

# VALOR

VETERAN ★ ALLIANCE

April 2022

## Inside this issue:

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| VCO Update                | 2 |
| Veteran's Voice           | 3 |
| Student Veteran Spotlight | 4 |
| Call to Action            | 4 |
| Fire Watch                | 5 |
| Career Corner             | 6 |
| Certification             | 7 |
| Office Updates            |   |
| Coming Up                 | 8 |
| Stress Awareness Month    | 9 |

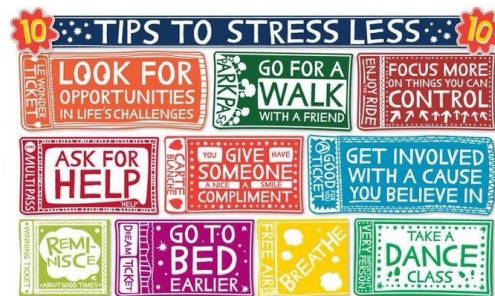


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Colleagues and friends,

With the sun now setting in the eight o'clock hour, the sight of brown lawns, the return of the robins, and the reappearance of shorts and capris on the campus, I am feeling decidedly more hopeful about the days ahead of me this semester. Spring, particularly after a long winter, has that effect. Alas, there is still much to do in the six weeks that remain of the semester.



April is Stress Awareness Month. I cannot help but feel that April was chosen out of a sense of simpatico with college educators who are barreling toward the end of the semester with group projects and lots of other grading. However, I do leave room for the possibility that April stress can be tied to other things such as taxes, spring cleaning, and students barreling toward the end of the semester with multiple group projects, assignments, and tests.

When I was younger, I used to often say I was “stressed for success” - I don't say that any longer as I know that stress causes far more distress than success. If you are feeling stressed about things in your life, read the article on page 9 that provides some strategies for reducing stress. Of course, being outdoors in the fresh air can help reduce stress (and is something that most of us are more than happy to do after a long winter).

This month's call to action urges you to remember the cost of armed conflict. With the conflict in Ukraine ongoing and Gold Star Spouses Day on April 5<sup>th</sup>, the potential cost of service to our country is particularly salient. Please take time to channel your thoughts (and if applicable, prayers) to recognizing the burden members of the Armed Forces and their friends and families bear and ways in which we can (as a human race) move closer to world peace.

Next month's newsletter will be our last for the semester. The newsletter will return in the fall with the start of the new semester. If you have any summer announcements or information to share in the May newsletter, please send it to [carol.cwiak@ndsu.edu](mailto:carol.cwiak@ndsu.edu) by April 21<sup>st</sup>.

Thank you for all you do to support student veterans. Your efforts, no matter how small you believe them to be, have an impact. Enjoy the month with less stress.

Carol Cwiak, J.D., Ph.D.  
 VALOR Faculty Liaison

**It doesn't take a hero to order men into battle.  
 It takes a hero to be one of those men who goes into battle.  
 ~Norman Schwarzkopf**



### VCO Update Jim Stoddard

You can visit Jim on campus at the Veterans Educational Training Office in Ceres 329; or by phone at 701-231-9706; or by email at [james.stoddard@ndsu.edu](mailto:james.stoddard@ndsu.edu).



Dr. David Cook has been named the 15<sup>th</sup> President of NDSU and will start his official duties in this role in mid-May.

As Dr. Cook makes his way around the campus this summer and into the fall, please freely share your thoughts with him about ways in which NDSU can better serve student veterans. You can learn more about Dr. Cook [here](#).

VALOR's survey of NDSU's military-connected student population is finally underway! I began e-mailing out the survey link to our student list right after spring break, and I'll send a few reminders for students to give us their thoughts on the survey's questions. If you're a military student (including military family members) and haven't received a message from me with the survey link, please let me know, and I'll get it to you.

In this survey, we're mainly asking about what features would be important in a potential veteran center on campus, but also about some other campus services tailored to military students. We really want to know students' thoughts so that VALOR can help promote the right priorities.



As I mentioned last month, I wanted to just relay a couple things that struck me during the presentations when I attended the Symposium on Military-Connected Students, hosted by NASPA, the professional association for Student Affairs.

