

# ARMY NATIONAL GUARD CHILD & YOUTH SERVICES

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

## NEWS LETTER

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## SUPPORTING MILITARY YOUTH THROUGH CONNECTION AND LEADERSHIP

February is a time to slow down, stay connected, and focus on well being during the winter months. In this issue of the ARNG Child and Youth Services newsletter, we are proud to introduce our new Guard Teen Panel delegates. These teens represent their regions with leadership, dedication, and a strong commitment to advocating for military youth and strengthening connections across the Guard community.

This month, we are also recognizing National Heart Month by sharing age appropriate ways families can support heart healthy habits for young children, elementary age youth, and teens. You will also find featured resources designed to help military families stay connected, supported, and informed, no matter where duty or life takes them.

Thank you for being part of our nationwide network of support for Army National Guard children and teens. Together, we continue to build opportunities, strengthen resilience, and create meaningful connections for military families across the country.

### BOYS & GIRLS CLUBS MISSION: YOUTH OUTREACH

Through this initiative, eligible military-connected youth can receive a free or reduced annual Boys & Girls Club membership once each year. This stipend supports children and teens who are dependents of an active duty, National Guard, or Reserve military sponsor, giving them access to local Club programs designed to inspire, engage, and support positive growth.

Learn more at: <https://www.bgca.org/about-us/military/mission-youth-outreach-2025/>



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# REGION 2 SPOTLIGHT: BUILDING CONNECTION ACROSS COMMUNITIES

**New Jersey** wrapped up the year with several meaningful family and youth events. The Annual Winter Wonderland brought families together on December 19 at the Bordentown Armory. Even when a power outage briefly turned the event into a “lights out” experience, families adapted and enjoyed crafts, games, and hot chocolate together. Once power was restored, activities continued with team-building games and hands-on challenges, welcoming more than 30 NJNG families.

Throughout December, Operation Merry & Bright supported over 275 National Guard youth with holiday gifts through a partnership with a local church and the Soldier and Family Readiness team. January also kicked off with the state’s first Youth Camp Reunion and in-person registration event, reconnecting camp families, volunteers, and staff while strengthening networks ahead of summer camp.

**New York’s** First Annual Back to School Bash in August welcomed more than 134 adults and Army National Guard youth. Supported by 13 community partners, 15 volunteers, and 90 volunteer hours, families connected with local resources and received free school supplies through Operation Homefront and Dollar Tree. With strong community support and great turnout, the team is already planning to make this event even bigger and better in the coming fiscal year.

In FY25, the **U.S. Virgin Islands** hosted Overnight Summer Camp from July 18 to 20 at the Carambola Beach Resort on St. Croix. The three-day camp welcomed 40 youth from across the territory, including both returning campers and first-time participants. Youth took part in activities designed to encourage teamwork, independence, and confidence while building strong peer connections in a supportive and engaging environment.

The camp created space for youth to step outside their comfort zones, form new friendships, and strengthen life skills in a setting that balanced fun with personal growth. The experience continues to be a highlight for families and youth across the territory.

**Puerto Rico** celebrated the season with a Christmas Workshop Day Camp on December 20, 2025. The day emphasized leadership, creativity, and community service, with PRNG Keystone Club teens playing a key role in mentoring younger participants. Activities included a resilience-focused “Gratitude Tree,” a wood workshop led by PRNG Keystone Club teens, ceramic ornament decorating, gingerbread creations, and hands-on STEM fun with sensory snow.

Seven Keystone Club teens volunteered their time throughout the day, modeling leadership and teamwork while supporting younger children. Their positive example inspired three new teens to join the Keystone Club, making the event a meaningful celebration of leadership, service, and connection.





## GUARD TEEN PANEL

## NEW DELEGATES

**CHRISTIAN MUNIZ****REGION 2 DELEGATE**

My name is Christian Muñoz, and I am 16 years old from Puerto Rico. I am passionate about engineering and plan to pursue it as my future field of study. For the past four years, I have been a member of the Teen Youth Council in Puerto Rico, where I have participated in leadership and resilience courses that strengthened my teamwork and communication skills.

I also serve as the captain of my school's Relay for Life team, helping organize fundraisers to raise awareness and support for cancer patients. Through my experiences connected to the National Guard, I have seen how many valuable resources exist for military youth, and how often teens who could benefit from them do not know they are available. As the Region 2 representative, I hope to help military youth better access these resources and speak up about the challenges they face.

