



Military Families Outdoors

2024 Impact Report

Executive Summary

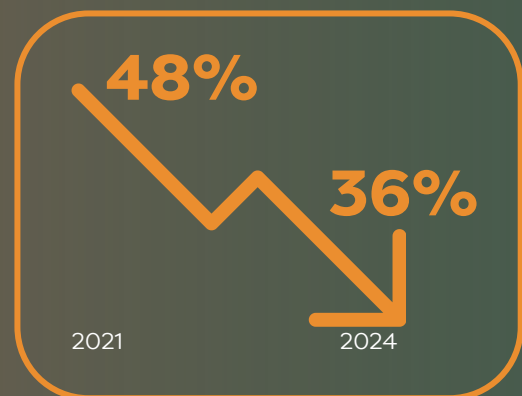
Military Families Outdoors (MFO) advances national security by strengthening the resilience and readiness of the All-Volunteer Force.

Healthy families mean resilient and retained service members. MFO creates stronger, more resilient and more connected families through low-cost, high-impact nature-based experiences that reduce stress, foster community, and encourage healthy lifestyles. These efforts provide upstream solutions to suicide prevention, mental health, and long term physical fitness. By promoting family readiness—a core element of force readiness—we are supporting the mission of the Department of Defense’s (DoD) strategic priorities and its core mission to train and equip service members to fight and win the nation’s wars.

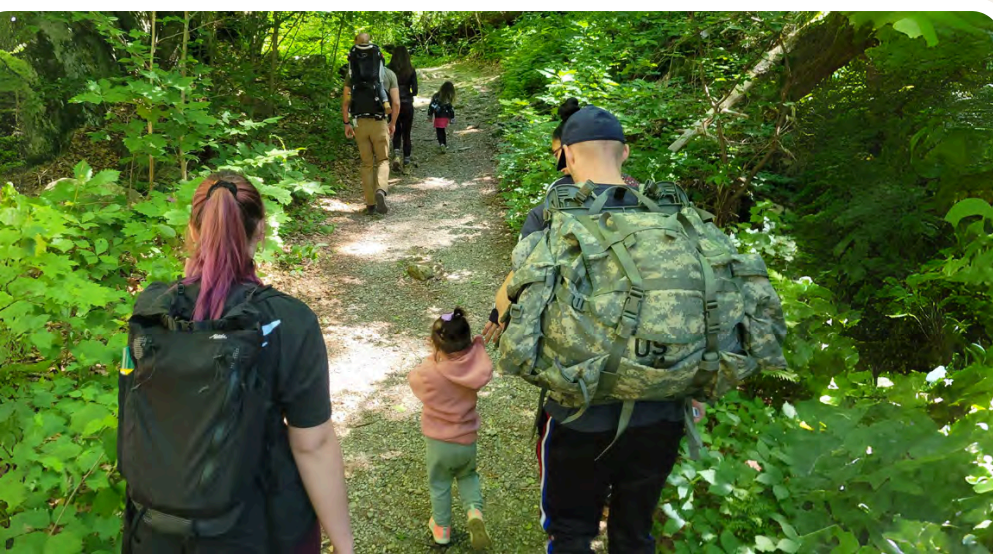
FINDINGS FROM BLUE STAR FAMILIES’ 2023 AND 2024 MILITARY FAMILY LIFESTYLE SURVEY SHOW THAT:

73% of active-duty family respondents report high stress

63% of active-duty service members cite family considerations as a key factor in their decision to continue military service



There was a significant drop in the percentage of military spouses who said they were satisfied with the military way of life between 2021-2024. If we can increase family satisfaction with the military lifestyle, then we can begin to reverse this trend and increase retention in the All Volunteer Force.



Executive Summary

MFO is committed to enhancing the health, well-being, and overall quality of life of active-duty military and their families by providing meaningful outdoor experiences. Through engaging programs in national parks, public lands, and waterways, MFO provides military families with the opportunity to experience the life-changing benefits of nature.

