

# ARMY NATIONAL GUARD CHILD & YOUTH SERVICES

It's More Than A Program...It's A Promise!

## NEWS LETTER

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## A NEW YEAR, A FRESH START

A new year brings new opportunities, and we are excited for all that lies ahead in 2026. Across our local programs, teams are already planning a wide range of engaging activities designed to support children, teens, and families throughout the year. From in person events to educational opportunities and community connections, there is much to look forward to in the months ahead.

We are especially excited for Month of the Military Child in April. This is a time to celebrate the strength, resilience, and contributions of military connected youth. Be sure to mark your calendar for Purple Up Day on April 10, when we come together to show our support and appreciation for military children everywhere.

As always, our team is here to serve you. If you are looking for in person activities, opportunities to connect with other military families, or help navigating resources available to your family, please reach out to your local Child and Youth Program. We are happy to help and look forward to connecting with you in the year ahead.



## NO COST CHILD CARE DURING DRILL WEEKENDS



Eligible Army National Guard Soldiers may qualify for no cost child care during drill weekends through the Weekend Drill Child Care Pilot Program, a partnership between the National Guard Bureau and Upwards.

This program supports mission readiness by reducing child care challenges and easing financial stress for Guard families. Care is available for dependent children ages six weeks to 12 years who are registered in DEERS.

Participating states include: Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Iowa, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon, Virginia, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin.



Learn more and check eligibility at [upwards.com/benefits/military](https://upwards.com/benefits/military)



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# REGION 1 SPOTLIGHT: BUILDING SKILLS, STRENGTH, AND CONNECTION

Across Region 1, Child and Youth Programs are creating meaningful opportunities that go far beyond seasonal fun. From family celebrations to hands on STEM learning, these events are intentionally designed to build life skills, strengthen resilience, and deepen connections within the military community.

In Connecticut, families came together for the annual Service Member and Family Dinner Dance in recognition of Month of the Military Family. The evening provided more than a celebration. Through shared activities, creativity, and time on the dance floor, families strengthened relationships and reinforced a sense of belonging within the Guard community.

Vermont closed out the holiday season with a variety of family centered events, including festive gatherings and a memorable Polar Express experience. These activities offered youth and parents opportunities to connect, build positive memories, and maintain strong support networks during a busy and often stressful time of year.

In New Hampshire, the Spooktacular Science and Trunk or Treat event blended creativity, STEM education, and seasonal fun into a powerful learning experience. Youth explored science concepts through hands on activities such as building straw rockets to learn about force and motion, creating optical toys to understand how the brain processes images, and discovering local wildlife through interactive kits. Partnerships with STARBASE, New Hampshire Fish and Game, and the UNH STEMMobile expanded learning opportunities and exposed youth to science, technology, and problem solving skills that build confidence and curiosity.

Rhode Island hosted the Holiday for Heroes event, serving more than 50 National Guard families with a focus on literacy, service, and community pride. Children participated in crafts and cookie decorating while United Through Reading provided books to encourage family literacy. The Hero Tree offered a meaningful space for families to honor service members. Volunteers and teens played key roles in planning and facilitating the event, gaining leadership experience, teamwork skills, and a deeper understanding of service to others.

In Massachusetts, the Lights, Camera, STEM: Elf Edition event combined positive youth development with hands on learning. Youth worked together to complete a community building challenge using marshmallows and spaghetti, strengthening collaboration, communication, and problem solving skills. Participants then explored the science behind slime before creating their own, reinforcing scientific inquiry and creativity. The event concluded with a group reflection focused on perseverance, optimism, and resilience, helping youth connect their experiences to real life skills.

Maine welcomed families to Milk and Cookies with Santa at the Blaine House, the Governor's House, creating a statewide gathering that emphasized connection and service. Teen Council members served as volunteers, supporting younger children by reading books, greeting families, and assisting with activities. Their involvement provided leadership development, responsibility, and meaningful service learning while strengthening bonds across age groups within the Guard community.

Together, these Region 1 events reflect the heart of Child and Youth Programs. Each activity intentionally supports life skill development, character building, resilience, and strong connections to the military community, ensuring Guard youth and families feel supported, prepared, and connected throughout every season.







