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# Family

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The Magazine For Military Families

## kids' stuff

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# Kids' Stuff

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Some of the most heart-wrenching factors surrounding deployment are issues involving family and children. One national non-profit organization, Our Military Kids, is helping ease some of those burdens by providing extracurricular "activity awards" to children ages 1 to 18 of deployed National Guard troops; deployed Reserve service members; and post-9/11, combat-wounded, ill, or injured veterans in treatment.

"Our Military Kids activity awards build children's self-confidence, enhance family wellness, and strengthen a shared sense of community during an otherwise difficult time in their lives," explains Michelle "Chelly" Criqui, marketing and communications director for the organization. "The military families we support typically do not receive the same number of resources as active-duty military families. Most do not live on or near a military base or in what they would consider a military community. Our Military Kids aims to provide these families with a resource that not only eases a financial

burden during a difficult time, but helps to enhance overall family wellbeing, connect them to their local and military communities, and help them feel seen."

Our Military Kids was founded in 2004 by Linda Davidson and Gail Fertel as a direct response to the increased National Guard and Reserve deployments following the September 11th terrorist attacks in 2001. Both civilians, Davidson and Fertel wanted to support the military families in their community and discovered that most deploying soldiers' wish was simply that their families and children were looked after while they were away.

Our Military Kids began as a pilot program for one Virginia Army National Guard unit based out of Winchester, VA in 2004, and it quickly expanded to support the families of deployed National Guard and Reserve service members from all 50 states and four territories. In 2008, Our Military Kids expanded its program once



again to include the children and teens of post-9/11, combat-injured, ill, or wounded veterans from any branch of service.

Criqui points out that Our Military Kids has had a tremendous impact, stating, “20 years later, Our Military Kids has provided more the 95,000 extracurricular activity awards worth \$34 million to children and teens across the country and is continuing this momentum into the future to continue to support every eligible military child.”

Our Military Kids is a 501(c)(3) national non-profit organization funded solely through the generosity of American citizens, including individual donors, foundations, and corporate giving campaigns.

That organization’s impact includes Criqui and her siblings as well. “I am a military kid myself, as my father served almost 35 years in the U.S. Army,” she relates. “Part of my father’s career was spent serving with the U.S. Army National Guard. During my senior year of high school, he deployed overseas for a year with the National Guard. This left myself, my mother, and my three younger sisters at home. During this time, my mother found out about Our Military Kids through a soldier in my father’s unit. I was rowing on my high school’s crew team that year, an expensive sport for our family, especially that year. Our Military Kids came in and covered the costs of my uniforms and all other fees associated with the crew team.

“My younger sisters weren’t in any activities after school, so Our Military Kids gave them the chance to choose something they’d always wanted to do,” she continues. “Two of them chose horseback riding camp, and one chose voice lessons in Washington, D.C.—with all expenses covered by Our Military Kids activity awards.

“After I graduated college, I started volunteering for Our Military Kids—which is headquartered in Oakton, VA, close to where I live in Alexandria, VA—and eventually joined the team full-time in 2018,” she adds.

The organization’s “Deployed Program” is for the families of deployed or stateside-activated National Guard and Reserve service members:

- Children and teens (ages 1-18) of service members deployed with the National Guard or Reserve for 90-180 days are eligible for one \$300 activity grant per child.
- Children and teens of service members deployed with the National Guard or Reserve for 180+ days are eligible for two \$300 activity awards per child.



- The “Combat Injured Program” is for the families of post-9/11, combat-injured, ill, or wounded veterans from any branch of service who are currently undergoing treatment: Children and teens (ages 1-18) of post-9/11 Veterans in treatment for combat-related injuries are eligible to receive one \$300 activity grant every six months for a total of four activity awards per child, plus a fifth FLEX grant that is available at any time.

Eligible families simply need to fill out the Our Military Kids online application (found at [www.ourmilitarykids.org/apply](http://www.ourmilitarykids.org/apply)) and provide the required documentation, including a form of identification for the child and cost information for each child’s chosen activity for either the Deployed Program or the Combat Injured Program. After filling out an application and providing the required documentation, families will receive an email letting them know that their child’s activity grant was approved.

“We then mail out a ‘Top Secret’ award packet to each child with a check made out to their chosen activity provider enclosed, as well as a personalized award certificate recognizing them for their support during their parent’s deployment or treatment, dog tags, an Our Military Kids patch, and other goodies to share our appreciation for their strength and sacrifice during this time,” Criqui explains. “Families then hand-deliver the grant check to their child’s chosen activity provider.

