connect with other people like me in my community.	63%	53%
I have opportunities to participate in my culture where I live.	57%	43%
There are others like me in my community.	67%	55%
I trust my neighbors.	70%	68%
I feel safe where I live.	92%	79%

These percentages have not been tested for significance and are simple comparisons of proportions, which may be influenced by small sample sizes.
*White respondents who did not identify as part of a multiracial/multiethnic family.

[43] Davis County Health Department (2023). Community health Assessment

or understood (42%) when compared to their white peers (49% and 54%, respectively). Fewer respondents of color reported opportunities to participate in their culture (43% versus 57%). While differences are not tested for significance, a pattern of respondents of color feeling less safe, less valued, less understood, and ultimately less belonging to the community emerges.

Among LGBTQ+ family respondents in the Hill AFB and surrounding communities (n=26), less than half reported feeling a sense of belonging (39%) or felt valued by others (42%), and just one-third (31%) felt understood. However, more than half felt they had important things in common (54%), that there were others like them in their community (52%), and that there were opportunities to connect with others like them (62%).

Table 2.7: LGBTQ+ Family Community Perceptions
LGBTQ+ family respondents in Hill AFB and surrounding communities (n=26) | Proportion who somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree

I feel a sense of belonging to my local community.	39%
I feel valued by others where I live.	42%
I feel understood by others where I live.	31%
I have important things in common with others in my community.	54%
I have the opportunity to be involved in community decisions.	23%
I have opportunities to connect with other people like me in my community.	62%
I have opportunities to participate in my culture where I live.	46%
There are others like me in my community.	52%
I trust my neighbors.	77%
I feel safe where I live.	92%

Initial Impressions

In addition to the regional survey, active-duty family respondents who were part of families of color or LGBTQ+ families[44] were invited to participate in individual interviews to gain a richer understanding of their experiences in the community, including their perceptions of the community before relocating there and their experiences once they arrived. Interview participants from Hill AFB and surrounding communities described being excited to relocate to Hill AFB, specifically mentioning interest in being a more diverse community than where they were coming from, hopeful to find grocery stores that carried familiar foods, and an interest in the area amenities, especially the access to outdoors and national parks.

[44] Participants identified either as a person of color, a member of a multiracial or multiethnic family, identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, or had an immediate family member who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

"We had visited down here before and was really excited because he saw a lot of Hispanic stores. Just Hispanic grocery stores that would sell the stuff that he wanted." — Interview Participant

Once they arrived, they did find the area had the stores they were looking for, and the outdoor activities that they were interested in, though the neighborhood they settled in the community did not have the diversity they hoped to find, and they found it difficult to build connections with others.

Perceptions of Diversity

Among all Hill AFB and surrounding community respondents to the regional survey, the majority of open-ended responses (55%, n=161) from Davis County and Hill AFB indicated they did not see their community as diverse, while one-third (34%, n=161) did say their community was diverse. Many reported that the local community was predominantly white and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS, also sometimes referred to as "Mormon"), but they also distinguished between diversity on the installation and within the local community, reporting that the installation was diverse, and the military brought diversity to the area, even if they did not perceive the local civilian community to be diverse.

Would you define your community as diverse? Why or why not?

"I would say it's diverse. The base itself is full of colorful, wonderful people but the surrounding area outside the base is not diverse." — LGBTQ+ Family Respondent

"My community is somewhat diverse. My family and I live on the Air Force base, so our immediate family is made up of other military and DOD civilian employees. Off base, the diversity is quite limited due to the predominately Mormon culture/religion in the state." — Active-Duty Spouse

"My community is diverse only because of the military presence. Otherwise it would be very similar types of people living in the area." — Active-Duty Spouse

"My community is not diverse. It is predominantly white, conservative, and Mormon. Not being any one of these, or former Mormon, can put you into an "other" category. I will say that the local community working on Hill AFB is more diverse than the surrounding community." — White Respondent

"Yes I would, we do live off base, but close enough to the base where a lot of military reside here. We live in an apartment complex, and I feel we are very diverse in multiple areas: race, gender, sexuality, marital status, etc." — White Respondent

Others reported different types of diversity — including diversity of thought, profession, and culture.

"Yes. There is some religious diversity, cultural diversity, and a little racial diversity." — Respondent of Color

"It is diverse because diversity extends beyond race and religion. It is diverse in thought, talent, and opportunity for all." — White Respondent

"Yes, there are neighbors from different religious, professional, and ethnic backgrounds." — Respondent of Color

Perceptions of Welcome

Most respondents in Davis County (64%, n= 107) feel welcome in their community. However, slightly fewer families of color (58%, n=59) and LGBTQ+ families (54%, n=26) reported feeling welcome. Among those who reported they felt welcome in their community, respondents were asked what made them feel welcome, and many described individual acts of kindness and welcome. Most commonly, Davis County/Hill AFB respondents pointed to friendly people (39%, n=72), neighbors (25%, n=72), and people looking out for one another (21%, n=72) that made them feel welcome. Others described a lack of hostility (11%, n=72) or just the military presence (10%, n=72) that made them feel welcome.

What incidents, experiences, or observations made you feel like you were welcome?[45]

(Asked of respondents who reported they felt welcome in their community)

"Neighbors always waving on my two-mile dog walks. Talking with neighbors openly whenever there is a conflict of interest. Neighbors offering lawn care tools or assistance when doing yardwork and/or landscaping." — White Respondent in Multiracial/Multiethnic Family

"Our neighbors are kind and help us mow and shovel. I helped my neighbor get up when she fell. People smile and stop to say hi when I walk my dog. I meet people in the park; kids talk to and want to play with me and my grandchildren. People at church are welcoming, and there are several other churches close by that are well-attended." — White Respondent in Multiracial/Multiethnic Family

"I was nervous [coworkers] would know I wasn't a member of the church [...] and not accept me. In everyone I worked with I really only had one person I felt like didn't like me because they knew I wasn't part of the church. They were all kind and welcoming. I think Utah as a whole gets a bad rep for their lack of diversity." — White Respondent in Multiracial/Multiethnic Family

"My spouse and I have strong work communities where we do feel welcome, understood and appreciated. Our small local neighborhood is more welcoming and diverse than the wider community in which we live which also helps with feelings of acceptance and welcome." — White Respondent

"In my workspace, I've felt welcomed despite being a person who identifies as bisexual and with a disability. I feel welcomed because my colleagues know and do not attempt to push traditional hetrosexual beliefs, I do not feel discriminated on the basis of sex or disability, and encouraged to support LGBTQ+ programs on the base. This is despite my office being a near even split of civilians who are local and service members who are rotated out." — LGBTQ+ Family Respondent

"Everyone smiles and waves, I had a breakdown on the freeway and numerous people who didn't know me stopped to check on me and to assist in getting me on my way. Law enforcement is extremely friendly unless someone is doing something that forces their hand to escalate. I have never felt the police target me specifically because of race. They all seem pretty professional." — Respondent of Color

[45] Selected quotes are used throughout the report to illustrate important themes, and include perspectives from a variety of respondents, including participants of color, white respondents in multiracial or multiethnic families, families with lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender members and straight/heterosexual respondents.

However, some respondents report the strong presence of the LDS church and culture made it difficult for them to feel welcome, particularly for their children.

"I explained with my kids struggling to find friends because of religion. My experience with going out in public with my husband on numerous occasions was disheartening to say the least. I also experienced this with a teacher of my son. His teacher was clearly Mormon and preferred the Mormon children to the others." — White Respondent in Multiracial/Multiethnic Family

"Most of my neighbors don't talk to us, they definitely haven't tried to get to know us. When my son was younger he was told by other kids they weren't allowed to be his friend because we weren't part of "the Church." I have gone to community picnics and been completely ignored by the people in my neighborhood." — Respondent of Color

Less than one-half of all respondents in Hill AFB and surrounding communities[46] (n=183) agreed that the community was very welcoming to people of color (48%) and embraces diversity (43%, n=167), though these proportions varied among subgroups; 41% of families of color (n=59)[47] agreed that the community is very welcoming to people of color, and 49% (n=57) believe the community embraces diversity. Only one-third (31%, n= 170) of all respondents[48] believed the community was very welcoming to LGBTQ+ families, but among LGBTQ+ families themselves (n=26),[49] just 15% agreed the community was very welcoming to LGBTQ families.

When asked about their observations or experiences that made them feel the community was welcoming to people of color, 55% of open-ended responses (n=58) reported that there were many people of color in the community, and 43% (n=58) reported they had not seen any hostility based on race.

You indicated that you view your community as welcoming to people of color. Please share why you feel this way, focusing on specific observations or experiences. Highlight actions, initiatives, or behaviors that you believe exemplify this welcoming attitude.[50]

"I have never felt like an outsider as a person of color and always welcomed." — Respondent of Color

[46] Including families of color and LGBTQ+ families

[47] Both respondents of color and white respondents who identified as part of multiracial or multiethnic families and respondents of color were grouped into "Families of Color"

[48] Including LGBTQ+ families

[49] LGBTQ+ family respondents include any respondents who identified as lesbian, gay, homosexual, or bisexual and/or who reported they have an immediate family member (spouse or child) who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or transgender.

[50] Selected quotes are used throughout the report to illustrate important themes, and include perspectives from a variety of respondents, including participants of color, white respondents in multiracial or multiethnic families, families with lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender members and straight/heterosexual respondents.

Community Findings

"Being close to a military base there is a wide range of different ethnicities and cultures. I've never experienced racism in the form of ethnicity, it's more religion based." — White Respondent

"We are non-Mormon, Hispanic, and not as conservative as our neighbors but they have all been welcoming and very kind to us. We all help each other by taking out the trash cans and putting them back in, shoveling snow, all without asking. We all check on each other, and overall care for our neighbors." — Respondent of Color

"Military communities are made up of all kinds of people, regardless of background, so no matter what you are you can find someone like you that is welcoming." — White Respondent in Multiracial/Multiethnic Family

Among those who disagreed that the community was welcoming to people of color, some pointed to the deeply held religious beliefs in the community and saw religious leadership in the community as an opportunity to lead cultural change.

You indicated that you perceive your community as not welcoming to people of color. To improve this situation, could you suggest specific actions, initiatives, or behaviors that should be introduced or changed? Please detail these recommendations to help us understand what would signify a welcoming community to you.

"People here are very set in their ways, my husband works with different ethnicity groups and they feel wanted but just in general especially as a native American it's very hard to express your culture without push back." — Active-Duty Spouse

"I haven't observed out and out racism, but a lot of apathy. The recognition that DEIA are beneficial would go a long way." — White Respondent

"I'm not entirely sure what can be done. I think that the DOJ involvement with our local school district due to racial discrimination is a great start to improving how people view people of color. The military base also brings diversity into our community and has the ability to improve perceptions." — Active-Duty Spouse

Similarly, among those who agreed that the community was welcoming to LGBTQ+ families, most (55%, n=33) noted an open acceptance of everyone and no evidence of discrimination toward LGBTQ+ families, or that they had friends of family members who are part of the LGBTQ+ community (15%, n=33). Some also reported actions that support LGBTQ+ families, such as Pride clubs at schools, community events, and welcoming LGBTQ+ neighbors.

You indicated that you view your community as welcoming to LGBTQ+ families. Please share why you feel this way, focusing on specific observations or experiences. Highlight actions, initiatives, or behaviors that you believe exemplify this welcoming attitude.

"Can't cite specific actions or initiatives. They are simply welcomed as neighbors and community members." — LGBTQ+ Family Respondent

"There is a pride club at my daughter's charter school. I am not sure if regular public schools would make it feel as welcoming." — LGBTQ+ Family Respondent

"There are LGBTQ+ owned businesses in my community and they are treated the same as other businesses. There are special events in the community that are to celebrate their diversity."
— Straight/Heterosexual Respondent

"Yesterday my neighborhood newsletter profiled a new couple that just moved into the neighborhood, welcoming them. The couple are gay." — DOD Civilian

Among those who disagreed that the community was welcoming to LGBTQ+ families, the majority (60%, n=48) pointed to conflicts with the LDS church as a primary issue, and to state-level policies that made them feel unwelcome.

Community Findings

You indicated that you perceive your community as not welcoming to LGBTQ+ families. To improve this situation, could you suggest specific actions, initiatives, or behaviors that should be introduced or changed? Please detail these recommendations to help us understand what would signify a welcoming community to you.

"There are very few community resources for LGBTQ+ people. Those that exist can be hard to find and are not very active. Groups that felt comfortable operating openly would be able to welcome incoming families and host activities that would allow LGBTQ+ people and their loved ones to make social connections." — LGBTQ+ Family Respondent

"There is a lot of policy negatively aimed at LGBTQ community. There is also an overwhelming negative perception towards the community as a whole partly due to misunderstanding about the trans community and misinformation fueled by the LDS church." — LGBTQ+ Family Respondent

Despite the strong presence of the LDS church in the community, most respondents (52%, n=159) agreed the community was welcoming to those of their religious affiliation, though another 26% (n=159) disagreed, often highlighting a desire to find groups or religious groups outside of the large LDS community.