For example, VALOR board members here had a good bit of discussion when NDSU decided not to pursue renewing its "Military Friendly"™ rating from the Victory Media Company. Mainly, this was because NDSU does not have a system that tracks our student veteran data in the way requested by the rating survey, and was therefore not able to easily or confidently provide the type of data that the rating survey requires.

At the Symposium, Dr. Phil Olt of Fort Hays State University presented on his study (in progress) on college choice factors among veterans and whether such ratings matter to veterans when choosing a college to attend. Initial data suggests that ratings like this are not a significant factor, and that many more veterans choose their college based mainly on other factors. According to his initial analysis, veterans were more likely to choose a college based on location near where they're living after separating from service, and that it offered their desired field of study.

Rating surveys like the "Military Friendly", or "US News Best Colleges" are typically many pages long, and require many hours of manual analysis to complete. Compiling the data and information required to obtain these marketing ratings is very time-consuming for institutional staff, and so Olt's tentative conclusion is that the work does not seem to provide a proportionate return on that investment.

In another discussion, Montaigne Long, Assistant Director of Veteran Services for the Texas A&M University System, noted their system's successful use of veteran-specific Admissions counselors, which she recommends as a model/"best practice". She sees pre-enrollment advising as a critical element in getting military students to actually commit to their schools, and proposes designing programs with a more active mindset of veteran inclusivity, rather than the more passive veteran "friendly" concept.

I also attended a panel discussion with two college presidents that are veterans themselves. President Tom Jackson, Jr, Cal Poly-Pomona, noted that showing the impact on enrollment and retention is key to getting your president's attention for a veteran support program. He also noted that as a president, he is "hungry" for opportunities to engage with students, not just as an excuse to avoid administrative meetings, but because he enjoys this as an important part of the president's job. Both presidents mentioned that knowing some of the common concerns of military students would be information they'd like to keep aware of.

Finally, did you know that the Fargo Public Library offers Notary services to the public free of charge? Military folks often need to have documents notarized because they can't always be physically present in the location where a legal transaction must take place. Notarization is the process for a trained, impartial official to authenticate the identity, mental competence, and free willingness of a person signing a document for a legal transaction. Call the Main Library at (701) 241-1492 to check on Notary availability, and check [here](#) for their complete policy and instructions.





## Veteran's Voice

Craig Schwinden

VALOR Student Veteran Representative

Greetings, student veterans.

Another month is upon us and as I write this, we have already completed week 11 of this semester. It has gone by quickly for me. I have so much to think about as I am about to (hopefully) graduate, but for now here is another Veteran's Voice column.

First, it again appears as though we have survived COVID. I, and I assume you, have seen fewer and fewer masks on campus and everywhere else. Apparently, the VA thinks so too as they have once again reverted to the pre-pandemic policy regarding housing allowances.

From the VA's G.I. Bill website:

"...starting June 2, 2022, you will no longer receive the MHA at the resi-

dent (in-person) rate for classes taken online. When enrolling for courses after that date or any subsequent term, you will need to enroll in approved resident (in-person) classes to continue receiving your MHA at the resident rate. Otherwise, you will receive the online rate, which is half the national average." ([va.gov/education](https://va.gov/education))

Any of my fellow vets registering for summer and or fall semester, please remember this. You will have to register for in-person (on NDSU's Campus Connection site they are referred as "face-to-face") classes to receive the full housing allowance. Let's hope this time the policy doesn't change back as I, and the VA, thought we were through with this once before.

Next, I wanted to mention that April is Stress Awareness Month. With the semester well past the half way point, our attention starts to turn to the requisite work involved in preparing for graduation, internships, and summer jobs. Worrying about these things as well as maintaining schoolwork can start to wear on you. The weather getting warmer makes us want to get outside and enjoy ourselves as well. This can all lead up to added stress as we try to balance our time and fit everything into our schedule. As mentioned previously by me and others in this newsletter, there are so many ways

to get assistance on this campus for yourself or for your fellow student vet. I challenge all of you to use this awareness opportunity in April to improve yourself and others in the struggle against stress. Check out [NDSU's Counseling Center](#), [Student Government's Mental Health Toolkit](#), and [WHO's Doing What Matters in Times of Stress](#) illustrated publication (available in over 20 languages) for free resources that will help you deal with stress.

