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Creating Connections

National Volunteer Organization Military Spouse Advocacy Network
Builds Camaraderie and Community Through Mentorship

PAGE 12

Cover Story

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National Volunteer Organization Military Spouse Advocacy Network
Builds Camaraderie and Community Through Mentorship

It is no secret that military spouses face an array of crushing challenges, including frequent moves, employment instability and career disruption, social isolation and loneliness, mental health issues and emotional strain, and access to reliable information and resources to help them navigate different life stages and experiences. One national nonprofit organization—the Military Spouse Advocacy Network—is building connections, camaraderie, and a sense of community to help military spouses overcome these overwhelming obstacles.

“MSAN envisions a world where every military spouse is empowered, connected and supported with the mentorship, resources and leadership opportunities needed to thrive, strengthening military families and communities worldwide,” explains Verence Castillo, founder, chief executive and president of the volunteer organization, who adds that MSAN

creates “a community where every military spouse regardless of branch, location, life stage, or circumstance has immediate access to knowledge, mentorship and community they need. A global, interconnected network of trusted and trained peer mentors, reliable partners and accessibility to educational and leadership opportunities and resources allows MSAN to further transform the military spouse experience from one marked by isolation, loneliness and uncertainty to one of conviction, connection, and opportunity.”

“Military families today face a unique combination of challenges that stem from the demands of service life,” Castillo points out. “Frequent relocations often disrupt careers, education, and support systems, making it difficult for spouses to build stability or maintain professional growth. This constant transition can also lead to social isolation, especially for

those who are new to military life or stationed far from family and familiar communities. Many military spouses struggle with limited access to consistent, reliable information and resources. Navigating benefits, mentorship, education and employment opportunities, or local support can feel overwhelming. These challenges are often compounded by the emotional strain of deployments, separations, and the uncertainty that comes with the military life."

Castillo's understanding of the challenges faced by military spouses is rooted in personal experience. "My first experience leaving my home was at the age of 16 when my family immigrated from Mexico to the United States," she recalls. "When I married my husband Tony, now an Air Force retiree, I had to leave everything behind, to move again and again as my husband was stationed from place to place." Now married for 26 years, the couple have two sons, aged 25 and 19.

"After years of struggling to build camaraderie within the military spouse community, I saw the opportunity to be a mentor to fellow military spouses and fight isolation, know that they were not alone in this, become knowledgeable and empowered," she points out. "The vision grew and I officially established the Military Spouse Advocacy Network 501(c)(3) non-profit in 2014 with the mission to educate, empower and support military spouses from Day One."

To support her goals, Castillo earned her bachelor's degree in

social psychology, noting, "I was born to help people and find ways to improve the gaps that society faces...I love it!"

MSAN's Military Spouse Mentorship Program offers 24/7 peer-to-peer mentorship for all military spouses seeking support. Mentors assist spouses at every stage of their journey from navigating the military lifestyle and accessing services, to career guidance, transition support, and connecting families to essential resources. The organization's Mentorship-HUB functions as a dynamic virtual education, resource and fellowship platform, where members receive access to educational videos, weekly live chats with MSAN staff and community members, spouse community groups for connection and discussion, a comprehensive military spouse toolkit, online connection to our MSAN Branch Mentors group, HUB community groups, chat functions, and much more.

"Across the year, our online Mentorship-HUB reached and provided indirect mentorship to 3,050 military spouses through a wide range of interactive mentorship experiences, including community groups, HUB chats, live events, and educational modules," Castillo states. "Through MSAN's dynamic blend of learning and community-building opportunities, the Mentorship-HUB hosted 52 live virtual events, giving mentees direct access to the Mentorship Team and specialized advocates all while creating a space for open, candid conversations about issues affecting the military community."

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Castillo outlines MSAN’s services as a three-step program:

Step One: Military spouses use the Military Spouse Mentorship-HUB to receive educational support. “They have the availability to ask questions and receive mentorship through our 24/7 chat option, educational videos, training, courses, webinars and toolkits in areas such as Career & Employment, Financial Readiness, Deployment & Reintegration, Mental Health & Wellness, Education and New Military Spouse. If more support or mentorship is needed, they go to Step Two.”

Step Two: Military spouses request to be assigned a mentor to receive peer-to-peer mentorship 24/7.

Step Three: Military spouses have the opportunity to apply for the training inside MSAN’s Leadership Institute for Military Spouses and establish and grow their ideas and initiatives to enhance their local communities. “The focus of the program is to select a diverse group of military spouses to receive training from Ivy league schools such as the National Preparedness Leadership Initiative (NPLI) at Harvard University, and the University of Notre Dame,” she explains. Participants engage in challenging conversations, receive state-of-the-art resources, network, and learn from industry leaders to better serve their community as leaders.

