



2012 Annual Report



2012 Blue Star Families Annual Report Letter from the Founder & CEO

This report is available at www.bluestarfam.org

Dear Friends,

It is an honor and a privilege to be a part of a family that includes service members of all ranks including Guard and Reserve, wounded warriors, transitioning veterans, survivor families-and their family members. Blue Star Families is the largest chapter-based organization for military families in the country and because we include the civilians who care too — every one of our programs absolutely depends on the partnership of caring civilian organizations, institutions, and individuals.

In 2012, our third year of operation, we cultivated continued growth that resulted in enough strength and stability for us to begin to look to the process of further developing our work on behalf of military families, and to planning seriously for the future.

We have an extraordinary and dedicated staff, almost all of whom are military family members. They cope with deployments, moves, births and adoptions, injuries, transitions out of the military-indeed the full spectrum of experiences faced by military family members-all while managing their incredible enthusiasm and dedication to our effort. In 2012 we grew to 36 talented and passionate national staff members and contract employees, who for example, design and analyze our annual military survey, manage our blog and social media efforts, and oversee public relations, membership and programs.

The heart of Blue Star Families is fostering leadership in the military family community through volunteer and leadership opportunities and in 2012 we grew to **45,000 members** and 32 chapters across the U.S.

Blue Star Families reached millions of people in 2012. Military families are using social media as one of their primary sources for information about current events and they see us as a trusted source for both BSF and national military event information — the fact that our website received more than 325,000 views is proof positive of this. We also saw military families embrace social media in 2012 as our platforms — Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram grew by **500%**.

Nearly half a million military family members attended museums for free over the summer through our enormously popular Blue Star Museums program. Nearly 24 million hours of service were pledged through our Operation Honor Corps program, many collected during White House Holiday parties, where guests to the Executive Mansion were invited to pledge service hours as they arrived.

The First Lady also supported the launch of our Blue Star Theatres program, initiated with 55 theatres nationwide pledging discounted tickets and special programming aimed at military families. Over 100,000 free, new, high quality children's books have been given directly to military children, schools and libraries through Books on Bases since the program's inception. And we were selected as a key partner under the "Military Family" pillar for "Got Your 6." Got Your 6 is a campaign led by the entertainment industry to build support for veterans and military families in the country.



Our Military Family Lifestyle Survey was released in May with the Senate and House Military Family Caucuses, and again received wide coverage in media. It highlighted the keen concern about employment in our community, and thus led to a concentrated focus for the organization. In 2012, we launched an important partnership with the Chamber of Commerce Foundation on spouse employment, and developed "Making Volunteerism Work for You," a toolkit to help spouses translate extensive volunteer experience into resume language. We launched and will grow the Blue Star Spouse Networks as an outlet for milspouse professional networking and grass roots policy influence. Many more plans for education, training, and job placement will launch in 2013.

There is much more to share with you, and it is my hope that you will read about all of our programs and help us to support, connect and empower military families. Thank you for your interest in our organization. We welcome any questions or comments about our work, and hope that if we don't count you among our members, supporters or partners already, we soon will.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kathy Roth-Douquet".

Kathy Roth-Douquet
Co-Founder and CEO
Blue Star Families



We Are Military Families Supporting One Other

Blue Star Families was formed in 2009 by a group of military spouses to raise awareness of the challenges of military family life with our leaders and within our civilian communities. Since then, Blue Star Families has grown to include spouses and families from all services and all walks of life, including National Guard, Reserve and veterans, as well as civilians who strongly support us.

There are currently millions of active duty, Reserve and National Guard members serving our country. Each of them has a family, including parents, siblings, partners, children and friends who participates in the service member's sacrifice, but is often overlooked by government and civilian organizations. Because those in military service make up just one percent of the country's total population, most Americans do not have first-hand knowledge of the military or the military family experience. Blue Star Families aims to bridge that gap and help our military families make the best life for themselves through a unique chapter-based approach. It's this **boots-on-the-ground strategy** that has enabled us to personally touch spouses and family members at both US and overseas bases.

