



APRIL 2024

MILITARY SPOUSE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE AFTER ACTION REPORT



PROGRAM BACKGROUND

In the summer of 2023 ADC launched the Military Spouse Community Leadership Initiative. Designed to integrate military spouses and their perspectives into local installation-community relations, ADC (in partnership with senior military spouses) selected the first cohort of nine spouses from across the country representing the Army, Air/Space Force and Marine Corps to take part in the program. These spouses joined their respective community and installation representatives at the 2023 Installation Innovation Forum (IIF) where they shared their insights on quality-of-life challenges, learned about installation-community partnerships, installation management and local economic development efforts.

Building on the success of inviting military spouses to IIF, ADC continued this partnership bringing the first cohort of spouses to attend the 2024 Defense Communities National Summit, an annual event held in Washington, DC that focuses on the key issues that are driving defense policy in DOD and Congress. Over three days, the first cohort of spouses were able to meet and network with decision-makers on Capitol Hill and at the Pentagon, learning first-hand how community leaders can impact defense policy and advocate for their communities and installations. This year's initiative was made possible by the sponsor, the Army and Air Force Exchange Service (AAFES).



“It begins with inviting the right people to the table. ADC has certainly done that by including military spouses in this year’s summit. I know they plan to continue this dialogue with spouses at their future gatherings, too.”

The spouses who attended the annual ADC Summit this year are leaders within their community – working to connect people with resources, to fill gaps where they see them and to tackle challenges. They are the doers! I call them the “over-through-under-around” people in your neighborhoods – they will figure out a way to get it done.”

– **Patty George, Spouse of the Chief of Staff of the Army**



MILITARY SPOUSES

ARMY

MAGGIE MALDONADO

Current Duty Station:
Schofield, Barracks, HI

LAURA MYER

Current Duty Station:
Fort Drum, NY

COURTNEY FLOHR

Current Duty Station:
Fort Cavazos, TX

AIR FORCE

JANET DRIGGERS

Current Duty Station:
Joint Base San Antonio, TX

LAUREN KIMBALL

Current Duty Station:
Ellsworth Air Force Base, SD

MARIA QUINN

Current Duty Station:
The Pentagon

Our Mission Continues.



ENGAGEMENT AT THE DEFENSE COMMUNITIES NATIONAL SUMMIT

While attending the National Summit, military spouses were able to share their knowledge, learn best practices about on-the-ground military-community partnerships and network with a wide variety of stakeholders. During the event, spouses had a combination of scheduled activities and time to “choose their own adventure,” attending whichever breakout sessions appealed to them most.

Caucus Policy Breakfast on Capitol Hill

Spouses traveled to Capitol Hill to attend ADC’s Caucus Policy Breakfast. There, they had the opportunity to connect with Congressional staffers, that represented over 100 congressional offices. Spouses were able to observe how defense community leaders engage with policy makers and advocate for their communities and installations.

Pentagon Visit

With the help of former Chief of Army Partnerships, Ivan Bolden (Ivan Bolden and Associates LLC), spouses visited the Pentagon to meet with key leaders, and visit with the Chief of Staff of the Army, Gen. Randy George. Spouses had the opportunity to sit down with the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy, Patty Barron, and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, Ron Keohane. The group had a productive conversation exchanging insights and sharing perspectives.



National Summit Participation

ADC wanted to ensure spouses felt included, welcomed, and championed throughout the event. The spouses were able to meet with the Air Force and Army Exchange Service representatives, the initiative's sponsor, to discuss their thoughts and opinions on quality-of-life challenges as part of a military family. The Exchange has programs specifically for military spouses and families and the spouses feedback proved invaluable as they discussed area's of improvement with key leaders. Ivan Bolden played a crucial role in helping advocate for the spouse's seat at the table, as he set up meetings with key leaders and held daily after action meetings to hear their feedback.



“It was a pleasure sitting down with this first cadre of spouses selected for ADC’s Military Spouse Community Leadership Initiative,” said Mrs. Patricia Barron, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy. “They were excellent ambassadors for all military spouses and not only shared their insights and concerns regarding military family readiness, but also engaged in meaningful conversations to explore solutions to keep our Service members and families ready and resilient. We thank ADC for reaching out so we could meet this cadre of motivated and enthusiastic military spouses.”