You indicated that you view your community as welcoming to people with your religious preference. Please share why you feel this way, focusing on specific observations or experiences. Highlight actions, initiatives, or behaviors that you believe exemplify this welcoming attitude.

"I'm accepted but not part of the majority which is fine. We have things in common and I knew it when I came here. Our moral beliefs and view of family are the same." — White Respondent

"A lot of LDS members in my neighborhood, none have looked down upon those of us who are Christians of a different denomination. They don't push their LDS ways on me or my family. They've told us that if we need help with projects, they can get a group of folks from the church to help out." — White Respondent

Community Findings

You indicated that you perceive your community as not welcoming to people with your religious preference. To improve this situation, could you suggest specific actions, initiatives, or behaviors that should be introduced or changed? Please detail these recommendations to help us understand what would signify a welcoming community to you.

"People are friendly if you are non-LDS but you're never 100% welcomed to their inner circle, which is fine. The biggest problem we have had since moving here is finding a church to attend that is not LDS or super conservative. Perhaps helping people get connected to others/churches that are not LDS or even providing a directory for non-LDS churches would be helpful." — White Respondent

"It feels like if you are not Mormon, there isn't a place for you here. Very few churches outside of theirs. I have joined some groups that are for non-Mormons and that has helped me to feel more normal in this community, but I don't know what could be done to fix it otherwise." — LGBTQ+ Family Respondent

Ways the Community Demonstrates Embracing Diversity

Community members describe multiple ways the community demonstrates embracing diversity: more than one-third (34%, n=14) of open-ended responses referenced community events, such as Pride festivals, various clubs, programs, and activities, and monthly awareness campaigns. One-quarter also reported the community was accepting and welcomed all people to events and activities. Many also described individual acts of welcoming new families, or focused on welcoming behaviors by neighbors, rather than the larger community.

You indicated that you believe your community embraces diversity. Please share why you feel this way, focusing on specific observations or experiences. Highlight actions, initiatives, or behaviors that you believe exemplify this welcoming attitude.

"People try to understand different cultures and help new people to feel [they] belong to the [neighborhood] by holding a neighbor event to gather together." — Respondent of Color

"Diversity is embraced throughout the community during many of the celebrations we have throughout the year. Especially our Fourth of July celebrations and parade. Many diverse community members display their patriotism and love for this country. Everyone in our small community comes out for this and we all have a great time." — White Respondent in Multiracial/Multiethnic Family

"When getting out into town, whether its grocery stores, restaurants, or other businesses, diversity is everywhere. And since moving to Utah, I've seen nothing but kindness out of the people in the community." — White Respondent

"We are Hispanic and aren't treated different. All our neighbors are white and they made it a point to come over and introduce themselves and offer help when we moved into the neighborhood." — Respondent of Color

Strategies and Resources Used to Develop Belonging

When asked about the community activities or resources that made them feel like they belong, Hill AFB and surrounding community respondents most commonly mentioned diversity-focused events (27%, n=118) and activities (15%, n=118) as strategies to help families feel like they belong to the community. These activities can be at a community level, but may be even more effective at a neighborhood level, or with individuals who share some important characteristics, such as parenting groups. For these events and activities, respondents also described consideration of different work schedules and family structures. Respondents often mentioned they were looking for other families like theirs — families without kids, or with kids at similar ages. Others mentioned that there were activities, but families were not always aware of them. Online groups were also highlighted as a way to connect with other community members who have common interests.

What activities or resources in this community make you feel like you belong?

"Diverse events that embrace people of color, ethnicities, and different backgrounds, and different languages." — Respondent of Color

"I'd like to see people being more neighborly but that's unfortunately not something you can make people do. I'd like to see activities coordinated that take into consideration people's work schedules in all different shifts. Not just day shift. Family events on every base are typically hosted during a lunch time hour on a Friday. Only few get to attend and the families can not join the FAMILY event." — White Respondent

"More free activities to participate in — for families, singles, couples with no kids, and everyone! That way we can go somewhere that others are seeking more friendships as well, that could fit into the same or different stages of life!" — White Respondent

Community Findings

"I would like to see more events that have things like ax throwing, art such as painting or making ceramics. Things that everyone can enjoy. Maybe a volunteer garden that donated the food to the food bank or homeless shelter." — LGBTQ+ Family Respondent

"There are many programs/resources on Hill. Specifically the ones that made me feel like I belong are the new parent support program and their playgroup. I have made so many great friends for me and my children at playgroup. I also love the love that the military community is shown here. My family have been blessed by the multiple organizations that go above and beyond for military families." — White Respondent

"Military specific events with the public." — LGBTQ+ Family Respondent

One theme that came up in interviews was a desire to understand a neighborhood or community before settling in. When families live in the community rather than on an installation, the neighborhood they choose can have a big impact on their sense of belonging. Some participants wished they had more information about selecting a neighborhood before they settled on it.

"Connecting with like a real estate, Realtor that can help us find like a stronger, like an area where we could have more military community, right? Something like that." — Interview Participant

While ensuring families have good information on which to make their housing choices can benefit military families relocating to the area, it is also important to ensure equitable housing practices. Another respondent highlighted the importance of maintaining equity.

You indicated that you perceive your community as not welcoming to people of color. To improve this situation, could you suggest specific actions, initiatives, or behaviors that should be introduced or changed? Please detail these recommendations to help us understand what would signify a welcoming community to you.

"The more homogeneous a population is, the harder that is to change. It starts with the Realtor showing you houses when you move. We were steered away from certain areas on our moves, due to race."
— White Respondent

Summary

Findings mirrored previous community assessments of the area, which identified that connections were fostered through shared values, supportive neighbors, feelings of belonging and inclusion and opportunities for community involvement.[51] While there may be fewer families of color or LGBTQ+ families in the local community, Hill AFB and surrounding communities have committed tremendous resources to supporting inclusion, and many of these efforts and resources can be seen as strengths to be replicated in other communities.

As an example, Hill AFB hosts an annual Salute to Our Nation's Defenders Picnic,[52] a great example of community organizations coming together — on the military installation — to welcome military families. This event has been hosted for many years by the Top of Utah Military Affairs Committee, a joint committee run by the Ogden-Weber Chamber of Commerce and the Davis County Chamber of Commerce — another example of community coordination to support military families..

Project One[53] at Hill AFB is an initiative focused on fostering a sense of belonging and community among Airmen and their families. It addresses challenges related to inclusion and community engagement through five key areas: Airmen, schools, colleges and governments, community partners, and religious and spiritual support. The project aims to enhance readiness by building supportive relationships and improving the experiences of Airmen, particularly those who may feel isolated or underrepresented in the surrounding community.

The Davis County School District also provides exemplary initiatives addressing the needs of military families through a unique Military Support Team,[54,55] and Purple Star Schools.[56] The Military Support Team at the Davis County School District in Utah provides specialized assistance to military-connected students and their families. This team addresses the unique challenges these students face, such as frequent relocations and the emotional impact of military life, by offering resources and support to help them succeed academically and

[51] Davis County Health Department (2023). Community Equity Assessment

[52] 75th Air Base Wing Public Affairs. (2021, August 9). Top of Utah military affairs committee sponsors picnic for Hill's military, families. Hill Air Force Base. https://www.hill.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/2724955/top-of-utah-military-affairs-committee-sponsors-picnic-for-hills-military-famil

[53] Hill Air Force Base. (2023). Project one: Readiness through belonging and community. Af.mil. https://www.hill.af.mil/Project-One

[54] Potter, D. (2022, December 19). Military support team is valuable resource for K-12 students. Hill Air Force Base. https://www.hill.af.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/3250106/military-support-team-is-valuable-resource-for-k-12-students

[55] Davis School District. (2024). Military support team. https://le.utah.gov/interim/2024/pdf/00002259.pdf

[56] Utah State Board of Education. (2024). Purple star schools. Utah.gov. https://schools.utah.gov/policy/purplestarschools

socially. The program is a collaborative effort to ensure that military families receive the necessary support within the school district, and could be expanded to other districts that serve military-connected students.

Community Recommendations

Building on recommendations from participants, the below recommendations are opportunities for the community to continue to enhance its capacity to welcome and support military families, especially diverse military families. In addition to the following community recommendations, individuals also have a role to play in supporting welcoming and inclusive communities. As recommended in previous community assessments for Davis County,[57] all community members can become aware of personal biases and take steps to intentionally welcome others, creating inclusive environments that set the conditions for military families, even though transient, to feel a sense of belonging to the community. Military family members can take additional steps to intentionally engage with the local community — seeking out community resources, identifying what they desire in a new community, and going beyond what is familiar to build relationships with others.[58] These findings reinforce that inclusive communities are built by individual actions, by being good neighbors, and these individual actions accumulate into welcoming and inclusive communities.

1. Maintain or increase inclusive and diverse community events and activities, specifically those for both the civilian and military communities. These should consider different times and activities that appeal to varied groups — those without children, with children at different ages, and can provide some education about different cultures or traditions.

You indicated that you believe your community does not embrace diversity. To improve this situation, could you suggest specific actions, initiatives, or behaviors that should be introduced or changed? Please detail these recommendations to help us understand what would signify a welcoming community to you.

"More cultural festivals and community building events would go a long ways with making people feel more inclusion." — Respondent of Color

[57] Davis County Health Department (2023). Community Equity Assessment
[58] Spears, A. (2022). The community mapping journal. Forge Community.

You indicated that you perceive your community as not welcoming to people of color. To improve this situation, could you suggest specific actions, initiatives, or behaviors that should be introduced or changed? Please detail these recommendations to help us understand what would signify a welcoming community to you.

"There are not many people of color here, so it is hard for people to understand the POC community in general (as they have not been exposed to it). I would encourage more gatherings of families no matter what race, to foster a larger sense of inclusion. Not specifically targeted toward people of color (which could alienate white-presenting, Asian American, or white individuals from attending)."
— White Respondent

"I would recommend that the base and affiliates do things such as celebrating Black History Month the same way they celebrate Month of the Military Child. It is just as important. Create inclusive and diverse clubs to bring awareness and allow the children to see people that look like them." — Respondent of Color

2. Provide outreach about resources, events, and activities, especially before or when military families arrive — such as at a Newcomer's Brief. Continue to conduct outreach to new military families assigned to the installation before they arrive, and provide information about the community prior to the move. This could include connecting military-friendly real estate agents, sponsors who can provide information about specific areas, information about community activities like recreational sports, hobby groups, or parent/family groups.

You indicated that you perceive your community as not welcoming to people of color. To improve this situation, could you suggest specific actions, initiatives, or behaviors that should be introduced or changed? Please detail these recommendations to help us understand what would signify a welcoming community to you.

"I think the upfront information to military families before the PCS. Possibly education topics and opportunities for local schools and local teachers on how to better bridge the social interactions for military children and local children." — White Respondent

Community Findings

You indicated that you perceive your community as not welcoming to LGBTQ+ families. To improve this situation, could you suggest specific actions, initiatives, or behaviors that should be introduced or changed? Please detail these recommendations to help us understand what would signify a welcoming community to you.

"Being more proactive in the community to make activities that focus around these types of communities. Advertising them like crazy and making sure to have more that identify in this group of people on boards." — White Respondent in Multiracial/Multiethnic Family

3. Maintain or increase thoughtful community development and "third spaces"[59] — playgrounds, parks, or neutral places for military and civilian community members to meet.

You indicated that you perceive your community as not welcoming to people of color. To improve this situation, could you suggest specific actions, initiatives, or behaviors that should be introduced or changed? Please detail these recommendations to help us understand what would signify a welcoming community to you.

"Create more opportunities within the local community and reach farther off-base to establish relationships between the community outside of base and people from different ethnicities." — White Respondent

What would you like to see in this community to help families like yours feel like they belong?

"Thoughtful development that encourages walking, gathering, and common spaces in a town center. No roads through town center, but convenient parking to encourage use." — White Respondent

4. Continue and expand support for military families in local school districts.

You indicated that you perceive your community as not welcoming to people of color. To improve this situation, could you suggest specific actions, initiatives, or behaviors that should be introduced or changed? Please detail these recommendations to help us understand what would signify a welcoming community to you.