Also, make sure to check out the profile of our April student veteran of the month, Luke Rysdahl. Luke is a member of Bison Student Veterans and comes to us from the United States Marine Corps where he served five years as a CH-53E 'Sea Stallion' helicopter crew chief. Another 'Devil Dog' graces the pages of the VALOR newsletter! Thanks, Luke for being our profile veteran this month and thank for your service.

Finally, as always, please contact me at [craig.schwinden@ndsu.edu](mailto:craig.schwinden@ndsu.edu) for any article ideas or comments or feedback. Thank you.



## Spring has Sprung: Go Outside and Play

North Dakota Tourism encourages us to embrace the emergence of spring by getting outside and out into the communities we live in. They offer a number of suggestions about what you can do in the state based on your interests. Check it out [here!](#)



*"Spending time in nature can help relieve stress and anxiety, improve your mood, and boost feelings of happiness and wellbeing." ~American Heart Association*

# THE SPOTLIGHT

Name: Luke Rysdahl

Major/Minor: Business Management

Originally from: St. Michael MN

Current city: St. Michael MN

Career plans after college: mid upper-level management, no particular company in mind though

Military Service/Awards: I was a corporal in the Marine Corps. I joined in 2016 and served for five years active duty as a crew chief on the CH-53E "Super Stallion" heavy lift helicopter, provided humanitarian aid in Florida in 2017 after a hurricane, and deployed to Central America in 2018.

NDSU activities/engagement: Yoga a few times a month at the Wellness Center

An interesting tidbit about the veteran: I shook Vice President Pence's hand in Guatemala while deployed to Central America.

Favorite experience/memories/etc. at NDSU: Using the 3D printers at the library to make a D&D minifigure.



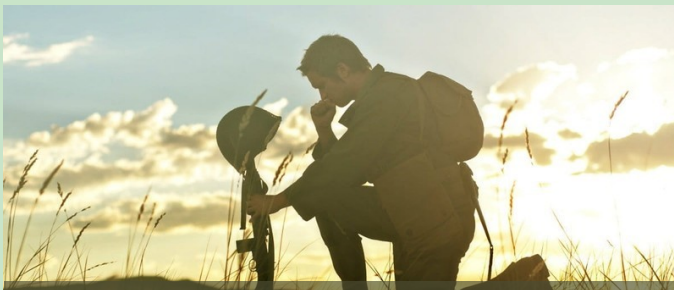
April 5<sup>th</sup> is recognized as Gold Star Spouses Day.

This day is dedicated to those whose spouses sacrificed their lives while serving in the Armed Forces of the United States or as a result of service-related disabilities after returning home.

**Gold Star**  
Spouses Day



## CALL TO ACTION: **REMEMBER THE COST OF ARMED CONFLICT**



*"The soldier above all others prays for peace, for it is the soldier who must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war."*  
~Douglas MacArthur

As the conflict in Ukraine continues, may we all stay focused on the cost of armed conflict. Government leaders make the decisions regarding the deployment of troops and military action, but it is those who serve in the Armed Forces who carry the burden of those orders. That burden also extends to their friends and family members who carry the concern for, and bear witness to, the impact of armed conflict on those who serve. As such, peace (which may seem like a utopian concept in the world we live in today), must continue to be our world priority for the sake of those who carry the burden.



**Fire Watch****Brennan Lemar and Devon Patton, BSV**

Spring has sprung, even though some days the weather seems to disagree. April is here and our veterans are looking to finish the semester strong as midterms and finals approach. The election polls are closing and the results for the next group of Bison Student Veterans Officers will be announced at our upcoming April meeting.

The April meeting will be held on the 5<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 PM in the Meadow Lark room of the Memorial Union. T-shirts are in and ready for pickup from Jim Stoddard's office during regular business hours. They will also be brought to the meeting for pickup, cash or check are accepted (the price is \$18).

We are looking for speakers for our fall semester meetings, if you or someone you know has information about anything our veterans should know please reach out to any BSV officer for coordination. We look forward to finishing this semester with our fellow student veterans, staff, faculty, and allies.

Connect with BSV via [email](#) or [Facebook](#).