We Are Supporting, Connecting and Empowering Military Families

At its core, Blue Star Families is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping military families across America. But it's BSF's volunteers and staff who live on and near military bases and are a part of our community who truly bring our purpose to bear.

And to achieve the mission to support, connect and empower, BSF hosts interactive programs, events, morale-boosting activities and children's literacy initiatives that communicate the public's often-unexpressed appreciation for everything military families do every day.

We also work with the Department of Defense and senior members of our local, state and federal government, including Congress and the White House, to bring military families' most important issues to light.





Our History.

During the height of the war in 2008, our forces were heavily engaged in combat or supporting our troops. Unfortunately, there was little being done at home for our military families. That's when a group of military spouses gathered to discuss how to not only empower military families everywhere to speak but to engage our civilian community with their local military families. Blue Star Families was born and the organization has since grown to 32 chapters across the country and more than 16,000 Facebook likes in 2012. Blue Star Families also provides civilian and military leadership, as well as elected officials on a national and local level, with unfiltered feedback from military families.

Support.

Blue Star Families and our worldwide membership support military families of all branches, ranks and backgrounds through the unique challenges of military service. BSF and our local chapters also reach out to the larger civilian population to support military families.



Connect.

Through our local chapters and our vibrant online community, Blue Star Families connects military families locally and internationally. Our outreach into the civilian community also helps bridge the gap between military and civilian life and brings families together.

Empower.

With our wide array of resources, research into military family life and partner organizations, Blue Star Families empowers military families to create the best personal and family life possible.





Military Family Lifestyle Survey

Widely regarded as the gold standard among military family surveys, the **2012 Military Family Lifestyle Survey** drew 5,125 participants, and once again revealed military families' top and most pressing concerns. This valuable insight into the daily lives of our military families, friends and caregivers revealed military pay/benefits, changes in retirement benefits, and spouse employment opportunities are top issues. Additionally we found many were concerned about their children's education and well-being. Armed with these results, BSF can develop programs to directly address the issues cited.

For example, the 2012 survey showed that 68% of spouses felt that being a military spouse had a negative impact on their ability to pursue a career. **Blue Star Careers** addresses this by offering a wide range of programs designed to make the military life work for spouses, and in 2012 the programs supporting military family member career and educational goals were further expanded.

An online tool, "Making Volunteerism Work For You," was developed for spouses, many of whom need assistance translating extensive volunteer experience into relevant civilian resume language. The Toolkit shows military spouses how to leverage their existing volunteer and military life experiences and assemble a professional resume. It also identifies resources by career type and addresses frequently asked questions such as 'how do I discuss the advantages of military spouse experience in an interview?'

Available through the Blue Star Families website, the Toolkit was featured at Hiring our Heroes and other career orientated fairs throughout the year. This resume toolkit is unique and practical because it's the only resource that is based on the needs military spouses have themselves identified as critical to and currently missing from existing military spouse employment initiatives.

Of note, the Military Family Lifestyle Survey was cited in the February 2012 Joint U.S. Department of Defense and U.S. Department of the Treasury Report, "Supporting our Military Families: Best Practices for Streamlining Occupational Licensing Across State Lines."

81% of military spouse respondents volunteered in the past year. However, 34% did not consider their volunteer experience relevant to their job search ...





Blue Star Museums

In partnership with the National Endowment for the Arts, Joining Forces, MetLife Foundation and museums across the country, this national program has exploded from just 950 participating museums in the first year, to nearly **1,900** in 2012 — double the number of participating museums around the country. An estimated 475,000 military family members visited a Blue Star Museum in 2012, enjoying free admission from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

From every corner of the nation, Blue Star Museums has flung open the doors to history, art, science, music, architecture and literature influencing perhaps the next great jazz musician, painter or writer. The gift of the arts is one that connects all of us, and thanks to Blue Star Museums, milfams can find respite in the halls of museums and inspiration from the great works of art. We applaud the arts community for extending this opportunity to our families and look forward to it each summer.



The **Way Cool Creativity Contest** awards *way cool* prizes like cameras, e-readers and savings bonds to children ages 6-17, who submit artwork inspired by a Blue Star Museum visit. Submissions have included glass pieces, a temporary tattoo, drawings, YouTube videos, and drawings.