"More representation by school administration on the military and how military life affects children when going to school in an area that is not so diverse." — Veteran

[59] Butler, S. M., & Diaz, C. (2016, September 14). "Third places" as community builders. Brookings. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/third-places-as-community-builders

Blue Star Families Campaign for Inclusion

Research Series

Community Findings: San Antonio, Texas

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Blue Star Families

San Antonio, Texas

San Antonio was selected as a target community for this study as a large multicultural Southern city with a significant military presence and a reputation as "Military City, USA." Previous research in this series highlighted the importance of military cultural competency in the local community as a factor supporting families' sense of belonging, so San Antonio was selected as an example of a culturally competent community that clearly embraces the military culture. Previous assessments of the San Antonio community[60] have noted how military cultural competency is woven throughout the fabric of the community, in schools, health care, and housing, though there are still opportunities to enhance that military cultural competency in universities and build on the community infrastructure necessary to support military families, such as child care.

Community Demographics

Affectionately known and trademarked as the "Military City, USA,"[61] the city of San Antonio, is the seat of Bexar County located in the state of Texas. It is home to nearly 1.5 million total residents with more than 121, 000 Veterans, comprising 8.5% of the population.[62] San Antonio has one of the country's largest military and Veteran populations.[63]

Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA) is one of the largest and most diverse bases in the Department of Defense that encompasses four primary locations: Fort Sam Houston, Randolph Air Force Base, Lackland Air Force Base, and Camp Bullis.[64] Spanning across 11 geographically separated parcels of land consisting of 46,539 acres, and 35 million square feet in facilities that support more than 266 mission partners,[65] JBSA has the most students from the Department of Defense (DOD) and "has more active runways than any other installation"[66] in the country. San Antonio Military Medical Center is also situated at JBSA, the DOD's largest hospital and only state-side level I trauma center, and supports more than 561,000 personnel.[67]

[60] Grogan, N., Kuzminski, K. L., & Pouchet, C. (2022). Greater San Antonio military & veteran family needs assessment. In Center for New American Security. https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/SanAntonioNeedsAssessment_2022_Final.pdf

[61] 502nd Air Base Wing Public Affairs. (2017, June 19). City of San Antonio unveils "Military City USA" trademark logo. Joint Base San Antonio. https://www.jbsa.mil/News/News/Article/1218583/city-of-san-antonio-unveils-military-city-usa-trademark-logo

[62] Explore census data: San Antonio city, Texas 2023. (2024) Census.gov https://data.census.gov/profile/San_Antonio_city,_Texas?g=160XX00US4865000

[63] The Health Collaborative. (2016). 2016 Bexar County Community Health Needs Assessment Report. San Antonio, TX: The Health Collaborative. https://www.sanantonio.gov/Portals/0/Files/health/News/Reports/chna-2016.pdf

[64] San Antonio military installations. (n.d.). Www.sa.gov. https://www.sa.gov/Directory/Departments/MVAD/Military-Installations

[65] Ibid.

[66] Texas Military Preparedness Commission. (2022). Biennial report. https://gov.texas.gov/uploads/files/organization/military/Biennial_2021-2022_Final_2022-07-01.pdf

[67] Texas Military Preparedness Commission. Biennial report.

Fort Sam Houston is home to more than 36,000 active-duty service members and DOD civilians; 48,000 family members; and 76,000 retirees.[68] Lackland consists of more than 24,000 active-duty members.[69] Randolph is home to more than 4,000 military members.[70] However, when Bexar county is examined, there are nearly 29,000 active-duty military members living in the community,[71] along with 12,415 military spouses, and 19,522 children ranging from 0-18 years of age.[72] By the vast amount of people that are employed by JBSA, this has a ripple effect on the community and state. In 2021, the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts found that the population of JBSA contributed at least $39.2 billion to the Texas economy and represents the economic importance JBSA plays to the city of San Antonio and to the state of Texas.[73]

Table 3.1: Proportion of the Population, by Gender, Sexual Orientation, Race, and Ethnicity
San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas, United States

	San Antonio City	Bexar County, Texas	Texas	U.S.
Female[C]	50.3%	50.4%	50.1%	50.5%
Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender[A]			3.7%	4.1%
Transgender adults[B]			0.4%	0.5%
Transgender youth[B]			1.4%	1.4%
White alone[C]	57%	83%	77%	75%
American Indian/Alaska Native alone[C]	0.9%	1.3%	1.1%	1.3%
Asian alone[C]	3%	3.7%	6%	6.4%
Black/African American alone[C]	7%	9%	14%	14%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander alone[C]	0.1%	0.3%	0.2%	0.3%
Two or more races[C]	23%	2.8%	2.3%	3.1%
Hispanic or Latino[C]	66%	60%	40%	20%

[A] Data drawn from The Williams Institute. https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/visualization/lgbt-stats/?topic=LGBT#density

[B] Data drawn from The Williams Institute https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/subpopulations/transgender-people

[C] Data drawn from the US Census Bureau. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/TX,bexarcountytexas,sanantoniocitytexas,US/PST045223

[68] JBSA-Fort Sam Houston. (2021, June 21). Joint Base San Antonio. https://www.jbsa.mil/Information/JBSA-History-Fact-Sheets/Article-View/Article/2664951/jbsa-fort-sam-houston

[69] JBSA-Lackland. (2021, June 21). Joint Base San Antonio. https://www.jbsa.mil/Information/JBSA-History-Fact-Sheets/Article-View/Article/2664929/jbsa-lackland

[70] JBSA-Randolph. (2021, June 21). Joint Base San Antonio. https://www.jbsa.mil/Information/JBSA-History-Fact-Sheets/Article-View/Article/2664767/jbsa-randolph

[71] Active duty demographics: Bexar County. (2024). Measuringcommunities.org. https://www.measuringcommunities.org

[72] Active duty demographics: Spouses and children in Texas. (2024). Measuringcommunities.org. https://www.measuringcommunities.org

[73] Texas Military Preparedness Commission. Biennial report.

Community Sample

The San Antonio sample included 154 respondents, generating more than 550 open-ended responses, and nine interviews. The survey sample was composed of 68% spouses of active-duty service members, 14% Veterans/retired service members, 11% spouses of a Veteran/retired service member, as well as a few active-duty service members, DOD civilians, and Reserve and National Guard service members or spouses. The largest age groups were 35-44 years old (47%), 25-34 years old (27%), and 45-54 years old (14%).

Table 3.2: Age Groups
All San Antonio respondents (n=154)

Under 18 years old	0%
18-24 years old	4%
25-34 years old	27%
35-44 years old	47%
45-54 years old	14%
55-64 years old	7%
65 years or older	1%

Table 3.3: Length of Time in Community
All San Antonio respondents (n=154)

Less than 1 year	25%
1-3 years	36%
3-5 years	17%
More than 5 years	22%

Of the sample, 90% (n=102) of respondents identified as straight/heterosexual, 8% identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and 2% reported their sexual orientation was not listed. The large majority (88%, n=102) were women, 10% were men, and 2% identified as transgender or nonbinary/gender fluid/genderqueer. However, 15% reported they had an immediate family member who identifies as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and 3% reported they had an immediate family member who identified as transgender. Overall, 21% of the sample were part of an LGBTQ+ family — meaning they or an immediate family member identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

Table 3.4: Respondent Race/Ethnicity All San Antonio respondents (n=100)	
American Indian/Alaska Native (For example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe, Mayan, etc.)	2%
Asian (For example, Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipino, Korean, Asian Indian, Japanese)	6%
Black/African American (For example, African American, Nigerian, Jamaican, Ethiopian, Haitian, Somali)	9%
Hispanic or Latino/a/x or of Spanish origin (For example, Mexican or Mexican American, Salvadoran, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Cuban, Colombian)	24%
Middle Eastern or Northern African (For example, Lebanese, Syrian, Iranian, Moroccan, Egyptian, Israeli)	1%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (For example, Native Hawaiian, Tongan, Samoan, Fijian, Chamorro, Marshallese)	0%
Some other race or ethnicity	1%
White (For example, German, Italian, Irish, Polish, English, French)	70%

Question text: How do you describe yourself? If you identify with more than one racial and/or ethnic identity, please select all that apply. Race/ethnicity was a select-all question so respondents could select multiple options and therefore, percentages do not equal 100%.

More than one-third (37%) identified as a member of a multiracial/multiethnic family (e.g. they have a spouse or child of a different race/ethnicity) (n=101). In total, more than one-half (52%) of the sample either identified as a person of color or had an immediate family member who was a person of color, referred to within this report as families of color (n=99). In comparison, 49% of respondents were white respondents not in multiracial or multiethnic families (n=99).

Community Representation and Belonging

The majority of both white respondents and respondents of color in San Antonio agreed there were others like them in their community, although fewer respondents of color (63%) than white respondents (83%) agreed. Additionally, fewer respondents of color (n=40) than white respondents (n=47) also agreed they had important things in common with others in their community (55% versus 62%), and that they had opportunities to connect with other people like them (60% versus 68%).

Similar proportions of white respondents (52%) and respondents of color (48%) in San Antonio felt a sense of belonging to the community. However, fewer respondents of color felt valued (41%) and understood

Table 3.5: Community Perceptions
All San Antonio respondents | Proportion who somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree

	White Respondents* (n=47)	Respondents of Color (n=40)
I feel a sense of belonging to my local community.	52%	48%
I feel valued by others where I live.	56%	41%
I feel understood by others where I live.	56%	46%
I have important things in common with others in my community.	62%	55%
I have the opportunity to be involved in community decisions.	35%	38%
I have opportunities to connect with other people like me in my community.	68%	60%
I have opportunities to participate in my culture where I live.	68%	48%
There are others like me in my community.	83%	63%
I trust my neighbors.	75%	60%
I feel safe where I live.	77%	73%

These percentages have not been tested for significance and are simple comparisons of proportions, which may be influenced by small sample sizes.
*White respondents who did not identify as part of a multiracial/multiethnic family.

(46%) when compared to their white peers (56% and 56%, respectively). Likewise, fewer respondents of color reported having opportunities to participate in their culture (48% versus 68%), or trusting their neighbors (60% versus 75%), in comparison to white respondents.

Among LGBTQ+ family respondents in San Antonio (n=21), about half report feeling a sense of belonging to the community (52%), and roughly half felt valued (55%) and understood (45%) by others in their community. However, more than half felt they had important things in common (52%), and three-quarters felt that there were others like them in their community (71%) and that there were opportunities to connect with others like them (62%).

Table 3.6: LGBTQ+ Family Community Perceptions
LGBTQ+ family respondents in San Antonio (n=21) | Proportion who somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree

I feel a sense of belonging to my local community.	52%
I feel valued by others where I live.	55%
I feel understood by others where I live.	45%
I have important things in common with others in my community.	52%
I have the opportunity to be involved in community decisions.	29%
I have opportunities to connect with other people like me in my community.	62%
I have opportunities to participate in my culture where I live.	48%
There are others like me in my community.	71%
I trust my neighbors.	71%
I feel safe where I live.	76%

LGBTQ+ family respondents include any respondents who identified as lesbian, gay, homosexual, or bisexual and/or who reported they have an immediate family member (spouse or child) who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or transgender.

Initial Impressions

In addition to the regional survey, active-duty family respondents who were part of families of color or LGBTQ+ families[74] were invited to participate in individual interviews to gain a richer understanding of their experiences in the community, including their perceptions of the community before relocating there and their experiences once they arrived. San Antonio interview participants described being both excited and scared to relocate to San Antonio. Some thought it would be a more diverse community than the community they were coming from, but others mentioned concerns about politics and fear they would not fit it or would be at risk because they perceived their political beliefs did not align with the local community's beliefs.

"We were excited about it. We picked it, you know, it was on our list of places ago as [a] military family."
— Interview Participant

"I wasn't very happy, just because everything that you hear about Texas in particular. So I was really nervous. I was really nervous about the fact that I'm Mexican and my husband's white and I didn't know how people were gonna react to that. So moving I was not very excited for it." — Interview Participant

[74] Participants identified either as a person of color, a member of a multiracial or multiethnic family, identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, or had an immediate family member who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

"I think part of the concerns were more politically based. Because at that time I think, we were starting to go through like the Roe v. Wade situation. And I have a lot of chronic medical health issues. So [...] I was just worried that in the off chance like would I be okay here, or even like people I know. Would they be okay here? That type of thing and I've visited Texas before? But I've never lived here, and so I do have some concerns about I guess, just like the political climate, and how people respond to other people down here." — Interview Participant

"I was scared at first. I was wondering how the people here would take me, and how if I was going to be welcomed by everyone, and if they would really accept me for who I am." — Interview Participant

"In terms of like the idea of coming to Texas. I was not excited about it at all. because it doesn't have the best rap for being progressive. So my dad grew up in Texas, so I wasn't that terrified about it. but yeah, I was not. I was not a fan of going to Texas. It was a nice overall negative impression of the State, [it] was not in my top choices." — Interview Participant

Some focused on the military presence as an opportunity to make new connections, and many mentioned San Antonio as being very military-friendly, and "Military City, USA."

