

Boys & Girls Clubs of America

GREAT THINK

Creating Great Futures
for Military Families and Youth



BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
OF AMERICA



BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS OF AMERICA THANKS THE PARTICIPANTS AND SPONSORS WHO MADE THE MILITARY GREAT THINK POSSIBLE.

SPECIAL GUESTS

General Wesley K. Clark, ret.

Boys & Girls Clubs of America
Alumni Hall of Fame

Selena B.

New Jersey Military
Youth of the Year
(Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst
Youth Center)

Charles Milam

Acting Deputy Asst. Secretary of
Defense for Military Community and
Family Policy

PANELISTS

Sloan D. Gibson

President, United Service
Organizations (USO)

Lydia Marek, PhD

Human Development Research Scientist,
Virginia Tech

Glen Walter

President and Chief Operating Officer,
Coca-Cola Refreshments

Kenneth R. Ginsburg, MD

Children's Hospital
of Philadelphia

C. Glenn Mahone, Jr.

Vice President, Communications,
Aerojet Rocketdyne

Gregory R. Young

Navy Child and Youth Program Director,
Navy Installations Command

Moderated by **Dan Lothian**, CNN White House Correspondent

ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

Aerojet Rocketdyne

Air Force Child and
Youth Programs

Air National Guard

American Legion Auxiliary

American Logistics Association

America's Promise Alliance

Army National Guard

Association of Military
Banks of America

The Coca-Cola Company

Corporation for National and
Community Service

Cypress International

DC Office of Veterans Affairs

Department of Defense
Education Activity

Department of Defense Military
Community & Family Policy

Department of Veteran Affairs

Fisher House Foundation

Fluor

Former Secretary of the Air Force

Former Secretary of the United
States Navy

Lockheed Martin

Marine Corps Family Programs

The Military Child
Education Coalition

Military Officers Association of
America

National Government Services

National Guard Bureau

National Military Family
Association

Navy Family Readiness

Raytheon Company

Sikorsky, a United Technologies
Company

UnitedHealth Group

United States Army

United States Air Force

United States Coast Guard

USAA Federal Savings Bank

Federal Savings Bank

U.S. Conference of Mayors

University of Phoenix

UPS

Warrior Care Policy





Boys & Girls Clubs of America

GREAT THINK

Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) is launching the Great Futures Campaign: an unprecedented initiative to mobilize our nation and ensure America's youth, especially those who need us most, graduate from high school with a plan for the future—ready for success in college, the military or a career; demonstrating good character and citizenship; and living a healthy lifestyle. We recognize that a national undertaking of this magnitude requires the collective support and advocacy of individuals, organizations, and partners working together across the public and private sectors.

BGCA's Great Think Series is central to our Campaign's national thought leadership agenda. The series convenes key influencers and stakeholders to examine critical issues affecting America's youth, such as: meeting the increasing challenges facing military families; providing STEM educational opportunities to underserved youth; reversing the childhood obesity epidemic; and strengthening child protection and safety practices nationwide. The series' inaugural event, BGCA's Military Great Think, was held in Arlington, Va. on September 13, 2013. It was our nation's first convening of military experts from academia, business, government, media and the non-profit sector (see facing page) to address the significant challenges facing military youth.

For more than two decades, BGCA has proudly partnered with every branch of the U.S. Armed Services, today providing nearly 500,000 military youth and families with proven programs that improve resiliency, leadership skills, health, and academic success. As a result of the Campaign, BGCA is redoubling its commitment, in partnership with the military, to better serve the families of active military personnel; families of veterans, ill or wounded soldiers; and service men and women who are transitioning to civilian life.

The Military Great Think white paper report summarizes the key insights from participants, as well as strategic recommendations and action steps for immediately improving access to vital programs and services for our American military heroes and their families.



THE ISSUE BY THE NUMBERS

- ★ Nearly 2,000,000 American children have a parent serving in the military.
- ★ Since 2010, more than 700,000 military children have had a parent deployed.
- ★ 220,000 of these children have a parent currently deployed, and 75,000 have experienced multiple deployments.
- ★ On average, military children move six to nine times before they graduate from high school.
- ★ Approximately 70 percent of all military families live in civilian communities away from critical health, academic and social services provided on-installation.

INTRODUCTION

The need to support military youth and families has never been greater. Today, nearly 2 million American children have a parent serving in the military. While these children may not wear the uniform, they make significant sacrifices every day for the sake of our country's national security. Too often, those sacrifices go unrecognized...their struggles unacknowledged.