### From the Bob Woodruff Foundation: [Veteran Housing Insecurity Identified as 2022's Most Pressing Issue](#)

Excerpted from article by Sarah Jautz, January 13, 2022

*"Gathering data about American communities and the veterans that live in them is a priority for the Bob Woodruff Foundation (BWF). In April 2020, BWF leveraged national research and key insights from our Got Your 6 Network to project the pandemic's impact on the military/veteran population. Given these urgent and unprecedented needs, we called in reinforcements from funders and expedited our 2020 grants to provide direct support to the military/veteran population during the pandemic. As we look ahead to 2022, additional insights and data from our network have brought a key issue to the forefront: the growing housing insecurity among veteran households.*

*Housing insecurity and homelessness among veterans are not new issues. On a single night in January 2020, 37,252 veterans were experiencing homelessness, and 7.9 percent of all people experiencing homelessness were veterans<sup>1</sup>. Still more veteran households are in economic situations that increase the risk of homelessness, with 12.9 percent reporting income at or below 150 percent of the poverty line, and 9.2 percent of veterans receiving public assistance. Additionally, half of veterans between the ages of 25 and 54 had less than \$3,000 to \$4,000 total in their bank accounts. Veterans were already facing hardship – and then, the pandemic struck.*

*The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges and gaps in services that contribute to veteran homelessness and housing insecurity. Veteran unemployment, which had been at a 20-year low of 3.1 percent in December 2019, increased over 8 percent to a high of 11.9 percent in April 2020. Our Got Your 6 Network reports that veterans and their families are at an elevated risk of losing housing due to the economic fallout of COVID-19, as well as the expiration of government led emergency measures such as Pandemic Unemployment Assistance<sup>2</sup> and eviction moratoria.*

*For much of 2021, BWF has invested in programs addressing the growing issue of food insecurity in the military/veteran community. BWF-funded efforts have strengthened the capacity of our partners to serve the most vulnerable in their community. "Local partners shared that their efforts to combat food insecurity as a result of receiving BWF funding led to a deeper understanding of the housing crisis," said Deirdre Armstrong, BWF Director of Local Partnerships. "For example, delivering hot meals to aging veterans allowed our partners to see first-hand a home in total disrepair, or lacking in basic necessities like heat or plumbing."*

*Armstrong said more than 70% of communities responding to our Local Partner Self Assessment Tool (LPSAT)<sup>3</sup> over the past year shared they were unable to address the housing issues that veterans face. "There has to be an organization that is stepping in," says Armstrong. "Again and again, we have found that the issues we focus on are intertwined. If our funding goes toward helping a family fill their pantry, it allows them to put that money towards next month's rent."*

*BWF grants target the gaps in federally administered programs. "Federal programs have had a tremendous impact addressing veteran homelessness in the last decade, but they still require supportive investments from the philanthropic community to assist community-based service providers," said Armstrong.*

*Emily Bader, BWF Director of Grants, agreed. "Often, BWF grants allow homeless service providers to serve veterans excluded from publicly administered benefits due to income and discharge status," she said. She added that it's important to recognize that effectively addressing homelessness requires more than providing physical shelter. Housing security is a complex issue, and is often intertwined with issues related to legal, mental health, and employment issues."*

Learn more about this issue at the [Bob Woodruff Foundation](#).

# Career Corner

Jerry South, Assistant Director, Career Coaching, NDSU Career and Advising Center



Are you career ready? Do you feel you have what employers are seeking? There is an organization called NACE (National Association of Colleges and Employers) that surveyed industries from across the country to discover what exactly makes a career ready employee. Based off their findings, they created a standard of 10 key attributes to help guide and develop students for a successful career:

1. **Career and Self Development** where one can identify and respond to needs based upon an understanding of situational context and logical analysis of relevant information.
2. **Communicate** through exchange information, ideas, facts, and perspectives with persons inside and outside of an organization.
3. Use **Teamwork** to build and maintain collaborative relationships to work effectively toward common goals, while appreciating diverse viewpoints and shared responsibilities.
4. Understand and leverage **Technology** ethically to enhance efficiencies, complete tasks, and accomplish goals.
5. Demonstrate **Leadership** to recognize and capitalize on personal and team strengths to achieve organizational goals.
6. Display **Professionalism** by knowing work environments differ greatly, understand and demonstrate effective work habits, and act in the interest of the larger community and workplace.
7. Use **Critical Thinking** to proactively develop oneself and one's career through continual personal and professional learning, awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses, navigation of career opportunities, and networking to build relationships within and outside one's organization.
8. Embrace **Equity and Inclusion** to demonstrate the awareness, attitude, knowledge, and skills required to equitably engage and include people from different local and global cultures. Engage in antiracist practices that actively challenge the systems, structures, and policies of racism.
9. Be involved in **Community and Global Engagement** by participating in meaningful and beneficial ways with local and global communities as a culturally competent, engaged citizen of the world.
10. Use **Creativity and Innovation** to identify goals or common problems, empathize within context, imagine and test novel solutions to adaptively convert what you have into what you envision.