**“** I want to help National Guard teens learn about and use the resources available to them, especially those who may not realize support is out there for them.

**EDEN HOPE ORTEGA****REGION 3 DELEGATE**

Growing up in the Guard community gave me opportunities to build strong relationships and develop resilience through challenges like deployments and relocations. Through STEM activities led by ARNG CYS, I discovered my interest in science and my goal of becoming a mechanical engineer.

Serving as a junior counselor and participating in service projects taught me the value of connection and putting others first. Over the past three years, I have been actively involved in the Maryland National Guard Youth Council, an experience that has shaped me as a leader in training and allowed me to give back to the military community that has supported me. Through these experiences, I have seen the power of mentorship, teamwork, and simply showing up for one another. As a Region 3 delegate, I am passionate about advocating for Guard youth so they feel heard, supported, connected, and empowered wherever their Guard journey takes them.



**“** I want to support and advocate for Guard teens by strengthening connections, mentorship, and leadership opportunities so they feel confident, heard, and empowered throughout their Guard journey.



## JONA STARKS

### REGION 5 DELEGATE

Hello, my name is Jona Starks, and I am the Region 5 Representative for the Army National Guard Child and Youth Services program. This is my first year on the Guard Teen Panel, though I have participated in ARNG CYS events for the past two years. I am from Minnesota and am excited to be a voice for military teens across the region.

As a military teen, I have experienced the challenges that come with having a parent serve in the National Guard, including long hours away, frequent travel, and missing important moments at school and home. A quote my grandmother shared with me has always stuck with me: "True love doesn't mean being inseparable; it means being separated and nothing changes." It reminds me that even when military parents are away, the connection and love within families remain strong.

I enjoy working with others and taking on responsibility. At school, I help run two faith-based clubs, a book club, and a monthly Spanish club, and I served as the captain of my soccer team this past fall. These experiences have helped me build leadership skills, stay organized, and form strong connections with others.

*"I want to help military teens feel more connected, support communication between teens and parents when they are apart, and create opportunities for Guard youth to support one another so no military teen feels alone."*



## CHARLEE CROMWELL

### REGION 7 DELEGATE

Hi, my name is Charlee Cromwell. I am 15 years old, live in Iowa, and attend my local high school while also taking classes at my community college. I have been participating in Child and Youth Program events with my family for as long as I can remember, and I was excited to join the State Teen Panel in 2024.

Since joining, I have helped with events like Fall Fest, Cookies with Santa, and the Regional Symposium last summer. My experience with the State Teen Panel and the CYP program has been incredibly positive. It is a welcoming community made up of supportive teens, adults, and leaders who share experiences and are always willing to help one another. I am honored to be selected for the Guard Teen Panel and am excited for all the opportunities ahead.

*"I want to support and connect with other Guard teens by helping create a welcoming environment where youth feel supported, involved, and excited to participate."*







## MADILYN NEUHARDT

### REGION 8 DELEGATE

My name is Madilyn Neuhardt, and I have been involved with the Child and Youth Program for nine years. During that time, I have participated in and supported many Military Youth Programs across South Dakota, including Yellow Ribbon events, Military Kids Day, teen symposiums, and military youth camp. I have also served on the South Dakota Military Youth Council for the past three years.

I enjoy being involved because I want to make a difference and help inspire other military youth. Outside of the program, I love doing arts and crafts, spending time with my family, and going on walks with my dog.

**“***I want to help inspire and support Guard youth by staying engaged, giving back to the program, and creating positive experiences where military kids feel included and encouraged.***”**



## ANNABELLE SLINKER

### REGION 10 DELEGATE

My name is Annabelle Slinker, and I am the Region 10 Guard Teen Panel delegate from Alaska. I love volunteering at Child and Youth Program events and am excited for the year ahead. This is my second year involved in the program and my first year serving on the Guard Teen Panel for Region 10.