– Patricia Barron, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy

Feedback and Testimonials

Leadership Feedback



“Our meeting with the extraordinarily accomplished and dedicated spouses of the ADC’s Military Spouse Community Leadership Initiative was a true honor and privilege. Military spouses are the mainstays of our military communities, and their input into programs we manage here in the Department of Defense is crucial to supporting service members and their families who give so much to our nation’s defense. I particularly appreciate their insights on military spouse employment and career enhancement, food security, and providing quality, affordable child care for military families.”

– **Honorable Ron Keohane**, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs



“Spending time with the military spouse cohorts gave me time to reflect on how wonderfully talented these spouses are and how dedicated they are to ensuring the military spouse has a voice and a seat at the table. America’s military families are in “good hands” with spouses like these articulating to Senior leaders the challenges military families experience.”

– **Ivan Bolden**, Ivan Bolden and Associates, LLC; Military Spouse Community Initiative Host



“It was invaluable to meet the spouses attending the forum and learn more about their concerns and opportunities for further support. The sponsor breakfast was a terrific opportunity to engage informally. The investment in time and funding was well spent.”

– **Denise Hunter**, Vice President, Services Operations Army & Air Force Exchange Service Initiative Sponsor

Spouse Testimonials



“Spouses view military challenges and Quality of Life issues in different perspectives from their Active Duty spouses and they are often the Subject Matter Expert in handling these challenges as they come at us from move to move. By giving military spouses a seat at the table and allowing us a voice in the room, we can contribute to the solutions in creative ways. Military Leaders + Community Partners + Military Families = Quality of Life Solutions.”

– **Janet Driggers**, Military Spouse Initiative participant



“Bringing military spouses together with community partners and defense leaders creates a unique and critical triangulation of ideas and input. The ADC National Summit provided the environment for us to participate in discussions that are vital to military families’ ability to thrive.”

– **Laura Myer**, Military Spouse Initiative participant



Social Media Engagement



Lilly Janine Alexander (née Casillas) (She/Her) · 1st
Community Impact Manager at Upwards
(formerly WeeCare)
1h · 🌐

It is with immense privilege that I had the opportunity to represent **Upwards** at the **Association of Defense Communities (ADC)** National Summit last week, let alone connect with leaders in the **United States Department of Defense** and discuss our child care pilot program for the **United States Army Reserve**.

Thanks to **Ivan G. Bolden**, **Jessa Santangelo**, and **David Leinberger**. You are the best!



Heather S. Campbell MS, RDN · 2nd
Military Families Advocate | Military Food Insecurity
Subject Matter Expert | Consultant | 2022 AFI Eielson...
Request services
9h · Edited · 🌐

Last week I had the honor of attending the **Association of Defense Communities (ADC)** National Summit in Arlington, VA alongside our leaders from **The Operation Child Care Project**. I'm still unpacking the connections and all the learning in those few short days.

What continues to stand out to me the most from last week was this lunch with these fellow advocates where a seat was saved FOR me.

No striving.
No competition.
Just a seat saved at a table with fellow leaders that value me and what I bring to the table.

As an **#advocate** for **#militaryfamilies**, I cannot overstate the impact of knowing I'm seen and valued... and that a seat is saved at the table.

Stay tuned for all that this group of spouses is doing in each of their areas of influence. These women are daily moving the needle for our community.

Sharene Brown **Gina Allvin** (All-vin) **Leslie Janaros**
Olivia Burley **Maria Quinn** **Tara Brandt** **Kayla Corbitt**
Janet Driggers



Olivia Burley (She/Her) · 1st
Military Spouse Liaison at Washington State
Department of Veterans Affairs
5d · Edited · 🌐

This week, I represented **Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs's** Military Spouse Initiative when I attended the **Association of Defense Communities (ADC)**'s National Summit in Arlington, Virginia. I was honored to speak on a panel focused on identifying **#childcare** challenges for **#military** families and providing actionable and innovative recommendations around CDC Staffing, Resource and Data Sharing, Process Frustration, and Barriers to Access Care. **Kayla Corbitt** and **Maria Quinn** were panelists with me and are doing incredible work advocating in this space, and I walk out of each room I share with them a little bit smarter. Our session was moderated by **Sally Velez** who is serving as a Booz Allen DEPLOY Family Retention Fellow with **Blue Star Families** and did an incredible job making a complex topic manageable and keeping us on track. Reach out to me to hear our recommendations or for a link to the Child Care for Military Families in Washington State Report.