"I think, usually like the larger bases or the larger cities that have multiple military installations. It's usually easier to find people with similar interests to us, or are similar to us so that was one indicator that really signified to us that there would be a little bit more diversity here than perhaps at our last duty station." — Interview Participant

"There seems to be a lot of community based resources or very active organizations or volunteer groups that are centered around helping military families and there's just like a lot of incentives with local businesses that try and cater to the military community. And they do have you know, like larger celebrations, such as we went to the San Antonio military ball last year which was kind of like a joint baseball per se, but also members of the public that were military, affiliated or prior Veterans could also attend. So it wasn't just active duty that could go. So I think all of those things kind of combined are good signifiers." — Interview Participant

Community Findings

Perceptions of Diversity

Among all San Antonio respondents to the regional survey, the large majority of open-ended responses from San Antonio (75%, n=118) indicated they saw their community as diverse, while 14% (n=118) said they did not believe it to be diverse, or lacking in different types of diversity. Respondents also mentioned that the military presence brings diversity to the area (10%, n=118).

Would you define your community as diverse? Why or why not?

"Mix of military and civilians as well as black, brown and white." — Respondent of Color

"This community is primarily Hispanic. Diversity to me does not mean only minorities of one kind. It means a variety of cultures. This community lacks diversity to some extent." — White Respondent in a Multiracial/Multiethnic Family

"San Antonio is rich with beautiful diversity and takes every opportunity to celebrate it. From Mexican/Laninx, German, Asian, to Black culture have deep roots and value in this community." — LGBTQ+ Family Respondent

"The military community is a melting pot of different cultures. The opportunity to experience different things is always around us!" — Active-Duty Spouse

Perceptions of Welcome

"I think San Antonio specifically, though, does a great job already at embracing the military and Veteran population. And they definitely do that by in the airport [when] you come off the plane, and there's volunteers there saying, 'Welcome to Military City. How can we help you?' [...] I definitely think [...] the airport volunteers that I mentioned is probably the top thing that the community here did that that made me feel like 'Oh, it's welcoming here.'" — Interview Participant

Most respondents in San Antonio (72%) feel welcome in their community, and this is consistent among subgroups; 72% of families of color (n=50) and 71% of LGBTQ+ families (n=21) feel welcome. When asked

what made them feel welcome, many described individual acts of kindness and welcome. Most commonly, respondents referred to friendly people (29%), neighbors (20%), a lack of hostility or issues (16%), the military presence (15%), community activities (13%), and people looking out for each other (11%, n=55).

What incidents, experiences, or observations made you feel like you were welcome?
(Asked of respondents who reported they felt welcome in their community)

"Welcome basket. Meeting neighbors and knowing names." — LGBTQ+ Family Respondent

"My neighbors tell me hi, I have had no issues in a negative way with my neighbors or in the community." — Respondent of Color

"Open invitations and genuine welcomes when attending those events." — White Respondent

"People are friendly and they love the military." — White Respondent

The large majority of San Antonio respondents (n=135)[75] agreed that the community was very welcoming to people of color (73%) and embraces diversity (67%). This is similar among families of color[76] (n=51); 71% agree the community is very welcoming to people of color, and 67% agree the community embraces diversity. Only one-third (32%) of all respondents[77] believed the community was very welcoming to LGBTQ+ families, which was consistent with LGBTQ+ families themselves (n=21);[78] about one-third (29%) agreed the community was very welcoming to LGBTQ families, and 60% agree the community embraces diversity.

Among those who felt the community was welcoming to people of color, respondents were asked about their observations or experiences that made them feel the community was welcoming to people of color. Two-thirds (66%, n=67) noted the presence of many diverse families, and that there was no hostility to people of color (34%, n=67). Many also mentioned the community ties of military affiliation as an important connection. Others mentioned cultural festivals and people of color represented in leadership roles in the community.

[75] Including families of color and LGBTQ+ families
[76] Both respondents of color and white respondents who identified as part of multiracial or multiethnic families and respondents of color were grouped into "families of color"
[77] Including LGBTQ+ families
[78] LGBTQ+ family respondents include any respondents who identified as lesbian, gay, homosexual, or bisexual and/or who reported they have an immediate family member (spouse or child) who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or transgender.

Community Findings

You indicated that you view your community as welcoming to people of color. Please share why you feel this way, focusing on specific observations or experiences. Highlight actions, initiatives, or behaviors that you believe exemplify this welcoming attitude.
(Asked of respondents who agreed their community was very welcoming to people of color)

"I am a person of color and ever since I and my family moved into my neighborhood we have never faced any form of racism or being treated differently because of my skin color." — Spouse of Veteran

"Because most neighbors are military or have lots of exposure to us they are more accepting of differences. We are a mixed race family and have never had trouble here in Texas." — White Respondent in Multiracial/Multiethnic Family

"Living so close to Mexico, there are a lot of people of Mexican and Native American descent in San Antonio. Many fiestas are held here. We have also seen Native American events that were held to observe different things in their culture. Many of these things are inclusive to those wishing to attend so people can share their culture. Specifically, Cinco de Mayo, Dia de los Muertos, and Fiesta." — White Respondent

"There are people of color in positions of leadership in my community (neighborhood, church, schools, etc.). Our neighborhood pages on social media have drama, but it's not typical to see racially charged comments. Children of all backgrounds and skin colors play together [at] neighborhood parks." — White Respondent

Similarly, among those who agreed that the community was welcoming to LGBTQ+ families, the majority (68%, n=28) noted they had not observed actions against LGBTQ+ individuals or families, and a few noted actions taken in support of LGBTQ+ families (18%, n=28), such as resources for trans service members.

You indicated that you view your community as welcoming to LGBTQ+ families. Please share why you feel this way, focusing on specific observations or experiences. Highlight actions, initiatives, or behaviors that you believe exemplify this welcoming attitude.

"San Antonio is progressive, the city has a LGBTQ committee. Our pride flag has never been tampered with or mentioned. Many of my colleagues are LGBTQ+." — LGBTQ+ Family Respondent

"The clinic has THMEU [Transgender Health Medical Evaluation Unit][79] resources for trans service members, San Antonio celebrates pride month as well as has events through the year."
— Straight/Heterosexual Respondent

"My specific neighborhood has pride events. I've noticed several LGBTQ+ affirming churches in the area. The local universities are specifically inclusive and have LGBTQ+ individuals in leadership."
— Straight/Heterosexual Respondent

Among those who did not believe the community was welcoming to LGBTQ+ families noted a perception of Texas in general, rather than focused on San Antonio.

You indicated that you perceive your community as not welcoming to LGBTQ+ families. To improve this situation, could you suggest specific actions, initiatives, or behaviors that should be introduced or changed? Please detail these recommendations to help us understand what would signify a welcoming community to you.

"I don't know that community leaders or activities are the solution here. Many Texans have strong religious beliefs and their thoughts on LGTBQ families is coming from their church and personal upbringing."
— Active-Duty Spouse

"This is a hyper conservative state ... Though again, San Antonio itself is a bit more balanced."
— Straight/Heterosexual Respondent

Ways the Community Demonstrates Embracing Diversity

Most San Antonio respondents agreed that their community embraces diversity, and cited a number of ways that demonstrate this community attribute. The most common themes among responses to an open-ended question were that the community hosted diverse events (42%, n=53), and that the community was inclusive (19%, n=53). Several also mentioned the military presence bringing diversity to the area and representation of people of color in leadership positions in the community.

[79] Bordeaux, M. (2021, June 28). 59th MDW treats transgender service members. TRICARE Newsroom. https://newsroom.tricare.mil/News/Defense-Health-Agency-News/Article/2699359/59th-mdw-treats-transgender-service-members

Community Findings

You indicated that you believe your community embraces diversity. Please share why you feel this way, focusing on specific observations or experiences. Highlight actions, initiatives, or behaviors that you believe exemplify this welcoming attitude.

"Our neighborhood Facebook page has quite a few posts where neighbors who have small businesses have listed their ethnic businesses and it has been well received." — Respondent of Color

"The many festivals and events that the city of San Antonio hosts shows the willingness of our residents and even tourists that come in to experience the diversity that is within the city." — White Respondent

"Various ethnicities live here and all are welcomed. We do group dinners and value the unique meals brought by everyone." — White Respondent

"[San Antonio] often has different parades or festivals such as LGBTQ Pride. Libraries celebrate months for certain marginalized groups such as AAPI month, black history month, local PowWows etc." — White Respondent in Multiracial/Multiethnic Family

"There are diversity chairs in the PTA. There's a pillar at our school that celebrates diversity." — Active-Duty Spouse

"The large presence of military and Veterans help the community have a greater ability to embrace diversity." — Active-Duty Spouse

Strategies and Resources Used to Develop Belonging

When asked about the community activities or resources that made them feel like they belong, San Antonio respondents described several strategies that they used to create connections in the community, including community and neighborhood events and activities, hobby groups, volunteering, employment and schools, religious groups, the YMCA, unit events and Family Readiness Groups. The most common themes among open-ended responses were events, including diversity-focused events (42%, n=74), military events or groups (19%, n=74), neighbors (14%, n=74), and activities (12%, n=74).

Community Findings

What activities or resources in this community make you feel like you belong?

"Within the military community there is crafting events, coffee gatherings, the spouses' club." — White Respondent

"Military events for events where military gets priorities/discounted or free tickets." — White Respondent in Multiracial/Multiethnic Family and LGBTQ+ Family Respondent

"Military-centered events and including us as a unique group through public invitations etc." — White Respondent in Multiracial/Multiethnic Family and LGBTQ+ Family Respondent

"So many orgs such as the USO, military nights at sporting events." — Respondent of Color

"There are food trucks that come to the neighborhood, Easter egg hunts, trick or treating, and the fire truck comes through the neighborhood before Christmas to name a few of the events/resources." — Respondent of Color

These themes also resonated among interview participants, who were part of diverse military families.[80] Some interview participants emphasized the need to intentionally engage and seek out connection with others in the community.

"We moved into like a regular community neighborhood that does have a lot of military people here surprisingly. But the community that we chose is very neighborhood focused. So there's a lot of social media like involvement from the community. And we have a really supportive HOA that throws a lot of events for everybody, not just families with kids. So I mean, that was part of it, like moving ourselves to a location that's going to provide that type of community involvement. Another thing that we kind of work towards as we started fostering with the animal care services down here because just the severity of need was just really worrisome for us. So we use that as kind of like a way to give back to the community, kind of learn about the community and meet other people who have similar interests. And perhaps maybe sort similar morals and values and things like that. So I would say, now, like we definitely feel more connected because we put a lot of the hard work in in the first year to be able to have this great second year here." — Interview Participant

[80] Participants identified either as a person of color, a member of a multiracial or multiethnic family, identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, or had an immediate family member who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

Community Findings

"I think I found people in fact and created community with people that look like me or have similar family structures as I do, or come from similar family backgrounds that I do. So that's kind of more so a community that I've created than a community that exists." — Interview Participant

Participants also described several ways they learned about the community, including Newcomer's Briefs, Facebook groups, and installation newsletters. Notably, there were still gaps and challenges with these approaches. One spouse mentioned the Newcomer's Brief, but was not able to attend due to a lack of child care. Additionally, online groups could provide information, but also were noted as often unhelpful or even hostile.

"The community might be more military friendly. But [...] there's not really any publicized things [...] My husband had to attend [...] a mandatory Newcomers Brief thing. But I wasn't able to, because you're not allowed to bring kids, and we couldn't find a babysitter. [...] I don't even know if they have key spouses anymore, because like nobody reached out to either him or me when he got here. So it was just we got here, and he like got signed in, and then we're just existing on our own, like in our own little island."
— Interview Participant

Interview participants also highlighted the military presence in San Antonio as something that helps them identify common bonds and feel like they belong.

"Yeah, San Antonio is a very military based community. So I think that's kind of a surefire way that kind of connects most of the people here in some form or another." — Interview Participant

"I think, usually like the larger bases or the larger cities that have multiple military installations. It's usually easier to find people with similar interests to us, or are similar to us so that was one indicator that really signified to us that there would be a little bit more diversity here than perhaps at our last duty station." — Interview Participant

"So that allows us to get along with other individuals of all of the other ethnicities, because we have that kind of common bond of the military." — Interview Participant

"We have the common ground of having the military kind of background. And so it always gives something to talk about like, even if you are talking to spouses who may not have been active duty. The fact that you could then, you know, talk about all the different places you've lived and, like, you know, complain about just military rules and regulations. So it just gives you something at least to start off a conversation with." — Interview Participant

Summary

Findings in San Antonio emphasized the centrality of the military and Veteran identity as a "bridge to belonging" particularly for diverse military families, while also highlighting the importance of embracing diversity. Most diverse military families had important things in common, and could find and connect with others like them in their community. Many highlighted the saturation of the military and Veteran community in San Antonio, and how having the military identity not only made the community more inclusive, but gave them common ground on which to start building connections and developing relationships, which could ultimately lead to a sense of belonging.