What are You Doing  
to grow  
intentionally

After reading the above attributes, evaluate yourself and see if you are career ready. If there is an area you are not actively engaging in, seek out ways in which to incorporate or grow this skill in your life. Far too often we become set in our ways and satisfied with who we are and what we have to offer. We turn a blind eye to the weaker areas of our life instead of trying to improve upon them. I encourage you to take the remainder of this semester and the coming summer to put some focus and intentionality into one or two of these areas and push yourself to become a 'better version of you'.

Do you need **money** for an emergency or **food** to get you through a rough patch?  
Check out [NDSU's Emergency Fund](#) and the [NDSU Food Pantry](#).

**Change is inevitable; growth is intentional.**



[valor.veteran.alliance.organization/](https://valor.veteran.alliance.organization/)

Page 6



## The Deadline is Approaching...

## Military and Veteran Certification Office



Todd Yackley

The deadline to verify your enrollment is approaching. To ensure you continue receiving your Monthly Housing Allowance (MHA) and/or kicker payments, verify your enrollment as soon as possible. If you previously opted into text message verification, you will receive a text message from VA at the end of the month requesting that you verify enrollment.

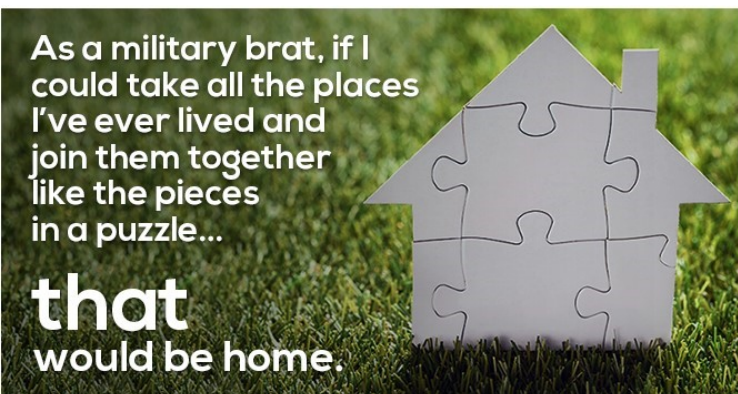
- If you continued attending your courses or training over the past month, reply “Yes” to verify enrollment.
- If you reply “No”, your file will be flagged for review. NOTE: If your schedule or courses have changed, please contact me so we can resolve any issues and avoid delayed payments.

Don't Miss the  
**DEADLINE!**

If you are enrolled in email verification, you will receive an email from VA at the end of the month requesting that you verify enrollment. Follow the links in the email to notify VA of your enrollment status. If you fail to submit enrollment verification for two consecutive months, your MHA/kicker payments will be placed on hold until you verify your enrollment. If you need to verify your enrollment by phone, opt into text verification, or enroll in email verification, you may call the Education Call Center (ECC) at 1-888-GIBILL-1 (1-888-442-4551).

## Month of the Military Child

By Jim Stoddard



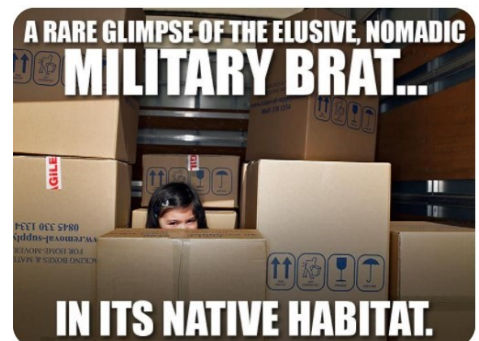
Within Department of Defense circles, April is the Month of the Military Child (affectionately known as Army “brats”, or a similar term). This special period attempts to raise awareness of, address, and mitigate the unique emotional challenges facing kids who are growing up while their parent(s) serve in the military. This can include being required to take on adult responsibilities at a much younger age than their civilian peers when one or both parents are away, and they may have more general stress due to separations from family and friends, or from the awareness that their parent has a dangerous job. This stress can manifest in many ways, or may be completely invisible.