Other thoughts from this inspiring event:
- The focus on quality of life issues is meaningful. I'm grateful to **Matt Borron** for shining light on military families and spouses concerns and giving space for these discussions.
- Kudos for the **Association of Defense Communities (ADC)** and **Ivan G. Bolden** for championing **#militaryspouses** engagement through a cohort of spouses at this event. Their engagement and sharing is crucial to improving programs, policies, and legislation.
- I'm continually grateful for the advocacy of leaders like **Sharene Brown**, **Kathy Roth-Douquet**, **Gina Allvin**, **Leslie Janaros**, and **Janet Driggers**. Thank you for sharing and hearing bold ideas to address child care for military families and other quality of life concerns.
- The military spouse voices, including **Maggie Maldonado**, **Donna Segal Huneycutt**, @Lauren Kimball, **Heather S. Campbell MS, RDN**, and **Tara Brandt** as they shared their experiences were powerful. We had an incredible lunch filled with fast connections.
- This all took place during the Eclipse - and we showed it's possible to have fun while learning, listening, and advocating for **#militaryfamilies**.



Janet Driggers · 1st
JBSA/502d ABW Command Spouse/Five &
Thrive Ambassador/Mentor/Advocate for Milit...
6d · Edited · 🌐

I'm so thankful for organizations reaching out to military spouses and giving them a seat at the table ~ letting their voices be heard. I was honored to represent Military Spouses in DC this week!
#FiveAndThrive



Maria Quinn · Following
Military Child Care Coach ♦ Helping Families Design
Their Family Life
now · 🌐

I submit that if we meet **#militaryfamilies** exactly where they are at, they will serve longer, be more focused on their GPC missions and be able to create the family life they want and they deserve.

"I have seen military members who've had to step away [from their duties] because of child care issues that were significant," said [Mrs. Sharene] Brown, who leads Five & Thrive, a grassroots initiative to connect military families with community resources.

I couldn't agree more with Mrs. **Sharene Brown**. We see it every day. I am inspired by her unwavering commitment to families through **Five & Thrive** as they commit to creating resources and sharing stories through their monthly SITREPS. A special thank you to **Leslie Janaros**, **Marian Wilcox**, **Laura Jane Browning** and **Anne Parker**

I'm grateful to the **Association of Defense Communities (ADC)** for the opportunities they've provided me to learn, to connect and to explore ways to serve families. A special thank you to **Matt Borron**, **Kelsey Judd** and **Ivan G. Bolden**.

If you're interested in learning what we're up to as we serve leaders and families by creating and delivering child care education and support, please reach out! I'd love to connect with you.

Outcomes

- **Higher Level Engagement** - Spouses were able to speak with leaders from the Pentagon that hold positions that can directly affect military families and policy, and were given the opportunity to meet with them and share concerns.
- **Stronger Connections to Local Leaders** - Spouses were able to connect with local community members and congressional aides from their area.
- **Expanding Networks** - Spouses were able to use this experience to expand their network and further conversations that were initiated during the last conference, IIF.

Next Steps

The military spouse cohort at the 2024 National Summit was ADC's second Military Spouse Community Leadership Initiative activation. Overall, the initiative was a great success and there was strong support from all stakeholders for continuing this effort in the future.

- Provide spouses the opportunity to be recognized at the beginning of the next conference by having them introduce themselves on stage or create a video to play at a general session.
- Increase attendee engagement with the spouses by providing them the opportunity to host a panel, where they can share insights and answer questions.
- Create a pin or broach that spouses can wear throughout the conference that better identify their role, to help initiate conversation.
- Develop and conduct outreach to the next cohort of spouses:
 - Identify the next group of military spouses to participate in ADC's two annual events, the Installation Innovation Forum and the Defense Communities National Summit.
 - Allow and encourage previous cohort to return to ADC events and act as mentors to the new spouses.
 - Work to diversity the cohort culturally, and encourage participation from a male spouse.
- Create smaller round table opportunities for spouses, so they are able to have more intimate conversations with leaders and attendees.
- Hold monthly meetings for this military spouse group to keep spouses engaged with each other and to share ideas and resources.
- Expand the program by developing DOD support opportunities
- Develop working papers/proposals as follow-ons from each conference.



THIS INITIATIVE WAS MADE POSSIBLE
BY AAFES PARTNERSHIP