Overall, America's military youth are strong, resilient, and independent as a result of their experiences. They understand sacrifice, dedication, and the value of public service. But many are also struggling academically, emotionally, and socially. These young people bear with bravery the significant

demands of a life of service to others. And so, it is our nation's solemn responsibility to help them cope with the challenges they face.

On average, military youth are uprooted from their homes and separated from their friends between six and nine times before high school graduation. Military youth experience more stress than their peers, which can lead to anxiety, depression, and behavioral problems. In fact, a recent report from the American Academy of Pediatrics noted that children in elementary school from military families were two and a half times more likely than other children to score as high-risk for emotional and behavioral problems. These same children also become deeply familiar with loss at a young age.

Supporting military youth and families is mission critical; it's essential for the future of our armed forces and our national security. Strong military families improve mission readiness. To retain a strong and resilient military workforce, we must provide consistent, impactful programming that supports military families through the challenges of deployment and reintegration.

When our troops return home from war, sometimes with life-changing injuries, they experience a period of reintegration – that is, the transition from active-duty service to civilian life. It's an important time when service members reconnect with loved ones and adjust to changes within the family structure. While reintegration ought to be, and often is, a happy experience, the process can be fraught with anxiety as the entire family adjusts to their “new normal.”

Yet, despite the growing challenges our military families face, it has become increasingly difficult to provide support services as families shift away from living on military installations. Currently, more than 70 percent of our nation's military families live in civilian communities, and that number will continue to grow. These families rely on a wide-ranging support system that has not adapted to serving a geographically dispersed military community. Participants at BGCA's Military Great Think indicated that many programs available to our families fail to reach as many people as they should, and are now threatened by the specter of budget cuts. Furthermore, the available services often don't address the unique issues our military families face in the sunset of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

BGCA's Military Great Think represents the beginning of an unprecedented collective effort of federal agencies,



leading non-profit organizations, corporations, and educational institutions coming together to better support military youth and families. Through a series of panel and roundtable discussions, participants highlighted key issues and recommended actions that will lead to more accessible services for military families.

This inaugural meeting made it clear that our nation can—and must—do more.

ISSUES DEMANDING ACTION

REINTEGRATION AND RESILIENCY

The key to helping military youth overcome the stresses of their circumstances was made clear: we must address the family. Support services for military children and teens will only work if they are conceived, developed, and offered in the broader family context. This requires considering the challenges families face with a parent's deployment and reintegration into the household and civilian life.

Reintegration can and should be an opportunity to create positive outcomes in education, employment, and family wellness. Unfortunately, research indicates that the reintegration process can last for years and, without guidance and support, military families may experience increased levels of fighting and anxiety. According to Dr. Lydia Marek, the director of Virginia Tech's Family and Community Research Lab and an expert on reintegration, only 25 percent of service members and their partners were satisfied with how they coped during their previous deployment, which is a good indicator of how challenging they will find their reintegration experience. Furthermore, dysfunction and stress are heightened when a family's expectations for reintegration don't match the experience. Family roles, responsibilities, and dynamics naturally change while a parent is deployed. These shifting dynamics can be difficult to navigate, especially if family members aren't communicating well or working to understand each other.

Participants in BGCA's Military Great Think indicated that support programs should take a more preventative and proactive approach, beginning ahead of deployment and continuing through the duration of the tour of duty. Family members should be made aware of the challenges posed by reintegration in advance so they can anticipate what is ahead and make adjustments. Parents and children should be given the tools to align their expectations with the reality of reintegration to better prepare for and ease the transition.

Additionally, to improve the reintegration experience, experts agreed that military families must be supported in sustaining high-quality, consistent communication with their family. This is especially important given how difficult

“Overall, our military youth are strong. They understand sacrifice, they understand dedication to the military, and to public service. But I will also tell you that we have military children who are struggling. They are struggling academically, they're struggling emotionally, they're struggling socially.”

- CHARLES MILAM -

Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
for Military Community and Family Policy


**2 MILLION
CHILDREN**
HAVE A PARENT SERVING IN THE MILITARY

“We need to be very clear about our desired outcomes. What do we need to do for these families in terms of helping them build these resiliencies? We need programs to focus on family communication, negotiating family roles, reestablishing relationships, and developing realistic expectations for the reintegration process.”

