



APRIL IS MONTH OF THE MILITARY CHILD



April is designated as the Month of the Military Child, a time to recognize and celebrate the important role military children play in the armed forces community. Sponsored by the Department of Defense Military Community and Family Policy, the Month of the Military Child is a time to applaud military families and their children for the daily sacrifices they make and the challenges they overcome. ECAC joins the Department of Defense and the military community in celebrating April as the Month of the Military Child with this special edition newsletter highlighting North Carolina's military children with disabilities and special healthcare needs and their families.

A Message from Mandy Sonnenberg, ECAC's Military Outreach Parent Educator

Hello, from **Mandy Sonnenberg**, ECAC's Military Outreach Parent Educator. I would like to introduce myself to those of you whom I have not yet had the pleasure to serve. I began working for ECAC as the Military Outreach Parent Educator



nearly a year ago. My passion is to assist families navigating systems and services with a targeted focus on NC military families. I am the wife of a retired military member and mother of three children, Conner (14), Khloe (9), and Kaylee (7). Since starting school, Conner and Khloe have attended several different schools in 3 different states. With this last move to North Carolina, we promised them that we would be planting our roots and staying put. A big part of the military journey is relocation. Relocating can be very challenging, especially while navigating new systems and services in an unfamiliar area. I hope

to be able to help others have smooth transitions and access to information and resources.

Both of our older children have had IEPs in all of the states in which we have resided. Conner has ADHD and his IEP process throughout his school years has gone well. Khloe, on the other hand, had a vastly different experience. She was diagnosed at four years old with autism, and at that time she was non-verbal. Since then, she has also been diagnosed with dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia. Khloe is now verbal and thriving. She found her voice through horses and has become very active in our local horse community. She began attending in-person school at age 3, and prior to that was receiving early intervention services. We lived in two different states prior to her third birthday. She had an IFSP in the state of Washington. She has had an IEP in each school she attended to the present time.

Throughout Khloe's journey we have had to advocate and communicate with several school systems, and we feel that all of our hard work has paid off. Through the support of her medical team, therapists, teachers, and our extended family, Khloe has made significant progress. Through her circle of support, we believe Khloe has found her passion and is living a meaningful and happy life.

It truly does take a village to support a military child with disabilities and the unique needs of the individual--whether it be medical, educational, insurance-related, and/or community resources. I am working with ECAC to make sure that military families with special needs children know about the resources available to them and to help them navigate systems and processes and understand their rights so that they can have meaningful participation in meetings and make informed decisions.

STORIES FROM THE HOME FRONT

NC Military Families Share Their Stories



Lakia W.

"We are from Indianapolis and new to military life. Our son was diagnosed with Craniopharyngioma (a noncancerous brain tumor) and PANS disease (Pediatric Acute-Onset Neuropsychiatric Syndrome).

As challenges arose, ECAC became a great asset. The representative helped us to advocate for our child, as if she had known him for years. Her precise knowledge, dedication and expertise to our child's success, was reassuring during my spouse's deployment. Her presence brought warmth and calmness as we entered meetings. ECAC provides many resources, endless hours of work and positive educational outcomes.

It is truly a blessing to have such a tremendous wealth of knowledge. I can only hope others will utilize this awesome resource. Thanks again to the Exceptional Children's Assistance Center of North Carolina. You have truly equipped my family with the essentials of ongoing learning for our child."



Kaitlyn B.

"My name is Kaitlyn and I am the daughter of an active-duty U.S. Navy Submariner. Due to my father's career in the Navy, his duty assignments required our family to move every three to four years. With my family, I have lived in Hawaii, South Carolina, Minnesota, Washington state, and currently, in North Carolina.

In the past few years, I have been a youth member for the Exceptional Children's Assistance Center's Youth Advisory Team. The Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (ECAC) is a private, nonprofit parent organization, committed to improving the lives and education of all children through a special emphasis on children with disabilities and special healthcare needs. Through this group, I participated in several webinars and was a part of a number of presentations to talk about my experience with ADHD. I also share my experience with other teens to help them learn how to advocate for themselves and be a part of their own IEP meeting.

At my high school, Currituck County High School, I have been a member of the A&B honor roll for three years. Until recently, I was also a cheerleader for my school and a part of the Student Government Organization.

This past year I have had to take a step back from the student government organization along with cheerleading because my parents need me to help care for my younger sister. My younger sister has significant intellectual and physical disabilities and serious medical conditions. So, to help my parents, I trained and became one of my sister's personal care attendants.

I recently received my acceptance letter to attend The Citadel in the fall of 2022. My intended major is Intelligence and Security Studies. Ever since I was a little girl I knew that I wanted to go into some form of law enforcement. It is ingrained in me that we, as citizens of the United States, have a duty to "preserve and protect" our democracy and our society. With that in mind, I decided that I would like to join the FBI or a similar federal or state agency.

I chose the field of Intelligence and Security Studies because it is a field where my talents to research, analyze, and convert data into coherent documentation could be used to prevent crimes, including crimes involving national security, state security, drug, and sex trafficking to name a few of the issues I may work on after completing my degree. My work could also be used to solve crimes and to make new policies on a state, national, or global level. I believe that my future work could, at some point, be used to make a difference in the quality and safety of lives of U.S. citizens."



Khloe S.

"My name is Khloe. Before my 5th Birthday, I received the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder. My dad recently retired from the Army. My dad's career in the military was very challenging for me growing up. I lived in Washington and North Carolina, but every time we moved (which was a lot) I had to go to new schools and make new friends.

When moving back and forth my mom used the Exceptional Children's Assistance Center to get information and tools to support me. My mom taught me when I was little about my circle of support. Through my circle of support, I have overcome many challenges that I have faced. I want to encourage other military children to find their voice and to chase their dreams by using their circle of support."

Check me out in this **video!**



Khloe Sonnenberg



PURPLE STAR AWARD
NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOLS

Purple Star Award

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction launched the Purple Star program in 2019-20 as a way to recognize schools that demonstrate military-friendly practices and a commitment to military students and families.

[Click Here to Learn More!](#)



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Check out these additional resources!

Military Interstate Children's Compact
Commission - Guide for Schools/Parents

Military OneSource - Plan My Move



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