Since the contest began, Blue Star Museums and the unique projects created by talented military kids have been featured in hundreds of media outlets across the country.



And each year, milkids impress us, not only with their designs but also their enduring positive attitude and palpable excitement about Blue Star Museums.



When **Blue Star Theatres** debuted in September 2012, it was immediately recognized by First Lady Michelle Obama who said in a letter, *“By participating in the Blue Star Theatres initiative, fifty-five theatres from across our country have dedicated themselves to honoring and supporting our military families, and I am inspired by their commitment to those who sacrifice so much for our Nation.”*

Thanks to Theatre Communications Group with leadership support from MetLife Foundation, by the end of its inaugural year, nearly 80 theatres offered special programming or discounted tickets for active duty personnel, veterans and their families.



Books on Bases

Launched in 2009, Blue Star Families' Books on Bases program brings the power of books to military children and their schools, positively impacting their lives through reading. Generous partners and sponsors including The Walt Disney Company, Random House, BAE Systems, First Book, Sleeping Bear and Operation Paperback, donate books to military children, base libraries, Department of Defense schools and military-impacted public schools. In 2012 over 100,000 books were donated to military children and military impacted schools and libraries.

During 2012, more than **30** interactive events were held near military bases across the country. Celebrity readers, base leadership, teachers and parents celebrated our milkids as they journeyed through stories and tales to fanciful places and just for a moment to a world where camouflage and deployments are nonexistent.



White Oak Conference

Blue Star Families hosted the America Joins Forces with Military Families Summit Series at the White Oak Conference Center in Jacksonville, Florida in January 2010 and again February 2012. Over 55 participants from key military family and government organizations attended both Summits. Attendees included representatives from the White House, The American Red Cross, United Service Organizations (USO), Service Nation, Veterans Innovation Center, the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the National Security Council and the Senate Armed Services Committee, The Howard Gilman Foundation and others. Participants discussed innovative public-private strategies to meet the needs of military families. Through the White Oak Summit Series, these diverse entities can discuss opportunities for joint initiatives and a common approach to support military families and transitioning veterans in a productive and collaborative environment. Contributions from the conference led to the First Lady's Joining Forces Initiative, the Military Community Blueprint initiative now housed at Points of Light and championed by 40 non-profits, and preliminary work on a formal collaborative body for nonprofits in the military family field.



MilKidz Club

One of Blue Star Families most popular programs, MilKidz Club, allows our military children to take advantage of unique programming, events and platforms to share their experiences and perspectives. This club includes social, volunteer, educational, and support opportunities for the children of all ranks and branches of military — including Guard and Reserve.

MilKidz Club was launched in April 2012 at the Sierra Club's Celebration of the Military Child Outdoors. Hundreds of military family members from all branches attended the outdoor extravaganza. MilKidz Club also partnered with the National Wildlife Federation for a family-friendly Hike and Seek at Seneca State Park. MilKidz Club closed out 2012 with a KidZone event, jointly produced with Health Net.





Operation Honor Corps

Blue Star Families' Operation Honor Corps is a major avenue for bringing the civilian and military communities together, and for civilians to express their appreciation for service members and their families. Launched in 2011, Operation Honor Corps encompasses Operation Honor Cards, enabling both large organizations and individuals to make significant pledges of volunteer service.

In 2012, Operation Honor Corps (OHC) received pledges of nearly twenty-four million volunteer service hours dedicated in honor of our nation's military and their families. Inspired by Joining Forces, an initiative by the First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden to garner widespread support for military families, this powerful program connects civilians and military families and betters our nation through service.

Blue Star Families Operation Honor Corps added new partnerships with major national and regional organizations in 2012. Those partners include the Boy Scouts and the Girl Scouts of America, the USO, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, American Legion Auxiliary, American Red Cross, Old Dominion University, Operation Gratitude, Lions Club International, Yellow Ribbon Fund America, Mission Continues, NASCAR Foundation, Give An Hour, Habitat for Humanity, Bank of America, Code of Support, Blue Shield of CA, Points of Light: Community Blueprint — all of whom pledged service hours as a way to recognize milfams.