The City of San Antonio has developed key infrastructure to support not only military and Veteran families, but also diverse families, including LGBTQ+ families. The city maintains a Military and Veteran Affairs Department, which works to connect military and Veteran families with resources and services, arranges events and commemorations, and collaborates with local organizations, businesses and government agencies to support military and Veteran families. Furthermore, the City of San Antonio has enacted a LGBTQ+ Advisory Board, to provide guidance and recommendations to city leaders on issues affecting the LGBTQ+ community.[81] San Antonio publicly embraces the LGBTQ community, marking the community as LGBTQ+ friendly in Visit San Antonio marketing materials, hosting the largest night Pride Parade in the country,[82] and has a San Antonio LGBTQ+ Chamber of Commerce.[83]

One example of an initiative in San Antonio that creates an infrastructure of support and simultaneously signals welcome and belonging for military families are Military Spouse Fellowships for the city. Through a partnership with the Hiring Our Heroes Foundation, the City of San Antonio invests in fellowships designed for military spouses[84] to address a central military family lifestyle issue — high spouse unemployment.[85] In a similar vein, Joint Base San Antonio recently announced a partnership with the City of San Antonio, and Pre-K for SA[86] to expand access to high-quality child care for military families, addressing another central barrier to spouse employment — inaccessible child care.[87]

[81] Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer + (LGBTQ+) advisory board. (2023). Saspeakup.com. https://www.saspeakup.com/t1838

[82] Celebrating pride in San Antonio. (2024, May 24). Visitsanantonio.com; Visit San Antonio. https://www.visitsanantonio.com/blog/post/celebrating-pride-in-san-antonio

[83] Explore our city. (n.d.). San Antonio LGBT Chamber of Commerce. https://www.salgbtchamber.com

[84] Sparks, D. (2024). City of San Antonio invests in military spouses. City of San Antonio. https://www.sa.gov/Directory/News/News-Releases/City-of-San-Antonio-Invests-in-Military-Spouses

[85] Blue Star Families. 2023 Military Family Lifestyle Survey comprehensive report.

[86] Ramalho, F., & Byrd, J. (2024). Joint Base San Antonio and Pre-K 4 SA announce partnership. City of San Antonio. https://www.sa.gov/Directory/News/News-Releases/Joint-Base-San-Antonio-and-Pre-K-4-SA-Announce-Partnership

[87] Blue Star Families. 2023 Military Family Lifestyle Survey comprehensive report.

Community Recommendations

Building on recommendations from participants, the below recommendations are opportunities for the San Antonio community to continue to support diverse military families.

1. Continue to provide diverse and inclusive community events and activities. San Antonio respondents commonly recommended social events (27%, n=64) and activities (25%, n=64) as ways the community could help families develop a sense of belonging, particularly for families to find others with a similar structure, or children of similar ages.

What would you like to see in this community to help families like yours feel like they belong?

"I would love to see more events that we can be involved in like sports or more kid events. Also, events like date nights or something like that." — Respondent of Color

"A welcome event once a quarter. This can be done fairly inexpensively — a few bouncy houses for kids, light refreshments, flyers for on post services and coupons for area restaurants and beauty services in the area. It can be so hard to find a hairstylist, nail tech and other services when moving to a new place. Also, the number for the local chamber of commerce (and a brief explanation of the benefits of the chamber of commerce) would be beneficial as well." — White Respondent

2. Continue to provide information and outreach for resources, events and activities, especially for new families and for families with diverse needs, but also continuing for families who are unable to participate when they first arrive. Websites like the San Antonio Military and Veteran Affairs Department[88] are a great start for informing families about the military installations before they arrive.

"On the website for the base there would be stuff that would be specifically for diversity and inclusion. [...] just putting it alongside everything else because it's a natural, normal thing would be what we would need to see. [...] Here's some stuff, here's some resources for LGBTQ youth, or here is whatever just like that, it's just kind of accepted alongside everything else." — Interview Participant

"I would say more activities and get togethers spots but I may just not know about a lot of the stuff going on. I work full time and don't get out much so I could be missing information." — Respondent of Color

[88] San Antonio military installations.

Community Findings

"I would love it if someone created a "getting to know San Antonio" type introduction for new military families." — White Respondent

"Opportunities to meet people and family support. The San Antonio area is so large, it is difficult to get established with a community, especially with a young family. We struggled with feeling isolated when we arrived." — Interview Participant

3. Continue to celebrate diversity throughout the year, outside of a designated month, and throughout the community.

"Outside of Black History Month, when you see something that is an event that celebrates, you know, like African American culture [...] you see something that also celebrates that outside of that month, and people are really trying to make sure they sprinkle it throughout, that's when I feel like it's like, Oh, they really understand that there is not just that one month that we need to pay attention to this culture, we should sprinkle throughout other kind of events. That's when I really think this embraces diversity."
— Interview Participant

4. Continue and expand opportunities for representation for people of color and military families in leadership roles throughout the community, and to address the issues that are most important for military families, such as spouse employment and child care. For example, city governments can consider joining Blue Star Families' 4+1 Commitment.[89]

You indicated that you perceive your community as not welcoming to people of color. To improve this situation, could you suggest specific actions, initiatives, or behaviors that should be introduced or changed? Please detail these recommendations to help us understand what would signify a welcoming community to you.

"[...] Actively seek out and promote military spouses of color, to help integrate and promote representation — this is consistent with evidence based literature that representation is key to dismantle stereotyping/discrimination." — Respondent of Color

What would you like to see in this community to help families like yours feel like they belong?

"San Antonio itself hiring more military spouses." — White Respondent in Multiracial/Multiethnic Family

[89] The 4+1 Commitment. (n.d.). Blue Star Families. https://bluestarfam.org/4plus1

Blue Star Families Campaign for Inclusion

Research Series

Community Findings: Hampton Roads, Virginia

Funding for the Campaign for Inclusion Research Series is provided through the generosity of our sponsors, The USAA Foundation, Lockheed Martin, Booz Allen, JP Morgan Chase, Pritzker Military Foundation, AARP, BAE Systems, and Synchrony Foundation, with the additional support of Blue Star Families from craig newmark philanthropies and CSX.

Blue Star Families

Hampton Roads, Virginia

Hampton Roads was selected as a target community for this study as a large military community in the South, with a high concentration of Navy, Army, and Air Force installations spread across several communities that collectively make up the Hampton Roads area. The strong presence of the military in the area — and the spread across multiple communities rather than a single city or single installation — makes it a unique and interesting case study.

Hampton Roads has a complicated racial history. In August 1619, the first recorded enslaved Africans were brought to the Hampton Roads area,[90] beginning the slave trade in America. More recently, sociological research uncovered the impacts of historical redlining in the area[91,92] — a discriminatory practice of denying financial services on the basis of race, limiting people of color to certain areas, and concentrating poverty. However, the community continues to address racial equity through efforts like the Racial Equity Advisory Council of the Hampton Roads Community Foundation,[93] and inclusion of a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) & Title VI/Civil Rights Liaison within the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission to address equity in community planning efforts.

The area has also come under the national spotlight due to the high-profile case of Lieutenant Caron Nazario. Lieutenant Nazario, a Black and Latino Army officer wearing his military uniform, was pulled over for a routine traffic stop in Windsor, Virginia, near Hampton Roads in December 2020.[94] The situation quickly escalated, and police officers drew their weapons, pepper-sprayed Nazario, and forced him to the ground. The incident was captured on body cam footage, which went viral and raised concerns about police treatment of people of color and military personnel, which is more pronounced for individuals of color in the area.[95] Nazario later filed a federal lawsuit against the officers, alleging excessive force, unlawful search, and violation of his

[90] Austin, B. (2019). 1619: Virginia's first Africans. In Hampton History Museum. https://hampton.gov/DocumentCenter/View/24075/1619-Virginias-First-Africans?bidId=

[91] McGee, K. (2022, December 5). New exhibition explores the human toll of racist housing policies. Christopher Newport University. https://cnu.edu/news/2022/12/05-sswa-f-finn

[92] Living apart: Geography of segregation in the 21st century. (2022, November 18). Virginia Museum of Contemporary Art. https://virginiamoca.org/exhibitions/living-apart-geography-of-segregation-in-the-21st-century

[93] What is racial equity? (2022). Hampton Roads Community Foundation. https://hamptonroadscf.org/leadership-initiatives/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/what-is-racial-equity

[94] Andone, D., & Boyette, C. (2021, April 12). 2 police officers used excessive force, threatened Army officer during traffic stop, lawsuit says. CNN. https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/11/us/windsor-virginia-police-stop-army-lieutenant-lawsuit/index.html

[95] Gainey, R., Richman, J., Vandecar-Burdin, T., Wilson-John, W., Kibler, M., Boateng, N., & Smith, C. (2023). Life in Hampton Roads. The Social Science Research Center - Old Dominion University. https://www.odu.edu/sites/default/files/2024/documents/2023-lihr-report-final_0.pdf

constitutional rights.[96] The case attracted significant media attention, highlighting ongoing issues of racial profiling by police and concerns about the treatment of service members by law enforcement.[97]

Community Demographics

There are varied definitions of the area of South Hampton Roads, including a combined statistical area that includes parts of Virginia and North Carolina.[98,99] For the purposes of this report, when exploring external data about the Hampton Roads area, it was defined as a compilation of five communities in southern Virginia — Chesapeake, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach. Survey respondents were asked if they lived within 25 miles of Hampton Roads, and were able to then indicate which of the five communities they resided in, or select "Other" and write in their community (see Table 4.4 for a breakdown of communities). These communities make up the Norfolk/Portsmouth Military Housing Area (MHA). Combined, these communities make up a population of nearly one million people.[100] With 15 military bases located throughout the region,[101] the military presence is a critical part of the community. Defense spending is a primary driver of the local economy, estimating that defense spending accounts for about 17% of gross domestic product in the region.[102]

There is considerable variety among the communities in terms of racial and ethnic diversity of the population. Generally, there is a smaller proportion of people who identify as Hispanic or Latino, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Asian than in Virginia or the U.S., while there is a greater proportion of Black/African American people and those who identify as two or more races. Estimates of the lesbian, gay, or bisexual (excluding transgender) population are about 4.4%,[103] which is the 12th highest percentage among metropolitan areas in the country,[104] and higher than the Virginia average at 3.9%[105] and the national average of 3.4%.

[96] Negussie, T. (2023, January 17). Army officer pepper-sprayed by police gets $3,685 in $1 million lawsuit. ABC News. https://abcnews.go.com/US/caron-nazario-army-lieutenant-pepper-sprayed-police-awarded/story?id=96491296

[97] Schogol, J. (2023, January 19). Jury sides with Virginia police officers who pepper-sprayed uniformed Army lieutenant. Task & Purpose. https://taskandpurpose.com/news/army-lieutenant-pepper-sprayed-jury-decision

[98] U.S. Department of Commerce. (2012). Virginia Beach-Norfolk, VA-NC combined statistical area [Map]. https://www2.census.gov/geo/maps/econ/ec2012/csa/EC2012_330M200US545M.pdf

[99] Dragas Center for Economic Analysis and Policy | Old Dominion University. (2019). The state of the region: Hampton Roads 2019. https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?params=/context/sor_reports/article/1172/&path_info=SOR_2019.pdf

[100] Census data quick facts: Virginia Beach city, Virginia; Suffolk city, Virginia; Portsmouth city, Virginia; Chesapeake city, Virginia; Norfolk city, Virginia. (2024) Census.gov https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/virginiabeachcityvirginia,suffolkcityvirginia,portsmouthcityvirginia,chesapeakecityvirginia,norfolkcityvirginia/PST045223

[101] Welcome to Hampton Roads — Hampton Roads alliance. (2024, July 22). Hampton Roads Alliance. https://hamptonroadsalliance.com/welcome-to-hampton-roads/#:~:text=Hampton%20Roads%20is%20known%20around%20the%20world%20for

[102] Dragas Center for Economic Analysis and Policy | Old Dominion University. The state of the region

[103] Old Dominion University. (2016). The state of the region: The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer community in Hampton Roads. https://ww1.odu.edu/content/dam/odu/offices/economic-forecasting-project/docs/2016/sor-2016-lgbtq.pdf

[104] Newport, F., & Gates, G. J. San Francisco metro area

[105] Movement Advancement Project. (2019). Virginia's equality profile. Lgbtmap.org. https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality_maps/profile_state/46

Community Findings

Table 4.1: Proportion of the Population, by Gender, Sexual Orientation, Race, and Ethnicity
Hampton Roads Communities, Virginia, United States