“The goal of Our Military Kids is to enhance overall military family well-being via extracurricular activity awards,” Criqui adds. “These not only keep children active, healthy, and thriving, but help their families connect to their communities and feel seen during an otherwise difficult time.” 🇺🇸

**For more information, visit the group’s website at:**  
[www.ourmilitarykids.org](http://www.ourmilitarykids.org)



# courageous kids

Every April Our Military Kids holds a “*Courageous Kids Contest*” in celebration of the Month of the Military Child. The contest spotlights 12+ children and teens who excelled as leaders and role models while a parent deployed with the National Guard or Reserve or received care for post-9/11, combat-related injuries.

A few of this year’s honorees include:

## Matthew

**Matthew (9) from New Jersey was selected as a winner of the 5th Annual Our Military Kids Courageous Kids Contest in the U.S. Navy Reserve category.**

Matthew is the child of a U.S. Navy Reservist who deployed in 2024. During his father’s deployment, Matthew stepped up as a leader on his hockey team and faced each obstacle with courage and resilience. In the future, Matthew aspires to become a jet pilot in both the Navy and the Air Force, the CEO and President of a company, the President of the United States, and to “play any of my piano compositions to an audience.”

“When I was three, I learned how to play piano,” Matthew said. “I asked if I could learn ‘Anchors Aweigh,’ the Navy anthem. Not only did I learn to play it on the piano, but I would parade around my house with my drums and cymbals chanting the Navy song!”

## Xavier

**Xavier (16) from Georgia was selected as the winner of the 5th Annual Our Military Kids Courageous Kids Contest in the National Guard - Combat Injured Veteran category.**

Xavier’s mother is a U.S. Army National Guard veteran in treatment for combat-related injuries. Throughout her treatment and multiple cross-country moves, Xavier has stepped up within his family and community through his passion for cooking and helping others. In the future, Xavier aspires to open his own café, run a triathlon, and travel the world.

## Ace

**Ace (13) from Pennsylvania was selected as the winner of the 5th Annual Our Military Kids Courageous Kids Contest in the U.S. Army National Guard category.**

Ace is a student-athlete who served as a role model and leader within his family and wrestling and football teams throughout his father’s deployment with the Army National Guard. In the future, Ace aspires to join the military, wrestle at Penn State, and work in sports broadcasting.

**OUR  
MILITARY  
KIDS**

For more stories of these and other amazing kids, please visit:

[www.ourmilitarykids.org/contest-winners](http://www.ourmilitarykids.org/contest-winners)

## Ashley

**Ashley (7) from California was selected as the winner of the 5th Annual Our Military Kids Courageous Kids Contest in the U.S. Navy – Combat Injured Veteran category.**

Ashley’s mother is a U.S. Navy veteran in treatment for combat-related injuries. During this time, Ashley has persevered in academics and after-school activities, meeting each challenge with positivity and serving as a role model for her younger sister. In the future, Ashley aspires to be the President of the United States so she can support people in underprivileged communities.

## Peyton

**Peyton (14) from Missouri was selected as a Hidden Helper Hero Award winner in the 5th Annual Our Military Kids Courageous Kids Contest.**

From a young age, Peyton stepped up in assisting with caregiving tasks for her late stepfather, a U.S. Army Veteran who sustained combat-related injuries including PTSD. Throughout her stepfather’s treatment, Peyton served as an advocate for Veterans receiving care for combat-related injuries and their caregivers, speaking in interviews for local TV outlets and volunteering at Veteran caregiver retreats with her mother.

In early 2024, Peyton lost her beloved stepfather to suicide. Later that same year, Peyton bravely shared her story onstage at an Elizabeth Dole Foundation Hidden Helpers Summit and again at the EDF Heroes & History Makers Gala in December, to raise awareness surrounding the impact of veteran suicide.

In the future, Peyton aspires to become a pediatric nurse, so she can help children in a similar situation feel heard and seen.

## Willis

**Willis (11) from Arkansas was selected as the winner of the 5th Annual Our Military Kids Courageous Kids Contest in the U.S. Air Force Reserve category.**

During her father’s deployment with the Air Force Reserve, Willis helped her family through a move while continuing to pursue her passion for volunteering to better her community. In the future, Willis aspires to keep her grades high, strengthen her clarinet, piano, and drumming skills, and volunteer in her community.