“The Leadership Institute for Military Spouses by MSAN (LIMS) equips and empowers military spouses to become influential leaders and advocates within their communities,” Castillo notes. “Through comprehensive training (Emerging Leaders Program, Military Spouse Development Program, Ethical Leadership, Mental Health Ally certifications and Mental Wellness Program), mentorship, and collaboration, LIMS develops spouses’ leadership capacity, strengthens their ability to drive positive change, and fosters a culture of service, mentorship, and advocacy with a robust alumni network.


“As of 2025, the Leadership Institute for Military Spouses has graduated 498 military spouses, offered nine workshops and

4,042 military spouses were interested in the leadership training offered,” she adds.

In addition to its global virtual reach, MSAN’s Mentorship-HUB is expanding through strategic state-level initiatives. “MSAN is actively partnering with states to establish localized Mentorship-HUB models such as the successful Alabama Mentorship-HUB, to strengthen community integration, increase access to region-specific resources, and build sustainable leadership pipelines at the state level,” Castillo says. “These initiatives allow MSAN to tailor support to local military communities while maintaining connection to the broader national and global network.

MSAN serves new and seasoned spouses from every branch of the armed forces, including the National Guard, Reserve, and post-9/11 veterans/retirees, as well as caregivers and Gold Star surviving spouses; the organization is funded through grants, corporate sponsorships, and individual donations.

“Guided by a diverse team of volunteers who represent all aspects of military life, we stand as a trusted, knowledgeable network committed to ensuring that every military spouse has the support they need to thrive,” Castillo remarks. “By building a global, interconnected network of trained peer mentors and trusted resources, MSAN helps shift the military spouse experience from fragmented and isolating to connected, empowered, and opportunity-driven.

Castillo says mentorship is the key to unlocking military spouses’ potential: “When military spouses have access to mentorship, they gain not only practical guidance but also a sense of belonging and shared understanding,” she declares. “Creating centralized, trusted sources of information can also reduce confusion and empower families to make informed decisions. Transforming the experience from one of isolation and uncertainty into one of connection and opportunity is not just beneficial, it’s essential to the resilience of military families worldwide.” 

In Their Own Words

Participants in the Military Spouse Advocacy Network's Leadership Institute for Military Spouses (LIMS) say the program has been an invaluable resource for them. Here are some of their comments:

"This course was exactly what I needed to help sharpen my leadership skills and make my flame for serving my military community burn brighter."

"This program equipped me with the clarity I needed in order to have a greater impact for our community. I will use what I learned to work towards a world where there is service without sacrifice of connection and fulfillment at home."

"This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be with some of the most incredible people I have ever met. I have always felt very blessed to be a part of our military community."

"The information and resources for mental health was needed: I thought I knew enough, but didn't realize how much more was out there and how it all entwined with our health in so many ways. Full circle. Thank you so much for this valuable course."

"My experience with MSAN has been transformative. The program created a space where I felt both challenged and supported, and where ethical leadership was not just taught but truly lived. Through the sessions, I deepened my understanding of how to lead with integrity, courage, and empathy, qualities that have already strengthened my work and my relationships."

"This program was more than just a Thursday of learning about leadership. It was a journey! A journey of self-discovery and reflection of how important community is due to the unique challenges of being a military spouse. The shared experiences, honesty, and support made it clear that leadership isn't only about what we do, it's about who we are."

"Helping others has always been important to me, and now I have the tools to make sure I can provide quality support to those who need it. The Mental Health Ally training taught me how to recognize when someone is struggling and the best ways to respond with empathy and care. I plan to use these skills in my personal and professional roles to create a safe environment where people feel comfortable asking for help. I am committed to listening every day without judgment and connecting others with the resources they need. This training has given me the confidence and practical knowledge I need, and I'm ready to put it to good use to make a real difference."

"I plan to implement this training by promoting a more open and supportive environment where mental health is part of everyday conversations. I'll use what I learned to recognize when someone might need support, listen without judgment, and connect them to helpful resources. Whether it's with students, coworkers, or fellow spouses, I want to help reduce stigma and make others feel seen, heard, and supported."

"I was very nervous and had many questions about moving and supporting my spouse, my mentor guided me through all this and made sure I was prepared every step of the way! I'm glad she was there with quick replies and resources whenever I needed it."

"My mentor was very supportive and helpful. She provided answers for all my questions and requests. I really enjoyed having conversations with her over chat on the HUB, emails and live meetings. She is very nice and friendly. Best mentor ever!"



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