	Chesapeake City	Norfolk City	Portsmouth City	Suffolk City	Virginia Beach	Virginia	U.S.
Population[C]	253,886	230,930	96,793	100,659	453,649		
Female[C]	50.8%	49.1%	51.9%	51.1%	50.7%	50.5%	50.8%
Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender[A]						3.9%	4.1%
Transgender adults[B]						0.5%	0.5%
Transgender youth[B]						1.2%	1.4%
White alone[C]	57.3%	44.8%	37.7%	48.6%	62.8%	68.3%	75.3%
American Indian/Alaska Native alone[C]	0.2%	0.4%	0.4%	0.3%	0.2%	0.6%	1.3%
Asian alone[C]	3.7%	3.8%	1.4%	1.9%	7.1%	7.4%	6.4%
Black/African American alone[C]	29.3%	40.7%	51.4%	41.6%	18.9%	20%	14%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander alone[C]	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.3%
Two or more races[C]	7.1%	6.7%	7%	5.9%	8.5%	3.5%	3.1%
Hispanic or Latino[C]	7%	8.7%	5%	4.8%	8.8%	11.2%	19.5%

[A] Data drawn from The Williams Institute. https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/visualization/lgbt-stats/?topic=LGBT#density

[B] Data drawn from The Williams Institute https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/subpopulations/transgender-people/

[C] Data drawn from the US Census Bureau. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/virginiabeachcityvirginia,suffolkcityvirginia,portsmouthcityvirginia,norfolkcityvirginia,chesapeakecityvirginia,VA/PST045223

Community Sample

The Hampton Roads sample included 95 respondents, generating more than 280 open-ended responses, and two interviews. The survey sample consisted of 74% spouses of active-duty service members, 12% active-duty service members, 7% spouses of Veteran/retired service members, and 6% Veterans/retired service members. The largest age groups were 35-44 years old (57%), 25-34 years old (22%), and 45-54 years old (12%).

Table 4.2: Age Groups
All Hampton Roads respondents (n=95)

Under 18 years old	0%
18-24 years old	3%
25-34 years old	22%
35-44 years old	57%
45-54 years old	12%
55-64 years old	4%
65 years or older	2%

Table 4.3: Length of Time in Community All Hampton Roads respondents (n=95)	
Less than 1 year	21%
1-3 years	27%
3-5 years	19%
More than 5 years	33%

Table 4.4: Hampton Roads Communities All Hampton Roads respondents (n=95)	
Chesapeake	15%
Virginia Beach	31%
Norfolk	13%
Portsmouth	3%
Suffolk	5%
Newport News	7%
Hampton	5%
Yorktown	6%
Williamsburg	3%
Other	7%

Ninety-five percent of the sample identified as straight/heterosexual and 6% of the sample identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Eighty-four percent were women and 16% were men. Thirteen percent reported they had an immediate family member who identifies as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and 7% reported they did not know; 2% reported they had an immediate family member who identified as transgender, and another 2% reported they did not know. Overall, 16% of the sample were part of an LGBTQ+ family — meaning they or an immediate family member identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

Table 4.5: Respondent Race/Ethnicity All Hampton Roads respondents (n=53)	
American Indian/Alaska Native (For example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe, Mayan, etc.)	2%
Asian (For example, Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipino, Korean, Asian Indian, Japanese)	4%
Black/African American (For example, African American, Nigerian, Jamaican, Ethiopian, Haitian, Somali)	11%
Hispanic or Latino/a/x or of Spanish origin (For example, Mexican or Mexican American, Salvadoran, Puerto Rican, Dominican, Cuban, Colombian)	17%
Middle Eastern or Northern African (For example, Lebanese, Syrian, Iranian, Moroccan, Egyptian, Israeli)	2%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (For example, Native Hawaiian, Tongan, Samoan, Fijian, Chamorro, Marshallese)	2%
Some other race or ethnicity	4%
White (For example, German, Italian, Irish, Polish, English, French)	72%

Question text: How do you describe yourself? If you identify with more than one racial and/or ethnic identity, please select all that apply. Race/ethnicity was a select-all question so respondents could select multiple options and therefore, percentages do not equal 100%.

More than one-third (39%) identified as a member of a multiracial/multiethnic family (e.g. they have a spouse or child of a different race/ethnicity) (n=54). In total, more than half (54%) of the sample either identified as a person of color or had an immediate family member who was a person of color, referred to within this report as families of color. In comparison, 46% of respondents were white respondents not in multiracial or multiethnic families.

Community Representation and Belonging

Three-quarters of both white respondents (75%, n=24) and respondents of color (75%, n=20) in Hampton Roads agreed there were others like them in their community, and similar proportions also agreed that they had important things in common with others in their community (58% versus 55%), and that they had opportunities to connect with other people like them (79% versus 80%).

About half of white respondents in Hampton Roads (50%, n=24) and respondents of color (55%, n=20) agreed that they felt a sense of belonging to their local community. While similar proportions of respondents of color and white respondents felt valued (50% and 50%, respectively), fewer respondents of color felt understood compared to their white peers (45% versus 63%, respectively). Similar proportions reported opportunities to participate in their culture (55% versus 55%), but a greater proportion of respondents of color agreed they had the opportunity to be involved in community decisions (60% versus 44%).

Table 4.6: Community Perceptions, by Race/Ethnicity
All Hampton Roads respondents | Proportion who somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree

	White Respondents* (n=24)	Respondents of Color (n=20)
I feel a sense of belonging to my local community.	50%	55%
I feel valued by others where I live.	50%	50%
I feel understood by others where I live.	63%	45%
I have important things in common with others in my community.	58%	55%
I have the opportunity to be involved in community decisions.	44%	60%
I have opportunities to connect with other people like me in my community.	79%	80%
I have opportunities to participate in my culture where I live.	55%	55%
There are others like me in my community.	75%	75%
I trust my neighbors.	75%	75%
I feel safe where I live.	83%	80%

These percentages have not been tested for significance and are simple comparisons of proportions, which may be influenced by small sample sizes.
*White respondents who did not identify as part of a multiracial/multiethnic family.

Though a small sample size, LGBTQ+ family respondents in Hampton Roads reported very positive views of the community. More than three-quarters agreed they felt a sense of belonging (78%), felt valued (78%), and understood (67%). The majority agreed they had important things in common, that there were others like them in the community and that they had opportunities to connect with others like them.

Table 4.7: LGBTQ+ Family Community Perceptions
LGBTQ+ family respondents in Hampton Roads (n=9) | Proportion who somewhat agree, agree, or strongly agree

I feel a sense of belonging to my local community.	78%
I feel valued by others where I live.	78%
I feel understood by others where I live.	67%
I have important things in common with others in my community.	67%
I have the opportunity to be involved in community decisions.	78%
I have opportunities to connect with other people like me in my community.	78%
I have opportunities to participate in my culture where I live.	56%
There are others like me in my community.	67%
I trust my neighbors.	78%
I feel safe where I live.	89%

LGBTQ+ family respondents include any respondents who identified as lesbian, gay, homosexual, or bisexual and/or who reported they have an immediate family member (spouse or child) who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or transgender.

Initial Impressions

In addition to the regional survey, active-duty family respondents who were part of families of color or LGBTQ+ families[106] were invited to participate in individual interviews to gain a richer understanding of their experiences in the community, including their perceptions of the community before relocating there and their experiences once they arrived. The sample in this community had a high percentage of active-duty family respondents, and therefore may have been more focused on children and children's education than the other communities. For interview participants, the initial concerns about moving to the Hampton Roads area focused on their children's education and having a diverse and high-quality, supportive school environment. Once they arrived, they were able to find neighborhoods and schools that offered the diversity and quality education they had been looking for. They also noted the ability to find stores that sold culturally

[106] Participants identified either as a person of color, a member of a multiracial or multiethnic family, identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, or had an immediate family member who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

relevant food and hair salons that catered to their hair type, which was especially powerful when those places were also military-affiliated — finding commonalities on more than one important characteristic. While the common ground of a military affiliation was welcoming in itself, the existence of institutions that catered to their diverse needs was a clear sign of welcoming.

"We knew that the schools, you know, generally we wanted to be in this area where I currently live. [...] We saw those grocery stores, the hair salon. you know, it's just kind of the faces around, you know. It felt comfortable for us." — Interview Participant

Perceptions of Diversity

Among all Hampton Roads respondents to the regional survey, the majority of open-ended responses (71%, n=62) from Hampton Roads respondents indicated they did see their community as diverse, while nearly one-quarter (21%, n=62) disagreed. Most commonly, diversity referred to race and ethnicity (27%, n=62). Some respondents referred to socioeconomic diversity and military affiliation as well as diversity in terms of race or ethnicity, but some also described the area as segregated. Others mentioned the military bringing diversity to the area, and distinguished between diversity within the military housing community compared to the civilian community.

Would you define your community as diverse? Why or why not?

"Yes — There is a lot of military in my town which means we have people from all over the world represented here." — Respondent of Color

"No, people of the same race tend to be within the same area, while people of other races would be in a different area." — White Respondent in Multiracial/Multiethnic Family

"Yes it's diverse but also closed off and divided. Either military passing through, or stable non-military families with their friends list." — White Respondent

"Yes. Many military Veterans and retirees of diverse backgrounds in the area. Several local cities have majority minority populations." — White Respondent

"Our military housing community is, but the immediate surrounding area (York County) is definitely not." — Active-Duty Spouse

Perceptions of Welcome

Most respondents in Hampton Roads (74%) feel welcome in their community, and this proportion is similar among families of color (75%) and LGBTQ+ families (67%). When asked what made them feel welcome, many described individual acts of kindness and welcome. Most commonly, respondents pointed to friendly people (43%, n=30), neighbors (27%, n=30), the military presence (17%, n=30), and activities (17%, n=30). Some also described their individual effort to make connections and events at the schools.

What incidents, experiences, or observations made you feel like you were welcome?

(Asked of respondents who reported they felt welcome in their community)

Individual Effort and Finding Shared Experiences

"I've made strong connections and a lot of effort to build roots in the community, and for the most part, people I've met welcome that. Or, perhaps I've gotten more adept at establishing rapport, contributing (e.g. volunteering) to the community, and making an effort to make friends and build relationships. With these people, and sub-communities (shared identity, neighborhood, kids sports or arts in common, etc.) within this geographic area, I've built relationships and then felt welcomed. I don't think I felt inherently welcomed. People in Hampton Roads are more likely to be open to being friends with an active-duty family than other places we've lived [...]. But even within these communities, I had to find people with shared experiences and similar ways of being [...] there hasn't been much initially in common but tons of connections once we get to know one another in person and as people. That is to say, there haven't been overt experiences that made me feel welcome until I made an effort to connect and befriend people in the neighborhood, kid's school, kid's activities, etc." — White Respondent in Multiracial/Multiethnic Family

Schools and Community Organizations

"At my children's public school, there is a strong mix of families of color and the community celebrates Black History Month. A few principals at the local schools are people of color, and I think they welcome others within their community without hesitation. Many students are also people of color and they enjoy celebrating their culture." — Respondent of Color

Community Findings

Military Presence

"There is so much military here that it's easy to feel comfortable because they have or are living the same lifestyle." — White Respondent

"I think that because it's such a large military community I feel like I'm hardly ever in a room where I don't feel welcome. I can often find at least one person that I have a common interest with." — White Respondent

Culturally Relevant Goods and Services

"[...] Finding a Dominican hair salon two miles from my home where I met other Veterans and military spouses though from other branches of military was also very welcoming!" — Respondent of Color

However, some respondents did not feel welcome, and reported experiencing racial profiling and exclusion due to their military affiliation.

"I come from a Latino household, whereas Hampton Roads is [a] predominantly African American area. I've been racially profiled and unwelcome here. I have not felt welcomed." — Respondent of Color

"[...] my military coworkers and I have felt a push back and ignorance against us because we are affiliated with military." — Respondent of Color

The large majority of all Hampton Roads respondents (n=71)[107] agreed that the community was very welcoming to people of color (80%) and embraces diversity (63%). This was also consistent among families of color[108] (n=27); 78% agree the community is very welcoming to people of color and 68% agree the community embraces diversity. Only one-third (34%) of all respondents[109] believed the community was very welcoming to LGBTQ+ families, but among LGBTQ+ families themselves (n=9),[110] more than half (56%) agreed the community was very welcoming to LGBTQ families, and 63% agreed the community embraces diversity.

[107] Including families of color and LGBTQ+ families

[108] Both respondents of color and white respondents who identified as part of multiracial or multiethnic families and respondents of color were grouped into "families of color"

[109] Including LGBTQ+ families

[110] LGBTQ+ family respondents include any respondents who identified as lesbian, gay, homosexual, or bisexual and/or who reported they have an immediate family member (spouse or child) who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, or transgender.