- DR. LYDIA MAREK -

Virginia Tech Family and
Community Research Lab

it can be to parent long distance when deployed overseas. Ongoing communication allows for at least some continuity, and will make the process much smoother when they return home. Dr. Kenneth Ginsburg of the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, a leading expert on resiliency said, “The more we give parents the tools and the skill sets to parent effectively despite distance, the better the reintegration experience.” By learning these important parenting skills, parents as well as their children can more effectively manage through reintegration.

In all of our efforts, we must consistently encourage military children, reminding them of their potential, and commending them for their resilience. As Dr. Ginsburg stated, “We have to scream from the rooftops that military children, by and large, are models of resilience.” One of the most important and immediate actions we can take is to increase resiliency programs and trainings for military teens and families. Most importantly, these interventions must be scaled up, replicated, and made available to military families living both in civilian communities and on-installation.



**MILITARY
CHILDREN MOVE
6^{TO}9 TIMES
BEFORE THEY GRADUATE FROM
HIGH SCHOOL**

MILITARY GREAT THINK ACTION STEPS

- » Adopt a proactive approach to prepare military families for reintegration prior to deployment and throughout the tour of duty.
- » Identify and scale-up evidence-based resiliency resources and training programs, particularly for families and teens.
- » Form a network of delivery providers to reach military families living off-installation and ensure resources are available and accessible to all military families.



PREPARING MILITARY YOUTH FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS & WORKFORCE READINESS

Military youth often face significant obstacles to succeed academically. Every move results in a new set of academic requirements that can prevent military teens from graduating on time. They must constantly adapt and adjust to new administrators, new teachers, new curricula, and new classmates, while contending with the pressures of the move both at home and socially. Guiding our military youth to academic success and college and career readiness is essential to ensuring they remain models of resilience.

Great Think participants felt strongly that the lessons students learn in school need to be reinforced outside of the classroom. Boys & Girls Clubs and other providers of after-school resources to military children should integrate, where possible, aspects of school curricula into their programs. Particularly when a parent is deployed, afterschool programs provide critical adult mentorship and support, and an environment where academic success and resiliency can be reinforced.

However, the majority of discussion centered around STEM as an avenue to engage military families and better prepare military youth for college, military or the workforce. At a time when our nation faces a shortage in skilled STEM workers, the Military Great Think brought together leaders of industry to identify ways that we can engage more military youth to enter STEM fields, as well as leverage the considerable expertise of veterans and military spouses trained in STEM education.

The U.S. Armed Services needs men and women trained in STEM disciplines to maintain and advance our national security. While the private sector can seek foreign labor to fill the void in skilled American workers, the military relies on U.S. citizens. Our military youth represent a strong talent pool for the next generation of our armed services and the future labor force for STEM industries. According to the U.S. Department of Education, “improvements in STEM education will happen only if Hispanics, African-Americans and other underrepresented groups in the STEM fields, including women, participate.” The diversity of military youth can help our nation meet these goals.


As Glenn Mahone, Vice President of Communications for Aerojet Rocketdyne, explained, “We find that military youth are very much engaged in STEM simply because their parents are involved in national security and national defense.” In addition to advancing STEM education in schools, organizations like Boys & Girls Clubs of America can develop fun, innovative ways to cultivate interest among military youth during the non-school hours. STEM-focused companies can offer internships or apprenticeships specifically designed for military youth.

Participants also noted that many non-deployed parents have expertise in STEM subjects and would likely be interested in contributing their talents to engaging underserved youth. The Department of Education is focused on recruiting, preparing and supporting STEM teachers to meet our nation’s STEM education goals; veterans or military spouses should be leveraged as trainers, teachers or volunteer educators.

Great Think participants were passionate about the enormous potential for STEM education to benefit military children, their parents and communities. But they stressed the urgent need for action, as the workplace readiness of our military youth, as well as our nation’s competitiveness in the world economy, hang in the balance.

MILITARY GREAT THINK ACTION STEPS

- » Increase targeted educational opportunities for military youth.
- » Enlist military STEM experts, including veterans and military spouses, as educators.
- » Engage STEM companies to promote the field as a potential career choice by providing world-class internships, mentorships and programs both in schools and in Clubs.
- » BGCA will host a STEM Great Think in May 2014 to better support military youth and underrepresented youth in STEM education.



