

First Lady Jill Biden and Senator Elizabeth Dole Announce Campaign for Military Caregiver Children in Response to Troubling Study

Elizabeth Dole Foundation and Wounded Warrior Project lead coalition of organizations pledging support for children in military and veteran caregiving families



Washington, D.C. (November 10, 2021)— Today at the White House, First Lady Dr. Jill Biden, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) Denis McDonough, and Senator Elizabeth Dole announced the First Lady’s Joining Forces initiative will join the Elizabeth Dole Foundation and Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) in responding to a concerning new study revealing serious concerns for the 2.3 million children of military and veteran caregivers.

The [findings](#) by research firm Mathematica and commissioned by

First Lady Dr. Jill Biden walks with a group of hidden helpers, the children and youth of parents caring for wounded veterans, at the White House on Nov. 10, 2021. (Photo Credit: Katie Dance)

the Elizabeth Dole Foundation are published in: *Hidden Helpers at the Frontlines of Caregiving: Supporting the Healthy Development of Children from Military and Veteran Caregiving Homes*. Powered by support from Wounded Warrior Project, this is the first in-depth analysis of this population as well as the first to project the number of children and youths who have a parent caring for a wounded, ill, or injured service member or veteran at home.

The study reports that military caregiver kids and young adults struggle with feelings of stigmatization and being misunderstood in social and healthcare settings, and experience significant disruption in their lives, leading to elevated levels of distress. Experts believe this distress can severely impact their emotional and psychological development as well as learning in school. Caregiver kids and youth also take on household and family responsibilities and suffer from time lost with their caregiver parent who must divide their attention to meet the veteran’s care needs.

Speaking to the hidden helpers in the room, Dr. Biden said, “We’re here to tell you that you’re not hidden anymore. You’re not alone. The president and I see you. The secretaries, Senator Dole, the militaries, all our partners here—we see you, and we see the million of kids like you. And we stand with you.”

The Elizabeth Dole Foundation and WWP co-chair the Hidden Helpers Coalition, comprised of more than 60 public and private sector organizations dedicated to creating resources and initiatives that will directly respond to the gaps in support identified by Mathematica. Senator Dole announced that Coalition members have

pledged more than 40 unique commitments in support of caregiver kids and young adults.

“These commitments will make a true difference in the lives of our caregiver kids, but they are only the beginning,” said Senator Dole. “We need the rest of the nation to join us—it is going to take us all. We know that because of the research we now have in our hands and because of the stories we have heard from caregiver kids across America.”

Steve Schwab, CEO of the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, and WWP CEO Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Mike Linnington opened the event by unveiling Mathematica’s findings.

Linnington, in describing the precedence of the study, stated, “Despite our nation’s military answering the call to serve for nearly two and a half centuries, this study is the very first to ask the question, ‘How have the wounds of our warriors and the caregiving responsibilities of their families affected the youngest of our military and veteran family members – the children – who reside in the home and help care for a wounded warrior?’ Its findings should be a wake-up call for all of us.”

Nine-year-old Gabby Rodriguez of Griswold, Conn., who introduced the First Lady, shared her experience caring for her father who suffered a traumatic brain injury. Gabby said, “So much of the sadness that caregiver kids feel is because they think they are the only kid in their situation. I want to tell them, ‘You are not alone.’ I’m also a military caregiver kid, and there are millions more of us.”

After reviewing the Hidden Helper research findings, the Coalition members have committed to the following new programs and initiatives to better support the needs of military and veteran families. This list of commitments will continue to grow.