## BUILDING CHARACTER THROUGH SERVICE

Engaging children and teens in acts of service is a meaningful way to build character, strengthen life skills, and foster a sense of purpose. Service helps youth learn empathy, responsibility, and teamwork while showing them that even small actions can make a big difference.

Families can start with simple, age appropriate activities at home or in their neighborhood. Writing thank you notes to service members, first responders, or community helpers encourages gratitude and communication skills. Collecting food, books, or hygiene items for a local organization helps youth understand the needs of others while practicing planning and follow through.

As children grow, service projects can also support leadership development and resilience. Participating in organized projects such as park cleanups, donation drives, or service focused group activities gives youth the opportunity to problem solve, work as a team, and see the positive impact of their efforts.

If you are not sure where to begin or are looking for opportunities beyond your own ideas, reach out to us. Our Child and Youth Programs have ongoing service projects and strong community partnerships, and we can help connect your family or youth with opportunities that match their interests and abilities.

## CONGRATULATIONS TO THE NEWLY SELECTED GUARD TEEN PANEL MEMBERS

We are proud to congratulate the outstanding teens selected to serve on the Guard Teen Panel. This achievement reflects your leadership, dedication, and commitment to representing the voices of Guard, connected youth across the community.

As panel members, you will play a vital role in advocating, and sharing perspectives that help strengthen programs, resources, and opportunities for Guard teens nationwide. Your willingness to serve demonstrates maturity, initiative, and a genuine desire to make a positive impact.

We look forward to your contributions, ideas, and leadership as you begin this important role. Congratulations on your selection to:

- Region 2 Delegate: Christian Muniz Avalos, PR
- Region 3 Delegate: Eden Hope Ortega, MD
- Region 5 Delegate: Jona Jenay Bourassa Starks, MN
- Region 7 Delegate: Charlee Cromwell, IA
- Region 8 Delegate: Madilyn Neudhardt, SD
- Region 10 Delegate: Anabelle Slinker, AK
- Army's Director's Teen Panel: Kamryn Stauffacher, SD





## MILITARY ON SOURCE

### RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

Military OneSource is your 24/7 connection to information, answers and support to help you reach your goals, overcome challenges and thrive. As a member of our military family, you are eligible to use this Department of Defense-funded program anytime, anywhere. Turn to Military OneSource for tax services, spouse employment help, webinars and online training, relocation and deployment tools, and much more.

For more information:

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil/>

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## HEALTHY HABITS FOR THE NEW YEAR: TRYING NEW THINGS AT EVERY AGE

A new year is a great opportunity to help children and teens build healthy habits by encouraging them to try new things. Exploring new activities supports physical health, emotional well being, confidence, and resilience. When youth are given opportunities to step outside their comfort zones in supportive environments, they develop life skills that carry into school, relationships, and future goals. Below are ideas parents and community partners can use to promote healthy habits by age group.

### Early Childhood (Ages 0–5)

For younger children, healthy habits begin with play and routine. Encourage movement through new games such as obstacle courses, dance parties, or outdoor exploration. Introduce new foods alongside familiar favorites to support healthy eating habits. Simple mindfulness activities, like deep breathing or reading together before bedtime, can help establish calming routines and emotional regulation.

### Elementary Age (Ages 6–11)

School age children benefit from structured opportunities to try new skills. Consider introducing a new sport, creative hobby, or hands on learning activity such as cooking or gardening. Encourage goal setting by helping children choose one small challenge for the week, like learning a new skill or helping plan a healthy meal. Community partners can support this age group through group activities that build teamwork, problem solving, and positive peer connections.

### Teens (Ages 12–18)

For teens, trying new things can be a powerful tool for building independence and self confidence. Encourage participation in leadership opportunities, volunteer projects, fitness challenges, or creative outlets like art, music, or technology based activities. Teens also benefit from conversations about balance, including healthy sleep habits, stress management, and setting personal goals. Community partners can create inclusive spaces where teens feel safe to explore interests, develop leadership skills, and connect with peers.

If you are looking for ideas, activities, or connections in your area, reach out to us. Our Child and Youth Programs can help connect you with opportunities that support healthy habits, positive growth, and meaningful experiences throughout the year.