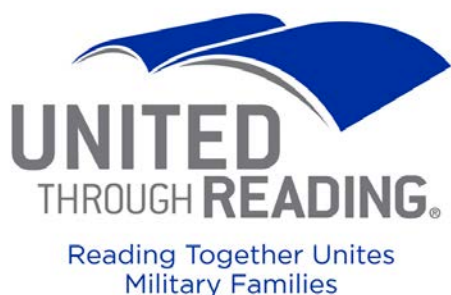
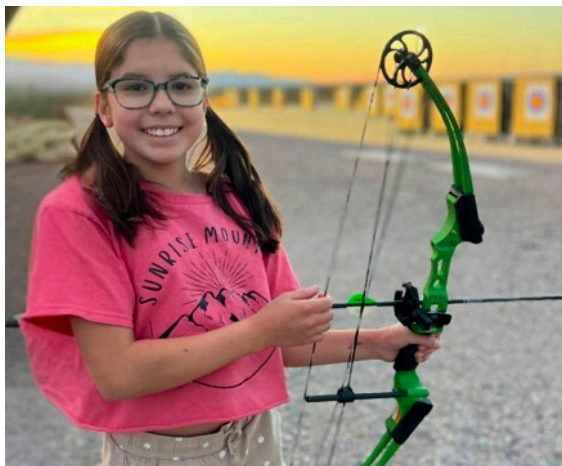
I have supported Alaska's Youth Program in many ways. During Month of the Military Child in 2025, I advocated for official recognition by reaching out to the Mayor of Anchorage, which resulted in a signed proclamation. I have also volunteered at events such as the Fall Festival, STEM Fair, Boots On Boots Off Camp, Yellow Ribbon events, Operation Santa Claus, and more. In addition, I have presented to Soldier and Family Readiness Groups to help promote the Youth Council and youth events. CYP has been an incredible community for military youth, and I am proud to be part of it.



**“***I want to advocate for military youth by increasing visibility, encouraging participation in youth programs, and helping more Guard teens feel connected to the CYP community.***”**



All of these teens have participated on their State Teen Panels, where they built leadership skills, took part in trainings, earned volunteer hours, and connected with other military youth. State Teen Panels provide meaningful opportunities for Guard teens to learn, lead, and serve. To learn more and get your ARNG teen involved, connect with your local Child and Youth Services coordinator. Coordinator contact information can be found at: [ARNGCYS.com](https://www.arngcys.com)



## RESOURCE SPOTLIGHT

United Through Reading helps military families stay connected through the power of storytime.

Service members can record themselves reading a book aloud so their children can watch and listen anytime, anywhere. Each recording includes a free copy of the book for families to read along. United Through Reading serves all branches, all duty statuses, and all types of separations, including deployments, drill weekends, and training, helping families stay close even when apart.

For more information:

<https://unitedthroughreading.org/about/>

Disclaimer: Sharing of resources in this newsletter does not constitute an endorsement by NGB, any contract vendor or the PM Team.

## DOWNLOAD OUR APP!



Search "ARNG CYP"

## NATIONAL HEART MONTH: BUILDING HEART HEALTHY HABITS FOR EVERY AGE

February is National Heart Month, a great time to focus on heart healthy habits as a family. Staying active, eating well, and managing stress all support a healthy heart, and these habits can start early and grow with your child. The American Heart Association encourages families to make small, consistent choices that add up to lifelong heart health.

**Early Childhood:** For young children, heart health starts with movement and play. Encourage active play like dancing, playground time, or simple games such as tag or follow the leader. Choose heart healthy snacks like fruits, vegetables, and yogurt, and build routines that include regular sleep and calm wind down time.

**Elementary Age:** Elementary age kids benefit from daily physical activity and learning healthy choices. Family walks or bike rides, backyard games, and sports help keep hearts strong. Involve kids in helping prepare meals so they can learn about balanced foods, and talk about how exercise helps their heart grow strong.

**Teens:** Teens can take more ownership of their heart health. Encourage activities they enjoy such as sports, fitness classes, hiking, or strength training. Support healthy stress management through music, journaling, or mindfulness. Talking about nutrition, hydration, and sleep can help teens make informed choices that support both physical and mental well being.

By making heart health a family priority, you are helping children and teens build habits that support their health now and in the future. Small steps taken together can lead to a stronger, healthier heart for everyone.

### Resources:

**American Heart Association:** Heart health tips, age specific activities, healthy recipes, and family challenges. Great tools for early childhood through teens.

**GoNoodle:** Free movement and mindfulness videos designed especially for younger children to get hearts pumping in fun ways.

**TeensHealth:** Health information written just for teens, covering fitness, stress management, sleep, and overall wellness.