In its 2024 pilot year, MFO impacted over 9,000 participants, offering an array of outdoor experiences such as guided hikes, camping trips, environmental education programs, and water-based recreation. These activities promote stress reduction, community connection, physical well-being, and a lifelong connection to nature. These outcomes increase quality of life for military families and aid in the retention of service members in the All Volunteer Force. MFO is committed to making America healthy again.

MFO is administered by the Defense Health Agency (DHA) and the National Park Service (NPS), and led by Blue Star Families (BSF) in collaboration with leading outdoor organizations, including Wilderness Inquiry (WI), YMCA of the USA, and The Center for Health & Nature at Texas A&M University. These partnerships ensure high-quality, expert-led programming tailored to the needs of military-connected communities.



POPULATION

**Active-Duty Service Members (ADSM)
across all military Services
ADSM Families**

THE MFO PROGRAM SUCCESSFULLY PROMOTES:



ACCESS TO NATIONAL PARKS

Free annual America The Beautiful Military Pass to enter 430+ national parks, including over 100 sites with military history



HEALTH & WELLNESS

Outdoor activities reduce stress, increase cognitive skills, decrease anger & anxiety, promote sleep, and support physical fitness, and time in nature fosters spiritual well-being.



IMPROVED QUALITY OF LIFE

Shared outdoor experiences strengthen relationships, build community networks, and provide critical social support.



SERVICE & STEWARDSHIP

MFO encourages engagement in conservation and volunteer efforts, reinforcing values of stewardship, service, and connection to the outdoors.



Impact Snapshot

The Year 1 Evaluation Report for Military Families Outdoors (MFO) from the Center for Health and Nature at Texas A&M found that participants were highly satisfied with the program, reporting:¹



stronger family bonds



improved mental health

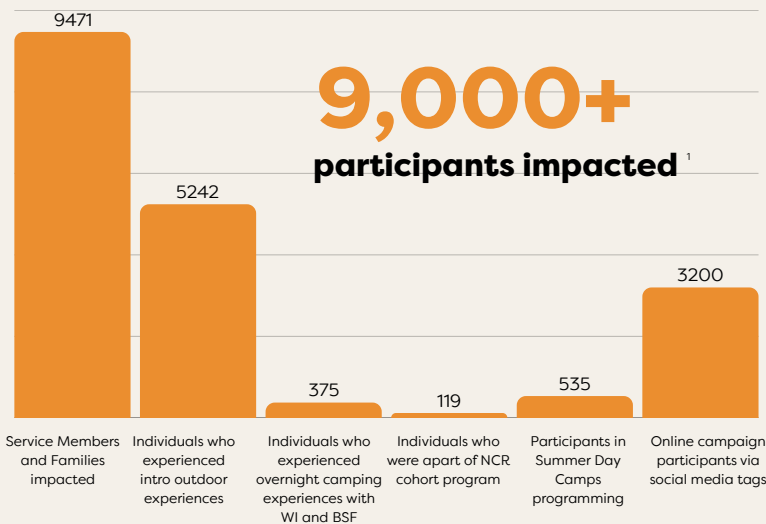


more social connections



increased access to outdoor experiences

● MFO Participation



“ **These events are priceless for us. It's such a wonderful way to help welcome families during a sometimes difficult transition.**

MFO Family¹

WILDERNESS INQUIRY'S POST-TRIP SURVEY SHOWED:³

92% of participants reported a greater sense of physical well-being

93% of participants felt more connected to themselves, their family, and/or the military community, AND more confident in their ability to access the outdoors independently and/or with their family

BLUE STAR FAMILIES' POST-PROGRAM OUTDOOR SURVEY REINFORCED THESE FINDINGS:²

98% of participants agreed they feel a sense of belonging in nature

98% agreed they gained a better understanding of how parks & outdoors support physical and mental health & well-being



2.1

and the program created a more connected community, increasing quality of life with military families—participants making an average of 2.1 new social connections as a result of their outdoor engagement



¹MFO Year 1 Evaluation Report
²Blue Star Families' post-program outdoor survey
³Wilderness Inquiry's post-trip survey