This month also celebrates the many positive characteristics and enduring life skills that these children often develop: resiliency, maturity, global perspectives and curiosity, welcoming spirits, comfortable trying new things, independence, and a greater sense of the need to serve their community in some way. They often speak other languages, and are familiar and comfortable with other cultures.

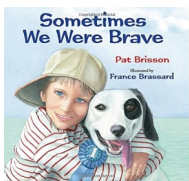
The color purple is often worn at awareness events throughout April to show solidarity and support for military kids. In military contexts, purple is often used to represent something that crosses all military services, since it's not the color of any individual service (like Army green or Air Force blue), but is imagined to be the color you'd get by mixing the colors of all the Services together.

There's a [great little video from the Psycharmor Institute](#) that covers some important things you should know about military kids—check it out [here](#).

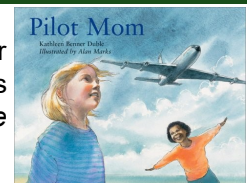
Next time you meet a military kid, ask them where they are from—just make sure you have a few minutes to hear all the places they have been!



## Books for Military Kids During Deployment



Deployments can be difficult for families, particularly children. There are a number of children's books available that are focused on helping kids deal with a parent's deployment. You can access a list of books (like the two shown here) through *The Military Wife and Mom* blog (access the post [here](#)).



## COMING UP

**Local Events**

**Tuesday, April 5<sup>th</sup>, from 6:30 – 9:30 PM, free individual income tax preparation assistance** is available from volunteers from NDSU's College of Business at the **NDSU Library**, Computer Clusters 14A, B, and C (basement). Find more information [here](#).

On **Tuesday, April 12<sup>th</sup>, from 11 AM—2 PM**, there will be a **Fargo Veteran Virtual Job Fair** sponsored by MilitaryX—[register here](#). “Past employers in Fargo have included Amazon, Apple, and TSA. These and other great employers have hired veterans full-time across a swathe of industries ranging from accounting, to IT, to HR, to sales” (MilitaryX).

On **Wednesday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, from 10 AM-12 PM**, veterans and their families can visit the **Fargo Air Museum's Veterans Coffee Hour** for free Sandy's Donuts and coffee. This event is held every second Wednesday of each month at 1609 19<sup>th</sup> Ave. N., Fargo.

On **Monday, April 18<sup>th</sup>** (and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of every month), **from 1-4 PM** visit the **free, walk-in legal clinic** for help for low-income veterans with civil legal matters at **Fargo VA's Community Resource and Referral Center (CRCC)**. The CRCC is on 1st Avenue N. in downtown Fargo, next to the Federal Courthouse.

**Connect Locally via Facebook****NDDVA**

[facebook.com/NDDVA/](https://facebook.com/NDDVA/)

**DAV North Dakota**

[facebook.com/davnorthdakota/](https://facebook.com/davnorthdakota/)

**American Legion Post 2**

[facebook.com/americanlegionpost2/](https://facebook.com/americanlegionpost2/)

**American Legion Post 21**

[facebook.com/legionpost21/](https://facebook.com/legionpost21/)

**North Dakota American Legion**

[facebook.com/NDAmericanLegion/](https://facebook.com/NDAmericanLegion/)

**Dilworth VFW Post 1223**

[facebook.com/VFW-Post-1223-106022496155155/](https://facebook.com/VFW-Post-1223-106022496155155/)

**Fargo VFW Post 762**

[facebook.com/fargovfwclub/](https://facebook.com/fargovfwclub/)

**West Fargo VFW Post 7564**

[facebook.com/VFW7564.org/](https://facebook.com/VFW7564.org/)

**North Dakota Veterans Educational Training**

[facebook.com/VeteransEducationalTraining/](https://facebook.com/VeteransEducationalTraining/)

**Bison Student Veterans**

[facebook.com/BisonVeterans](https://facebook.com/BisonVeterans)

**VALOR**

[facebook.com/valor.veteran.alliance.organization/](https://facebook.com/valor.veteran.alliance.organization/)

**April**

|                                     |                |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| Month of the Military Child         | Month of April |
| Military Saves Month                | Month of April |
| Gold Star Spouses Day               | April 5        |
| National Former POW Recognition Day | April 9        |
| Air Force Reserve Birthday          | April 14       |
| Purple Up! Day                      | April 15       |
| Army Reserve Birthday               | April 23       |
| National Military Brats Day         | April 30       |