Community Findings

Only 5% of Hampton Roads respondents disagreed that the community embraces diversity and 7% disagreed that the community was very welcoming to people of color.

Among those who agreed the community was welcoming to people of color, respondents were asked about their observations or experiences that made them feel the community was welcoming to people of color. The most common themes in open-ended responses (15%, n=41) was that there were many people of color in the community, and that businesses, schools, and hospitals provided information and services designed for people of color. Many mentioned that the military population is diverse, and brought diversity to the area.

You indicated that you view your community as welcoming to people of color. Please share why you feel this way, focusing on specific observations or experiences. Highlight actions, initiatives, or behaviors that you believe exemplify this welcoming attitude.[111]

"Mostly from my interactions with neighbors, they are BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and People of Color] as well and my ethnicity has not been a factor yet." — Active-Duty Spouse

"I found the ethnic stores, hair salons and overall community members to be reflective of our experience as a Dominican American/Mexican American family than when we lived in [...] however I found more opportunity to attend cultural and diversity focused events when we lived in [...]." — Respondent of Color

"Our social interactions and our child's activities are fairly diverse, and I see families welcoming and interacting with one another." — White Respondent in Multiracial/Multiethnic Family

"We live in an area that is primarily POC [People of Color]. The local hospitals and medical providers give information and resources for health crises such as the black maternal health crisis and maternal mortality in WOC [Women of Color]." — White Respondent in Multiracial/Multiethnic Family

"I think that this area is more diverse than that of others we have lived (San Antonio, TX). This area has a significant number of African American people and because of that there are businesses/events that are specifically focused on African American interests." — White Respondent

[111] Selected quotes are used throughout the report to illustrate important themes, and include perspectives from a variety of respondents, including participants of color, white respondents in multiracial or multiethnic families, families with lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender members and straight/heterosexual respondents.

Similarly, among those who agreed that the community was welcoming to LGBTQ+ families, many noted an open acceptance of everyone and no evidence of discrimination towards LGBTQ+ families, or that they had friends of family members who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. Some also reported actions that support LGBTQ+ families, such as programs and businesses supporting the LGBTQ+ community, and welcoming LGBTQ+ neighbors.

You indicated that you view your community as welcoming to LGBTQ+ families. Please share why you feel this way, focusing on specific observations or experiences. Highlight actions, initiatives, or behaviors that you believe exemplify this welcoming attitude.

"We have several same-sex couples in the neighborhood. We welcome everyone and love spending time with all couples and families when we have neighborhood block parties." — LGBTQ+ Family Respondent

"Since I am straight I don't know the reality but Norfolk seems like a progressive area [you] see programs and stores/businesses geared to LGBTQ and ethnicity." — Straight/Heterosexual Respondent

"Diversity in the neighborhood brings a sense of belonging." — Straight/Heterosexual Respondent

Ways the Community Demonstrates Embracing Diversity

Community members describe multiple ways the community demonstrates embracing diversity: from the diversity they see among people, schools and businesses, to the community's reputation as the home of NATO in North America[112] and an "All American City,"[113] to a variety of festivals, events, clubs and activities. Respondents also continued to share the perception that the military community is more diverse in contrast to the local community.

You indicated that you believe your community embraces diversity. Please share why you feel this way, focusing on specific observations or experiences. Highlight actions, initiatives, or behaviors that you believe exemplify this welcoming attitude.

"This area is known as the home of NATO in the USA." — Respondent of Color

[112] Allied Command Transformation. (2020, October 16). Norfolk: NATO's home in North America. NATO | OTAN. https://www.act.nato.int/article/norfolk-natos-home-in-north-america

[113] 2023 All-America city – Hampton, VA - National Civic League. (2023, June 12). National Civic League. https://www.nationalcivicleague.org/2023-all-america-city-finalist-hampton-va

"This is hard. The community that surrounds us does not embrace diversity — but the military community that we live in does to some extent. This is mostly because the military is diverse in many ways, and we are unable to choose our neighbors. This micro "melting pot" is almost forced to find ways to embrace our differences, at least when it comes to certain aspects of identity." — Active-Duty Spouse

"The embrace of diversity in Hampton Roads is best exemplified in that we easily found Latino/a former grocery stores, hair salons, other diverse parents at our daughters private preschool. I do think there could be more embrace on the cultural events offered by the community but we feel embraced and welcome here overall." — Respondent of Color

"Like cultural events are carried out in my community. Education and training offerings to other races. Inclusive policies that also support them and many more." — Respondent of Color

"Hampton was awarded "All American City" honors in 2023 based on many factors including reaching out to all communities." — Respondent of Color

"I think that Hampton Roads is awesome because of the diversity the area has. There are often festivals to celebrate different groups/cultures. I have been to a few Greek festivals and have plans to attend the upcoming Indian festival coming to Norfolk. It really is a melting pot of an area." — White Respondent

Strategies and Resources Used to Develop Belonging

The most common responses about what helped Hampton Roads respondents develop a sense of belonging were military events or groups (21%, n=42), schools (17%, n=42), church (14%, n=42), neighbors (14%, n=42), a wide variety of events and activities (12%, n=42), and volunteering (10%, n=42).

Community Findings

What activities or resources in this community make you feel like you belong?

Neighbors and Neighborhood Gatherings

"Our monthly newsletter and semiannual neighborhood festival."
— Respondent of Color

Culturally Relevant Goods and Services

"International grocery stores."
— Respondent of Color

Activities and Events

"Church, sports, neighborhood gatherings, military events."
— White Respondent

"I often join military events to feel included in the military life as well as join lots of events at my local library to get to know my area."
— White Respondent

Volunteering, Schools

"Volunteering, the YMCA, neighborhood activities, school activities, exploring the area through activities available through [Vet Tix]." — Respondent of Color

Groups

"Local Buy Nothing Sell Nothing groups and the activities they provide."
— Respondent of Color

"Some of the Facebook spouse groups are helpful."
— White Respondent

Summary

Hampton Roads is a diverse collection of communities, where the large majority of diverse military families can find and connect with others like them, which may contribute to a higher sense of belonging to the community. Having community resources that cater to unique needs — such as ethnic food stores and hair

[114] About. (n.d.). LGBT Life Center. https://lgbtlifecenter.org/about
[115] Hampton Roads Military and Federal Facilities Alliance. (n.d.). HRMFFA. Hrmffa.org. Retrieved August 13, 2024, from https://hrmffa.org

salons, or LGBTQ+ resources — also signal to diverse military families that they are welcome. Community resources like the longstanding LGBTQ Life Center,[114] which has been in the community for the past 35 years, provide both resources and community for LGBTQ+ families. Furthermore, entities like the Hampton Roads Military and Federal Facilities Alliance (HRMFFA)[115] work to support the many military installations in the area.

Recommendations

Building on recommendations from participants, the below recommendations are opportunities for the Hampton Roads community to continue to support diverse military families.

1. Continue to provide information about each unique community within the Hampton Roads area, so new families assigned to the area understand what each community has to offer.

What would you like to see in this community to help families like yours feel like they belong?

"Would have been great to receive info upon moving relative to the local area when we arrived on station." — White Respondent

2. Centralize information about resources, events, and activities across communities and installations, particularly for families new to the area.

What would you like to see in this community to help families like yours feel like they belong?

"Inclusivity between branches across the different cities." — White Respondent

"See where there is more collaboration versus competition between our military service organizations." — Respondent of Color

"I would love to see more ways to bring military families together and share what resources are out there. Too many people I meet have no idea what is out there and have a stigma that all military spouses are lazy and do nothing and want nothing to do with that group." — White Respondent

"For such a large military area I don't feel like there are any military groups for spouses outside of FRGs [Family Readiness Groups], and for a spouse at a very small command that limits my ability to get together with people who have my shared experience." — White Respondent in Multiracial/Multiethnic Family

3. Continue and enhance welcoming events that allow military families to connect with one another, particularly those that create small groups with similar interests — to offer the best opportunity for creating connections based on shared interests.

What would you like to see in this community to help families like yours feel like they belong?

"A welcome to Hampton Roads event where our family could meet and connect with others." — Respondent of Color

"Events set up for spouses by interest or age group, organized volunteering events, mom's day out." — Respondent of Color

Recommendations Summary

Sense of belonging to a community is impacted by the degree of community participation, such as collective events and activities, the ease of making connections with others in the community, enhanced by commonalities or "bridges to belonging," and a sense of responsibility for others in the community — the ability to have a voice in the community.[116] To increase a sense of belonging for diverse military families, communities can address each area — offering opportunities for community engagement, highlighting commonalities, and creating opportunities for military families to have a voice in the community.

Offer Opportunities for Community Participation

1. Provide community events and activities, specifically bridging both the civilian and military communities. These should not only welcome new families, but highlight the diversity of the community. Consider different times, activities, and topics that appeal to varied groups. Smaller group activities with shared interests may be even more powerful to create connections and belonging.
2. Centralize and provide outreach and information about the community, resources and activities to families before they relocate. Advance information can allow new military families to envision themselves in the new community and make plans to participate before they arrive.

Highlight Commonalities to Build Bridges to Belonging

1. Signal welcome and highlight commonalities through diverse and inclusive events and resources.
2. Offer or highlight opportunities for smaller groups with shared interests to connect, such parenting groups or hobby groups.
3. Provide "third spaces"[117] such as parks or playgrounds offer a neutral place for military and civilian community members to meet.

Increase Military Families' Voice in Community

1. Clearly invite and welcome military family voices in community events and civic engagement. Hold space for military and Veteran representation on city councils, in chambers of commerce, and on school boards and highlight diverse military and Veteran individuals in leadership roles.

[116] Bowen, G. L., Martin, J. A., Mancini, J. A., & Nelson, J. P. (2000). Community capacity: Antecedents and consequences. Journal of Community Practice, 8(2), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1300/j125v08n02_01

[115] Butler, S. M., & Diaz, C. "Third places" as community

Conclusion

Everyone can contribute to better equity and belonging for diverse military families: individuals, schools, public health departments, community organizations, and installations.

Individual community members have the greatest power to extend welcome and belonging, through individual acts of civic engagement and kindness. Simple acts like waving at new neighbors, introducing themselves, setting up neighborhood or community get-togethers, or setting up playdates for children all send powerful messages of belonging that can support diverse military families. Individual military families also have the tremendous power to create opportunities for connection for themselves and their civilian and military neighbors. Military installations bring welcome diversity to communities. Everyone can become aware of their personal biases and take steps to intentionally engage and welcome others and create conditions for belonging.[118]

Communities can set the conditions for belonging by addressing both social and physical infrastructure — creating formal systems and places that facilitate the informal networks that form the foundation for belonging. While the levers of social and physical infrastructure are less powerful than individual acts of kindness and welcome to create a sense of belonging, they do set the conditions for those individual connections to blossom. Many institutions in a community can contribute; schools can highlight diversity and welcome military-connected children. Libraries can provide spaces for small group activities and bring together community members with shared interests. Local government can highlight the military influence in the community to signal welcome and belonging.

Fostering equity and belonging for diverse military families requires a collective effort from all sectors of the community. While individual actions of kindness and civic engagement play the most direct and powerful role in creating a sense of belonging, the broader community can set the stage through thoughtful social and physical infrastructure. By combining these individual and collective efforts, communities can ensure that military families not only feel welcomed but also find meaningful connections and support. Whether through simple gestures or structured initiatives, every member of the community has the power to contribute to a more inclusive and resilient environment for military families.

[118] Davis County Health Department (2023). Community Equity Assessment

Methodology

This report, as the latest in the Campaign for Inclusion Research Series, builds on Blue Star Families' existing research — including previous Campaign for Inclusion research and Military Family Lifestyle Survey research. Blue Star Families' extensive and long-standing research on military families provides a treasure trove of data, which was analyzed in new ways for this report. This report synthesizes data from a variety of sources to provide new insights on building a sense of welcome, belonging, and ultimately, resilience for military families.

Campaign for Inclusion Regional Survey

Recruitment

To recruit respondents for the CFI Regional Survey, Blue Star Families utilized several sampling strategies to maximize participation among diverse military family survey participants and reach respondents in the selected communities. These strategies included partnering with organizations within the communities, including the installation(s), local government, school systems, health department, and community organizations. Blue Star Families members who resided in or near the selected communities were recruited via email and social media. The Fort Gregg-Adams community was initially included in the research effort, but was withdrawn due to a low sample size. Respondents from Fort Gregg-Adams are included in the full sample, but are not included in any of the community reports.