- **Biden-Harris Administration**

- The **Department of Defense (DoD)** and **Department of Veterans Affairs** together will establish an interagency work group focused on transition efforts helping identify ways the Departments can work together to better support the needs of military and veteran families and their children during transitions.
- The Department of Defense will work with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation to provide training for all DOD health care providers on the needs of hidden helpers and military caregiver families.
- DoD’s Office of Military Community and Family Policy has committed to working with the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS) on a new research effort in 2022 to better understand where and how military children are accessing mental health care.
- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has committed to launching a new Family Coordinator Program, with social workers linking veterans to support for their spouses and/or children. The Family Coordinator will be knowledgeable about resources in the local community as well as federal government resources to support veterans and their families.
- The **National Endowment for the Arts** has committed to establishing the Creative Forces Community Engagement Grant Program, that will distribute grants from \$10,000 - \$50,000 for arts-based community engagement projects for targeted military-connected communities, to include military kids, youth, and hidden helpers.

- **Financial Support**

- **Wounded Warrior Project®** has pledged the largest investment in supporting Hidden Helpers programming, with a commitment of \$1.5 million that will directly align with the research findings and sustain a new culture of support for military children and youth nationwide.
- **The USAA Foundation, Inc.**, will commit more than \$1.4 million in 2022 to support military caregivers and military children through alliances with key nonprofit partners.
- **Bob & Dolores Hope Foundation** will commit \$500,000 to the Elizabeth Dole Foundation’s caregiver emergency financial relief fund to support military and veteran families in 2022.
- **The Bob Woodruff Foundation** will commit to new funding opportunities in 2022 and work with the

Coalition to improve impact evaluation efforts.

- **Cerner** will dedicate funding to making health care environments more knowledgeable and responsive to the experiences of hidden helpers.

- **Education and Training Materials**

- **Sesame Workshop** will work with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation on new messages around military caregiving to share through its featured characters. Additionally, they will provide new online workshops about military caregiver kids for educators, health care professionals, and other relevant practitioners. Sesame Workshop joins other Coalition members in creating educational materials and experiences for and about hidden helpers.
- **Military Child Education Coalition** will lead an effort with educators nationwide by developing and curating evidence-informed content for military students in a caregiver role. MCEC® will also develop a new student-to-student track focused on hidden helpers, and a new focused track on the needs of caregiving children, at their MCEC Global Summit in July 2022.
- **PsychArmor** will work with the Coalition to support educational development and training opportunities for educators and health care professionals on how to best care for caregiver kids.

- **Health Care Commitments**

- The **Elizabeth Dole Foundation** will build on its existing Campaign for Inclusive Care to launch a new clinical transformation effort aimed at making health care environments more responsive to the needs of caregiving families, including children and youth. With the leadership of one of the nation's largest pediatric health systems, **Nemours Children's Health**, and the generous financial contribution of **TriWest Healthcare Alliance**, the Elizabeth Dole Foundation, together with **Humana Military**, **Magellan Federal**, and **Cohen Veterans Network**, will engage our nation's health care providers to create a new national model of support for caregiver children within medical institutions. Together these commitments will ensure that the physicians, nurses, and mental health and allied health professionals better understand and address the unique challenges military children face at every stage of their development.
- **CareLinx**, a Sharecare company, commits to extending their contribution and support to the Elizabeth Dole Foundation and VA's Respite Relief Program in 2022. The program has already supported more than 1,600 families since its launch in 2020 and allowed for military and veteran caregivers to care for their children and better manage their households.

- **New Programming**

Coalition members have also committed to an unprecedented number of new programs that will be launched to support hidden helpers with peer-support opportunities, mental health resources, and financial support over the next year:

- **The American Red Cross** will launch a new resiliency workshop for hidden helpers led by licensed mental health professionals. This workshop will provide an opportunity for participants to discuss challenges and concerns, and to develop and learn the tools to build upon their natural resilience.
- **The American Association for Caregiving Youth** will work with Coalition members to ensure that programs for hidden helpers are also shared with non-military youth caregiving leaders.
- **The Armed Services YMCA** will expand support for caregiver children across its programming and specifically through its Children's Waiting Room childcare service program at military treatment facilities.
- **Blue Star Families** will increase programs for caregiver children and collaborating with other Coalition members on their military family resilience metric.
- **Camp Corral** will launch a new video resource in December 2021 to educate parents on how to help their hidden helper at home. They also commit to supporting 1,100 caregiver kids through their summer camp programs in 2022, and to finding new opportunities of support for enrichment workshops and peer support workgroups.
- **Caregivers on the Homefront** will launch a new peer mentorship program in 2022 that will pair older teen hidden helpers with younger hidden helpers for a six-week virtual program to facilitate support for younger children in caregiving homes.
- **Combined Arms** will start a Caregivers Community Group to provide peer support to caregivers and caregiver kids in Texas.
- **Kids Rank** will expand their art therapy programs to support more military-connected children as they explore their social and emotional health.
- **Military Family Advisory Network** will support the Coalition by developing a standardized

