

# Missouri's Hidden Heroes



(l-r) Jessica Laurent, Sen. Elizabeth Dole, Kansas City Council Member Heather Hall, Shawn Moore.

In 2015, The Elizabeth Dole Foundation commissioned the Rand Corporation to conduct the first comprehensive, evidence-based national study of military and veteran caregivers and their needs. The study revealed a societal crisis: an estimated 5.5 million Americans care for injured or ill service members and veterans. These caregivers are moms, dads, siblings, adult children, spouses, partners and friends. Sen. Elizabeth Dole coined the term “Hidden Heroes” to describe these caregivers. Hidden from the communities they live in and the systems that support our nation’s wounded and/or ill veterans, military and veteran caregivers provide \$14 billion of uncompensated care each year that ultimately has led to a decline in their own mental health and wellbeing. Caregivers have been thrust into roles they never imagined with little to no education on how to provide care to their injured loved ones.

According to the Rand study, “Military caregivers consistently experience worse health outcomes, greater strains in family relationships, and more workplace problems than non-caregivers, and post 9/11 military caregivers fare worst in these areas.” The study goes on to say “We found that key aspects of caregiving contribute to depression, including time

spent giving care and helping the care recipient cope with behavioral problems. Perhaps even greater concern, between 12% (of pre-9/11 military caregivers) and 33% (of post-9/11 military caregivers) lack health care coverage, suggesting that they face added barriers to getting help in mitigating the potentially negative effects of caregiving.”<sup>1</sup>

In a study from 2021, Dr. Roxana Delgado et al. found that 23.6% of veteran spouses had suicidal ideations *after* becoming a caregiver. Without a healthy caregiver, the veteran will continue to suffer. As a nation, we must make caring for the caregiver a priority.<sup>2</sup>

These startling statistics show why our cities and states must come together to support these caregivers. According to the American Community Survey (2105-2019) there are 2.3 million children living in disabled veteran homes. Due to the needs of these veterans, the children become secondary caregivers and take on more responsibility than their civilian counterparts. These responsibilities can include taking care of younger siblings, household chores and caregiving for their veteran parent. Prior research suggests negative outcomes for children growing up in military caregiving homes.<sup>3</sup> Marote et al. (2012) conducted a review of 21

studies of child caregivers and found that children who are caregivers were more likely to experience isolation and have fewer opportunities to interact with their peers and develop friendships.<sup>4</sup> Marote also found that these children have increased feelings of stigmatization. Finally, Marote found that these children have more health problems such as stress, burnout and fatigue.

With the help of Kansas City Council Member and MML Board Member Heather Hall, Kansas City became a Hidden Heroes City in 2017. Since then, several other Missouri cities – Independence, Cameron and Pleasant Valley – have also come on board to help get the word out about how to support these hidden heroes and hidden helpers.

Shawn Moore, a veteran caregiver herself, and executive director and founder of Caregivers on the Homefront is an alumna Missouri Dole Caregiver Fellow. She cares for her husband, a 23-year Army veteran. Caregivers on the Homefront is based out of Kansas City and serves a nationwide audience with mental health and wellness programs. She knows firsthand how much caregivers need support and how to connect them with resources.

The one thing our communities can

do to offer support is to make sure we are providing opportunities for veteran caregivers to connect with other peers and receive mental health support. This is vital to prevent against veteran homelessness, divorce and suicide.

By becoming a Hidden Heroes city, Missouri cities can recognize caregivers and help identify their needs in the community. It is a simple process that begins with emailing Shawn and obtaining a toolkit with resources and suggestions, such as posting information on a city website, social media posts, and including family members as part of veteran care and recognition that may already be taking place.

To obtain more information on how your city can become a Hidden Heroes City and how you can support veteran and military family caregivers and their children, contact Shawn Moore for a toolkit and learn more at <https://caregivers-homefront.org/>.

**Shawn Moore** is the founder and executive director of Caregivers on the Homefront. She is also a 2017 alumna Elizabeth Dole Foundation Caregiver Fellow for the state of Missouri. Contact her at [shawn.moore@caregivers-homefront.org](mailto:shawn.moore@caregivers-homefront.org).

**End Notes:**

<sup>1</sup>Ramchand, Rajeev, Terri Tanielian, Michael P. Fisher, Christine Anne Vaughan, Thomas E. Trail, Caroline Batka, Phoenix Voorhies, Michael W. Robbins, Eric Robinson, and Bonnie Ghosh-Dastidar, Hidden Heroes: America’s Military Caregivers, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-499-TEDF, 2014. As of October 19, 2022: [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR499.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR499.html)

<sup>2</sup>Delgado, R. E., Peacock, K., Wang, C.-P., & Pugh, M. J. (2021). Phenotypes of caregiver distress in military and veteran caregivers: Suicidal Ideation Associations. PLOS ONE, 16(6). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0253207>

<sup>3</sup>Briggs et al. 2020; DeVoe et al. 2018; Glenn et al. 2002

<sup>4</sup>Marote, A.S.F., C.A. Pinto, M.dR. Vieira, M.dC.A. Barbiéri-Figueiredo, and P.M.N. Pedrosa. “Children as Carers: An Integrative Review.” Revista Latinoamericana de Enfermagem, vol. 20, no. 6, 2012, pp. 1196–1205.



Children who live in homes with caregivers and veterans have the opportunity to pair up with other teens/tweens as part of the Homefront Hangout program.

## Become A Hidden Heroes City/County

- 1. Contact Shawn Moore with Caregivers on the Homefront at [shawn.moore@caregivers-homefront.org](mailto:shawn.moore@caregivers-homefront.org). As a first step, the city or county passes a Hidden Heroes Resolution or proclamation. This pledge outlines steps the city will take to identify military and veteran caregivers and increase local awareness and support services for them.**
- 2. Next, the community designates a local point of contact, from the public or private sector, to spearhead the initiative and interact with the Hidden Heroes team.**
- 3. Deploy an action plan to identify the military and veteran caregivers in your community by working with the Dole Caregiver Fellows in your state.**

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