“We identify gaps and we identify needs. And where we don’t have the capacity to meet those needs, we look for a best-in-class partner. We can leverage those partnerships to make a difference for our military kids today.”

- SLOAN GIBSON -
President, USO

OUTREACH TO MILITARY FAMILIES: CREATING A PUBLIC/PRIVATE DELIVERY SYSTEM

Great Think participants agreed that we must develop more effective outreach strategies to engage military families living in civilian communities. The benefits of support services must be positively communicated to remove any stigma associated with military families seeking help. A suggested solution was developing an outreach strategy with a call to action for military families around readiness and resiliency. Topics could include mental health, workforce readiness, and family well-being.

In today’s constrained budget environment, it is critically important that we increase utilization rates and make these services readily accessible. For the public sector, sequestration and slashed budgets have resulted in mandatory cuts to vital programs—especially those that aren’t being used to capacity. It isn’t enough to be effective; providers must demonstrate that their programs are widely used.

“Many services are available, but we don’t have a centralized delivery system to ensure each and every military family has access. We can change that, working together.”

Ron Gidwitz
Chairman, BGCA National Board of Governors

As the Department of Defense confronts difficult budgetary decisions, we must work with policymakers to protect funding for, and necessary expansion of, programs for military families. This means educating elected officials about the struggles military families face and the tremendous value these programs provide for military children.

But given federal budget constraints, we need to look beyond government-supported programs in order to fulfill the needs of military families. Throughout BGCA’s Military Great Think, participants consistently touched on the need for stronger partnerships between public, private, and non-profit entities. Simply put, the work ahead cannot be effectively accomplished with organizations and institutions acting alone. For example, with facilities in more than 4,000 communities nationwide, including U.S. military installations around the globe, Boys & Girls Clubs of America



has the capacity to reach many more military youth. Yet, BGCA cannot singlehandedly provide the resources needed by every military family. No single entity can.

Public-private partnerships are needed to ensure every military family has access to services. BGCA, the USO, and other national organizations can work with the U.S. Armed Services to create a network for local community organizations, churches, schools, and businesses to support military families. Private companies can provide employment opportunities for returning veterans and their spouses. Local media should be engaged to go beyond “support our troops” to raise awareness about the services available to their families.

By pooling resources and ideas, organizations involved with military families can increase the reach of their services, improve the effectiveness of their offerings, and strategize new ways to address unmet needs for every member of the military family.

MILITARY GREAT THINK ACTION STEPS

- » Develop an outreach strategy with a call to action for military families around readiness and resiliency. Topics could include mental health, workforce readiness, and family well-being.
- » Coordinate current marketing efforts by the five branches, DOD, White House, and support groups.
- » Develop a centralized delivery system to help guide military families to available resources.
- » BGCA and USO will establish a partnership to better identify and support military families living in civilian communities.

FROM GREAT THINK TO ACTION PLAN: THE NEXT STEPS

In response to the input from the participants in the Military Great Think, Boys & Girls Clubs of America will collaborate with other participating organizations to create a Military Family Advisory Board, which will issue a concrete, outcome-driven plan to execute the recommendations summarized in this white paper.

As moderator Dan Lothian, CNN White House Correspondent concluded, we must not allow the excitement and passion displayed at the event to dissipate. We must use it to solidify our commitment and translate it into action. This conversation must continue, especially among the many organizations that expressed the desire and ability to collaborate. We encourage all participants to expand the scope of the conversation by bringing more interested parties into the mix. As we begin our work, feedback from participants and all interested parties will be continually collected and reviewed.

America’s military families sacrifice so much – sometimes everything – to secure our nation’s future. We are therefore duty bound to help them secure their children’s future. And, together, there is no doubt that we can.

“This is not just a one-time event or discussion; it will be an ongoing dialogue in the formulation of what we hope to be a public and private partnership to improve the lives of military kids and their families.”

Jim Clark

President and CEO, Boys & Girls Clubs of America

“I’m a stronger person because of the life
I have lived being a military child.”

- SELENA B. -

**Boys & Girls Clubs of America
Military Youth of the Year for New Jersey**



Boys & Girls Clubs of America

GREAT THINK

GREAT FUTURES START HERE.



**BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS
OF AMERICA**

Boys & Girls Clubs of America
1275 Peachtree St. NE
Atlanta, GA 30309-3506
404-487-5700
www.bgca.org

Visit bgca.org/greatthink to download the white paper and learn more.