approach to measuring impact, to ensure that all existing and new programs are adhering to rigorous program evaluation metrics.

- **National Military Family Association** commits to serving hidden helpers of all ages across their Operation Purple Programs, including virtual at-home programs, retreats, and camps).
 - **Our Military Kids** commits to expanding their work with new grant opportunities to support more than 100 hidden helpers in 2022.
 - **Philips** will work with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation to create a new mental health journey map that will outline the behavioral needs and challenges that caregiving families encounter.
 - **Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregivers** commits to supporting caregiver kids through a mobile app to facilitate immediate access to resources needed during moments of mental health crisis.
 - **Sugar Bear Foundation** will provide support for veteran children who have lost a service member or veteran parent.
 - **Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors** commits to providing appropriate bereavement expertise and services for all those grieving the loss of their veteran and to offering hidden helpers safe spaces to experience their grief and embrace healing.
 - **United Through Reading** will provide 200 hidden helpers with free reading kits and resources to support education at home.
 - **YMCA of the USA** will expand efforts to engage youth from veteran and military families in camp programs, particularly those that are part of the YMCA-National Park Service Youth Outdoors Summer Camp program.
- **Resource Navigation:**
 - **The Elizabeth Dole Foundation** and **Wounded Warrior Project** will establish a Family Resource Hub that will be a go-to destination for caregiver families in search of resources.
 - New programs will also be promoted and integrated into existing online networks with the help of **Amazon Military Affairs** and **RallyPoint**, the **Code of Support Foundation's** PATRIOTLink®, **Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families** AmericaServes Platform and **Unite Us**.
 - The **National Association of Counties** commits to providing resources and tools to county government leaders and integrating veteran and hidden helper data onto their County Data Explorer tool, to make data about the military and veteran families more accessible to county officials and local leaders.
 - **Esposas Militares Hispanas USA** has stepped up to provide Spanish translation services to the Coalition, so that resources and materials are available and accessible to diverse communities. They will also continue outreach and support to hidden helpers inside their community group.

The Elizabeth Dole Foundation has posted details of the Coalition's commitments, the Mathematic study, and resources for and about military caregiver kids on their website, hiddenheroes.org/hiddenhelpers.

About the Elizabeth Dole Foundation and Hidden Heroes

The Elizabeth Dole Foundation is the preeminent organization empowering, supporting, and honoring our nation's 5.5 million military caregivers – the spouses, parents, family members, and friends — who care for America's wounded, ill, or injured service members and Veterans at home. Founded by Senator Elizabeth Dole in 2012, the Foundation adopts a comprehensive approach in its support and advocacy, working with leaders in the public, private, nonprofit, and faith communities to recognize military caregivers' service and promote their well-being. The Foundation's Hidden Heroes campaign brings vital attention to the untold stories of military caregivers and provides a network for military caregivers to connect with their peers and access carefully vetted resources. Visit www.hiddenheroes.org for more information.

About Wounded Warrior Project

Since 2003, Wounded Warrior Project® (WWP) has been meeting the growing needs of warriors, their families, and caregivers — helping them achieve their highest ambition. [Learn more.](#)

Additional assets available online: [Photos \(2\)](#)

<https://newsroom.woundedwarriorproject.org/First-Lady-Jill-Biden-and-Senator-Elizabeth-Dole-Announce-Campaign-for-Military-Caregiver-Children-in-Response-to-Troubling-Study>