**May**

|                                      |              |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|
| Month of the Military Caregiver      | Month of May |
| National Military Appreciation Month | Month of May |
| Silver Star Service Banner Day       | May 1        |
| Military Spouse Appreciation Day     | May 6        |
| VE Day                               | May 8        |
| Children of Fallen Patriots Day      | May 13       |
| Armed Forces Day                     | May 21       |
| Memorial Day                         | May 30       |

**June**

|                                |               |
|--------------------------------|---------------|
| PTSD Awareness Month           | Month of June |
| D-Day                          | June 6        |
| Women Veterans Day             | June 12       |
| Army Birthday                  | June 14       |
| U.S. Flag Day                  | June 14       |
| Veterans Golden Age Games      | June 18-23    |
| Coast Guard Auxiliary Birthday | June 23       |
| PTSD Awareness Day             | June 27       |

**Thank you to those who serve, and have served, to protect our freedoms.**

*the Dandelion*

The official flower of the military child is the dandelion. Why? The plant puts down roots almost anywhere, and it's almost impossible to destroy. It's an unpretentious plant, yet good looking. It's a survivor in a broad range of climates. Military children bloom everywhere the winds carry them. They are hardy and upright. Their roots are strong, cultivated deeply in the culture of the military, planted swiftly and surely. They're ready to fly in the breezes that take them to new adventures, new lands, and new friends.



*the prickly pilot's wife*





According to the American Institute of Stress (AIS), “learning to cope with our stress and finding healthy ways to deal with these situations can go a long way in living a healthy and positive life” (Meyer).

Life by itself can be a challenge. It is important to know how to balance your priorities with your available time and energy, so you do not over-extend yourself. Stress is one of the ways our bodies tell us that we have done exactly that. As young adults, college is a challenge, but the world outside of college will present more challenges that can be more complicated. Now is the time to learn how to cope with stresses, especially when there are so many resources available to you on this campus.

Pam Meyer, the Wellness Director at the Benedictine Living Community in Wahpeton, ND, says because we are all so different, we will experience stress in different ways. This translates into the lack of a specific definition for stress. However, she says here are some ways in which stress can and may appear in your daily life:

- feelings of sadness, frustration, and helplessness;
- difficulty concentrating and making decisions; and,
- headaches, back pain, and stomach issues (Meyer).

When faced with stressful situations, some of the strategies you can use to relieve that stress:

- recognize when you don't have control, let it go;
- avoid getting anxious about situations you cannot change;
- take control of your reactions and concentrate your mind on something that keeps you calm; and,
- develop a vision for healthy living, wellness, and personal growth, and set realistic goals to help you realize your vision (Meyer).

Community is an important part of stress management. Community is more than just a geographical location on a map like the City of Fargo, it is a sense of belonging and a sense of connecting to others. There are many studies that show that people who are more social, or have better social connections, tend to be happier, more physically healthy, and live longer. As one might expect, being more of a loner, or lonely in general, has negative impacts.

Taking on an activity, hobby, or volunteering is a great way to bring 'community' into your life and become a more social being. Volunteering, in particular, will focus your attention outward on a group or individuals representing a cause. There are multiple benefits to this type of activity. First, it gets you involved with people. Next, it gets multiple people who are focused on the same project or goal working together. Lastly, it gets those same people more focused on helping others with their issues which may help put your issues into perspective. All these benefits equal a more balanced outlook at your life's experiences and the experiences of others.

Meyer suggests these strategies to reduce stress:

- Take care of yourself – eat healthy, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, give yourself a break if you feel stressed.
- Share your problems and how you are feeling and coping with a family member, friend, doctor, pastor, or counselor (it is alright to talk about it, really).
- Avoid drugs and alcohol. These can create additional problems and increase the stress you are already feeling.
- Recognize when you need more help – know when to talk to a psychologist, social worker, or counselor if things continue. (Meyer)

As noted at the outset, life presents challenges for all of us. Two years plus of a world-wide pandemic has just added to the burden of daily. Take time this month to help yourself, and those around you, effectively manage stress.

[Check out these five free meditation apps \(click here\) to help you increase your calm and focus.](#)