



BUILDING THE HEALTH CARE WORKFORCE OF TOMORROW: One Military Spouse's Journey

Overview

America's military families face unique challenges as they serve our nation. One of the most common challenges is military spouse employment. That's why programs like the National Military Family Association's (NMFA) Military Spouse Scholarship and Professional Support Program help military spouses pursue their educations and develop their careers.

Erin Marden is one of those spouses. When Erin's family moved from Hawaii to Alabama because of her husband's military service, she knew she would face hurdles to continuing her career as a vocational rehabilitation counselor. But she also knew she wasn't alone. Erin received a NMFA scholarship, funded by the United Health Foundation, designed to help military spouses in the primary care and mental health profession. NMFA recognized that to level the playing field of military life, spouses need funding for more than just degrees. As a result, Erin received professional funding toward the state licensure required to advance her career, and today, she is enrolled in a Ph.D. program in Counselor Education.

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I'm sure we could survive this lifestyle without resources like NMFA, but I don't know if our quality of life would be as positive. And, with each passing year, I have greater appreciation for what that means: Quality of life. We can get through anything. We have gotten through a lot, but with help and support. It has just been amazing.

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ERIN MARDEN
MILITARY SPOUSE

Military Spouse Employment

SELFLESS. RESILIENT. PATRIOTIC. These words define the men and women serving in the United States military. They also describe the spouses and families that support our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines. Service members and veterans alike will tell you that serving our nation is a family endeavor—and that fellow military families are among their greatest sources of strength.

Like our men and women in uniform, America's military spouses face unique challenges and make sacrifices in service to the nation. Far too often, they delay or defer career continuity or advancement. This is especially true of spouses entering or established in the health care profession. Moving from state to state, or even overseas, typically means leaving and finding jobs, obtaining costly new state licenses, or deciding on an entirely new career field. On top of moving to a new community, being far from home, and raising a family during a loved one's deployment, these spouses face a great deal of change and uncertainty.

Supporting Military Spouses

Despite these obstacles, military spouses are resilient. And thanks to organizations like the National Military Family Association (NMFA) and the United Health Foundation (UHF), these spouses are not alone.

For more than 48 years, NMFA has been the voice of military families, helping the American people understand the demands of the military lifestyle, and supporting these families. One of the ways NMFA supports military families is through its Military Spouse Education and Professional Support initiatives. These efforts include scholarships and career advancement support to better prepare spouses for meaningful employment, and to better contribute to their family's financial security.

Many of these scholarships and career advancement awards were made possible with a UHF grant designed to ease financial burdens for military spouses entering the mental health and primary care workforce.

Since 2013, UHF has provided \$425,000 in grants to NMFA's program to support more than 3,000 spouses through scholarships, professional mentoring, supervision required for licensure, career guidance, and interactive, highly-customized networking and employment opportunities in both the nursing and mental health professions.

In 2016, UHF and NMFA partnered with Give an Hour, a non-profit that provides free mental health care to service members, veterans and their families, to launch the Military Spouse Mental Health Profession Network. Designed to help alleviate the national shortage of mental health providers in the military community, the Network helps spouses build relationships with peers, find accredited graduate programs, secure clinical supervision and licensure, and connect with potential loan and repayment options and job-seeking resources.



Military spouses move across state lines

10x

more often than their civilian counterparts and sometimes overseas.¹



35%

of military spouses work in a field that needs licensure.¹



23%

of military spouses are looking for work but are unemployed.²

¹The Force Behind the Force: A Business Case for Leveraging Military Spouse Talent (Syracuse University Institute for Veterans and Military Families, 2016.)

²Military Family Life Project: Active Duty Spouse Study (U.S. Department of Defense, 2015.)



One Spouse's Journey: Erin Marden

ONE OF THE SPOUSES THESE PROGRAMS HELPED IS ERIN MARDEN.

Erin and her husband have been married for nearly 15 years and have a teenage daughter. After September 11th, 2001, Erin's now-husband reenlisted in the U.S. Army, in which he has served for more than 20 years. The Mardens have moved to six different duty stations—including South Korea, Hawaii, and Alabama—and Erin's husband has had multiple overseas deployments. Each time, Erin thought through how a move or deployment might impact her family, her career in the mental health profession, and her ability to contribute to her family's financial security. The Mardens' experiences are typical for the majority of today's military families.

And like so many military families, the Mardens have had to overcome challenges that come with the military lifestyle. Erin's husband has missed celebrating many birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays with his family. Erin's daughter has adjusted to new schools and new friendships every few years. Erin has helped her family integrate into each new community and navigate the various changes in a positive way, all while pursuing a career dedicated to the wellbeing of military families and others in need.

A daughter of a U.S. veteran, Erin understood from an early age the sacrifices military families make to support a service member. She saw firsthand the importance of quality health care and strong support networks for service members, veterans, and their families. This inspired her to study psychology in college, and later, complete a graduate degree in kinesiology and rehabilitation in Hawaii, near her husband's duty station.

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I started my master's degree determined to make a difference in the lives of returning service members and their families.

I really saw hope in people's faces. My work gave me an appreciation for the small things – that progress, no matter how small, is still progress.

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ERIN MARDEN
MILITARY SPOUSE

For the next three years, Erin was a vocational rehabilitation counselor in Hawaii, helping patients—including many service members and veterans—recover from injuries and trauma.

Erin drew from her own experiences and training to provide her daughter a stable childhood and support her husband's commitment to the country with a solid family foundation, despite the inevitability of change. Among the resources she both contributes to and draws strength from is NMFA's Facebook Group for military spouses in the mental health profession and Give an Hour's Military Spouse Mental Health Profession Network. Through them, she advises other spouses exploring careers in the mental health profession, and sees the newest ranks of spouses in need of peer and professional support receiving it from others who have traveled similar journeys.

Her own NMFA scholarship and career funding, supported by UHF, helped Erin bridge what might otherwise have been a gap in her career in Alabama. Through it, she obtained the state licensure required for employment as a certified professional counselor and alcohol and drug counselor. It ensured that Erin did not have to delay or defer her career because of her service as a military spouse.

Today, Erin is taking the next step toward her dream career by pursuing a Ph.D. in Counselor Education—an impossibility without an active license in counseling. She remains dedicated to improving the wellbeing of other military families by guiding spouses through hurdles to careers in health care, supporting them through mental health struggles, and strengthening the workforce committed to their care.

Conclusion

Erin is only one of the many selfless, resilient, and patriotic spouses supporting our men and women in uniform, but she represents many navigating their educations and careers around hurdles of the military lifestyle. The National Military Family Association and United Health Foundation are especially proud of our initiatives to support her and America's other military spouses.

Learn more about how UHF supports service members, veterans, and their families:

www.unitedhealthgroup.com/MilitaryVeterans.

Learn more about the NMFA's Military Spouse Scholarship and Professional Support Program at:

www.militaryfamily.org.



UNITED HEALTH FOUNDATION®

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Our nation must build a workforce of health care providers qualified to address the unique needs of everyone from military families, to those of other Americans.

Military spouses are ready and willing to answer the call. Our partnership with United Health Foundation has helped thousands of military spouses who have had to start and stop their education and careers because of frequent moves, deployments, and other challenges.

Any delay to their entry into the workforce affects not only their families' financial wellbeing, but the health of other civilian and military families – particularly those seeking counselors who understand firsthand their pressures and sacrifices.

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JOYCE WESSEL RAEZER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NMFA