One additional mechanism was through the 2024 Military Family Lifestyle Survey, which began fielding a few weeks prior to the CFI Regional Survey. Respondents to the 2024 MFLS were asked if they lived in or near (within 25 miles) one of the four selected communities. If respondents lived in one of the communities, a description of the upcoming CFI Regional Survey and an option to provide their email address were displayed. Those respondents who shared their email addresses were contacted later and a link to the regional survey was provided. Social media advertising on Instagram and Facebook and organic sharing of the survey by participants also increased engagement among target audiences.

Respondents could access the survey from a computer or mobile device via links shared via email or via social media. The survey began with a consent form which explains the study's objective, risks, and benefits.

Methodology

Consent was required to participate. All questions except for the survey consent, primary military identity, and current community (to determine if respondents lived in one of the selected communities) were voluntary. Respondents could skip any other questions they did not feel comfortable answering. Respondents who did not agree to the consent, indicated they were younger than 18 years of age, were not connected with the military, and did not live in one of the four communities were sent to the end of the survey. Only those respondents who met the inclusion criteria could move ahead to the remaining survey items. Survey branching and skip logic techniques were used to allow survey respondents to avoid questions that were not pertinent to them. Therefore, including missing data considerations, the actual number of respondents per question varied throughout the survey.

Survey Data Cleaning

After survey closing, researchers conducted an extensive, multistep data cleaning protocol, including removing invalid responses to reach the final sample. For removal, responses had to meet several criteria agreed upon by researchers, including, but not limited to, nonsensical phrases repeated across respondents or across multiple answers for the same response, mismatch in selected community and state of residence (e.g., selected San Antonio in response to the community question and Ohio in response to a separate question about their current residence), and duplicate responses. For additional information regarding this protocol, please contact survey@bluestarfam.org.

Survey Data Analysis

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach. Most quantitative survey questions were single-answer, multiple choice (including Likert scale options) questions, but select-all questions were also included. In most cases, responses of “Does not apply” or “Prefer not to answer” were excluded from analyses, but in several cases, “I don’t know” was kept in the analyses. Analyses primarily included frequencies and cross-tabulations, though correlations were used for the analysis of items related to a sense of belonging.

Additionally, there were multiple open-ended questions included for qualitative analysis. The analysts used a content analysis methodology to identify key themes from the data. The content analysis process

is as follows: first, the data was reviewed for emergent themes; second, each response was categorized by relevant theme(s); third, a final tabulation of responses by theme was created. After each question was analyzed, quotes were identified to illustrate each theme. The Applied Research team intentionally selected quotes to share throughout the report that reflect the diversity of respondent backgrounds across racial and ethnic groups, branch of service, gender, etc.

Interview Data Analysis

At the conclusion of the regional survey, a description of the individual interviews for this CFI effort and an option to provide their email address were displayed to respondents who met the interview inclusion criteria. Active-duty family (active-duty service members or spouses of active-duty service members) respondents who were respondents of color, white respondents in multiracial/multiethnic families, identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, or had family members who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender were eligible to participate in the interviews.

Eligible survey participants who had expressed interest in interviews and provided a contact email within the regional survey were contacted to schedule individual interviews with a member of the research team. Interviews with participants were conducted via Zoom, recorded, and transcribed. Transcriptions were coded using the same content analysis methodology used for open-ended responses to the survey, and provided greater context and understanding about developing a sense of belonging within each community. Data was reviewed for emergent themes, responses were categorized by the relevant theme(s), and a final tabulation of responses by theme was developed.

Historical Data Analysis

Historical data referenced in this report is drawn from Blue Star Families' 2022 and 2023 Military Family Lifestyle Surveys (MFLS). The survey instruments were designed by BSF in collaboration with Syracuse University's D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) with extensive input from military family members and advocates, subject matter experts, and policymakers who work with military families. The surveys were conducted online with approval from Syracuse University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and administered using Qualtrics' survey system (Qualtrics, Inc., Provo, UT). The 2022 MFLS fielded from May 23 to July 10, 2022, and the 2023 MFLS fielded from May 24, 2023, to July 17, 2023. Questions, definitions of various subgroups, and samples differ across survey efforts and from year to year. Open-ended responses from the 2022 Military Family Lifestyle Survey were also included in a new analysis to explore potential differences in feeling welcome by race/ethnicity or sexual orientation. Nearly 1,500 responses were categorized by the respondents' race/ethnicity or identified sexual orientation and codes

were tabulated within each category to better understand how respondents in each group felt welcome. For more information on the samples in both reports, see the Methodology sections for those reports.[119,120]

Additionally, the MFLS data referenced in both this report and the 2022 and 2023 reports are for active-duty family respondents only, but the present report includes all respondents to the CFI survey, including Veteran and spouse of Veteran respondents, National Guard family respondents, Reserve family respondents, DOD civilians, as well as active-duty family respondents. While MFLS reports often centralize active-duty family respondents' experiences, and those voices are central to this research, all respondents were included to get a broad understanding of each community as a whole. Future research focusing specifically on active-duty family respondents, particularly that focusing on families of color or LGBTQ+ families in these communities could provide a more nuanced understanding of those experiences. All surveys used a convenience sampling method, and therefore are not generalizable to the entire military family population, or even to diverse military families, but nonetheless provides valuable insights and highlights areas for further exploration.

Definitions

The CFI Regional Survey utilized a select-all, combination race/ethnicity question as recommended by the U.S. Census Bureau. Respondents of color include those who selected American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Black/African American, Hispanic or Latino/a/x or of Spanish origin, Middle Eastern or North African, or Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. They could also select white and/or a write-in option, but not as the only option. As a result, respondents of color in this report could select multiple racial/ethnic identities and their responses may therefore be reflected in multiple comparison groups when racial and ethnic groups are analyzed separately. For example, respondents identifying both as "Black" and "Asian" are counted in both analyses, but only once when aggregated "respondents of color" are reported. In prior MFLS and CFI reports, respondents of color were analyzed separately from white respondents in multiracial/multiethnic families and white respondents not in multiracial/multiethnic families.

For the purposes of this CFI report, white respondents in multiracial/multiethnic families were grouped with respondents of color and are referred to as "respondents in families of color." White respondents in a multiracial/multiethnic family only selected white (and no other answer choices) to the race/ethnicity select-all question and also reported they are a member of a multiracial/multiethnic (e.g., have a spouse or child of a different race/ethnicity). White respondents with multiracial/multiethnic family members may have different experiences from respondents of color and/or white respondents who do not have multiracial/multiethnic families.

[119] Blue Star Families (2024). 2023 Military Family Lifestyle Survey comprehensive report. https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/BSF_MFLS_Comp_Report_Full_Digital.pdf

[120] Blue Star Families (2023). 2022 Military Family Lifestyle Survey comprehensive report. https://bluestarfam.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/BSF_MFLS_Spring23_Full_Report_Digital.pdf

Respondents who only selected white (and no other answer choices) to the race/ethnicity select-all question and indicated they are not a member of multiracial/multiethnic family are referred to as white respondents for this report. This group serves as a comparison group in several analyses throughout the report.

Definitions for some groups varied across different data sources. In the 2024 Campaign for Inclusion survey, LGBTQ+ families refer to respondents who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender, or who indicated they had a family member who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. In the 2023 Military Family Lifestyle Survey, LGB respondents included those who identified as "Lesbian/Gay/Homosexual, Bisexual, or Sexual orientation not listed." In the 2022 Military Family Lifestyle Survey, LGBQ+ was defined as respondents who selected Yes to the question: Do you identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer (LGBQ+)?

Military affiliation was captured differently in this survey than in Blue Star Families' previous survey on military families of color ('The Diverse Experiences of Military and Veteran Families of Color'). Respondents were asked first to identify all their current affiliations with the military. For example, respondents could identify themselves as a "spouse/domestic partner of an active-duty service member," "National Guard service member," and/or "Veteran/retired service member." A second question then asked participants to select their primary military affiliation with the instructions that respondents would use this perspective to answer the survey. For the CFI Regional Survey and associated analyses, the report uses "all respondents" or "military-connected respondents" to include respondents who selected any of the listed military affiliations, including DOD civilians. Most prior CFI and MFLS reports focus on active-duty family respondents due to the frequent relocation and the potential subsequent impacts on families' sense of belonging. The historical analyses (data from the 2022 and 2023 MFLS) referenced in this report only include active-duty family respondents (active-duty service members and spouses of active-duty service members). In all cases, it is important to note that "family" responses do not refer to paired dyads.

Methodology

Respondents

After data cleaning, the final sample included 510 respondents who started the survey. Of those who answered the question about community (n=510), 44% lived in Davis County/Hill AFB, Utah; 30% lived in San Antonio, Texas; 19% lived in Hampton Roads, Virginia; and 7% lived in Ft. Gregg-Adams, Virginia. The full survey sample consisted of 51% spouses of active-duty service members, 22% Veterans/Retired service members, 15% spouses of Veterans/retired service members, 15% DOD civilians, 10% active-duty service members, 4% Reserve family respondents, and 3% National Guard family respondents. Roughly one-third (34%) of the sample were respondents of color, 14% were white respondents in multiracial/multiethnic families, and 52% were white respondents not in multiracial/multiethnic families. Overall, 20% of the sample were part of an LGBTQ+ family — meaning they or an immediate family member identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

Sample sizes listed throughout the report refer to the number of respondents who answered the relevant questions, and therefore vary throughout the report. For example, while there were 226 respondents in the Hill AFB and surrounding communities sample, just 150 answered a question about religious affiliation. Percentages reported are the proportion who selected an answer choice, of those who answered the question.

Limitations

This survey is not intended to be statistically representative of the experiences of all military-connected individuals, within or outside of the selected communities. The intention of using convenience sampling methods was so the survey and interviews could include representation of respondents of color and LGBTQ+ respondents — whose voices are often diluted in surveys. No weights are used in the data cleaning or analyses. Because of the strategy to maximize participation from respondents living in the selected communities, it is not possible to generalize the results to military-connected families in other communities. Some of the findings may be influenced by survey recruitment methods and sample demographics, so it is important to consider these findings carefully, as a signal for future research and exploration, rather than a complete picture of military-connected individuals.

While there was an intentional effort and outreach to ensure that the survey would be able to focus on diverse military families within the selected communities, the proportional differences in terms of military affiliation, racial/ethnic identities, gender, and/or sexuality vary across the board. The overall results from the survey and interviews can be influenced by the proportion of different groups of respondents. For example, in a community with a greater proportion of Veteran respondents, the average amount of time in the community may be greater and could contribute to different experiences and perceptions of feeling welcomed or a sense of belonging.

Methodology

These analyses are limited in comparisons across different cross-sectional surveys and data sources, due to both the wording of survey questions and the survey sample. As an example, prior BSF surveys have asked about belonging in varying ways, with different survey items and different Likert scale options. Similarly, as mentioned in 'Definitions,' measurement of respondent military affiliation, race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality have changed over different iterations of the Military Family Lifestyle Survey and other Blue Star Families' reports. Ultimately, for consistency, clarity, and legibility, detailed information about relevant statistics from this survey are included in the methodology and when appropriate, in footnotes. Most often, the wording of questions and answer options change to better reflect current and shifting military family experiences, and this, in addition to the potential shift in demographics of the sample in each survey and year, limits the comparability of the survey results from year to year.

It is important to note that differences may exist between racial/ethnic subgroups. For example, Hispanic/Latino/a/x respondents may be more comfortable in San Antonio, Texas, than other racial/ethnic groups. Similarly, there may be within-group differences among the LGBTQ+ family respondents. For example, a straight or cisgender respondent who has a gay child may have different experiences in the same community from a respondent who identifies as lesbian. Relatedly, it was not always possible to explore the perceptions of respondents who were both respondents in families of color and LGBTQ+ families due to sample size. These analyses and others are limited by small and/or disparate sample sizes or unequal variances in the data.

When looking at questions of belonging to the civilian community, a central focus of this research, it is important to note that the survey was focused on military family experiences and included a variety of questions about those unique experiences. Respondents may have, therefore, been primed to consider their military identity as the most prominent in their community experiences, potentially limiting the influence of additional identities, such as race/ethnicity, gender, and sexuality.

This research examines patterns of relationships between a handful of variables, all of which are also affected by many other factors beyond what is explored in these analyses. Respondents' military affiliation, branch, rank, military occupational specialty, the presence of children, spouse employment and/or income, and previous life experiences and perceptions are a few of many factors that may influence the perceptions, opinions, and choices explored in this research. This investigation is intended to explore whether a pattern of effects exists between a few selected variables and, therefore, does not control for other factors that may influence. Furthermore, this survey research is cross-sectional, and therefore cannot determine causality, but it signals a need for further research.

Blue Star Families
Campaign for Inclusion

Blue Star Families' Campaign for Inclusion reflects values of welcome and belonging at the heart of our work. Using our theory of change (listen, share, partner, & act), we empower stakeholders to implement best practices that help all military families feel welcomed and included on their journey.

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