Operation Appreciation (OpApp) encourages volunteers to make a personal connection with those who sacrifice so much for our country through the written word. Civilians write letters to military families, service members and veterans to say thanks. It's a personal and touching way to recognize the challenge that modern milfams face today. In 2012, more than **33,000** letters of thanks were mailed to military family members — nearly three times the volume in 2011.



Supporting. Connecting. Empowering.

Blue Star Families grew to more than **45,000 members** by the end of 2012 while our chapters and volunteers held more than 300 events. Blue Star Families' social media strategy is pragmatic and smart, with a fresh approach through contests, photos, information sharing and community building. Because of this approach, Blue Star Families' social media reach - 325,000 views to our website, 25,000 Facebook and Twitter followers — grew more than 500%. All together, Blue Star Families reached millions of people in 2012. Blue Star Families continues to add innovative and compelling strategies and programs, such as Blue Star Careers, and grow our existing programs.

Blue Star Families created the MembersConnect portal in order to better engage and connect volunteers, chapter directors, and program managers. MembersConnect is an interactive resource for sharing programs, tools and resources that power Blue Star Families volunteer networks at both the community and national level. Blue Star Families staff and volunteers were involved in more than 30 events in 2012, including our annual Holiday Party at Walter Reed for the families of wounded warriors. This year, more than 175 volunteers participated in events.

Blue Star Families' **media coverage** also continued to grow with interviews, mentions and op-eds in hundreds of media outlets including NBC, CNN, NPR, Lifetime, Fox News, and *The New York Times*. Blue Star Families continues to regularly place essays in military-oriented outlets such as the Department of Defense Family Matters Blog, military.com, the Veterans Administration blog, and *Military Spouse Magazine*.

Blue Star Families continues to increase its reach through the visibility and expertise of the national staff. BSF has been featured in dozens of hearings, conferences and panels, such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce National Credentialing Summit: The Military Community, Points of Light Institute, Facebook Live, and the National Conference on Volunteerism, among many others.



Pictured: Dr. Meg Harrell, RAND; CEO Kathy Roth-Douquet; Mrs. Patty Shinseki, MCEC Advisor and others

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It's a well-known fact that a fulfilling military family lifestyle is not possible without the encouragement, support and resources provided by fellow military families and the many organizations devoted to supporting us. The same can be said for the success of Blue Star Families. BSF is proud to be partnered with strong organizations and is appreciative of the generous contributions from the following companies, foundations, organizations and individuals.

\$25,000 and Above

BAE Systems

Blue Shield of California Foundation

CJM Foundation

The Walt Disney Company

George Link Foundation

Health Net

Hunt Companies

Met Life Foundation

United HealthCare Services, Inc.

US Chamber of Commerce Foundation

Wounded Warrior Project



2012 Statement of Financial Position

Assets

Current assets

Cash and cash equivalent	\$ 531,581
Accounts receivable	-
Undistributed books	176,516
Prepaid expenses	<u>1,458</u>
	\$ 709,555

Liabilities and Net Assets

Current liabilities

Accounts payable	\$ 4,711
Accrued compensation and payroll taxes	<u>73,320</u>

Total liabilities (all current)	<u>78,031</u>
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Net assets

Unrestricted (deficit)	(248,312)
Temporarily restricted	<u>879,836</u>

Total net assets	<u>\$ 631,524</u>
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	\$ 709,555
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Blue Star Families continued its impressive growth in 2012, touching the lives of millions of people, military and civilian, across the U.S. At the same time, our programs have grown in depth and reach with the support of our network of dedicated volunteers. The generosity of individuals, foundations and corporate partnerships also worked to effect real change for military families.

2012 also saw the beginnings of Blue Star Families' aggressive plan to grow our membership around the country. Through innovative partnerships with corporate and nonprofit organizations, Blue Star Families is bringing events and programs to more military families, including more National Guard and Reserve families. Blue Star Families is also expanding our work to empower military families as volunteers and professionals, using the potential of military family networks to expand the reach of our membership and programs.

Contact Blue Star Families

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