



Successful Transitions Testimonial from a Military-Connected Spouse and Parent

By Beth Workman, MIC3 Communications Associate

February 12, 2020 - The U.S. military has been engaged in the longest period of conflict in its history and since 2001 approximately two million military-connected children have experienced parental deployment. Military-connected children cope with many challenges including frequent parental absences, the threat of potential harm to their parents during deployment and the aftermath effects trauma and stress. Of the 1.2 million children of active duty military families, almost 76% attend public schools throughout the United States; many times moving as much as nine times during their K-12 education path.

Michele Sumter grew up in Charleston, South Carolina, her father served in the Navy and retired as a Navy civilian employee, and her mother worked on the military installation. Ms. Sumter had a typical civilian childhood, remaining in her childhood home during most of her youth.

Sumter was introduced to the military lifestyle when she met and married her husband, who began his military service at Fort Bragg. Moving every year and a half, Ms. Sumter learned quickly the effects of the military lifestyle on spouses and children. The family has moved a total of nine times and has lived in six different states.

Each move meant a different job for Michele. She is an educator with experience living the military lifestyle as a spouse and parent.

Currently Sumter resides in Waynesville, Missouri serving as Waynesville R-VI School District's Director of Student Services, while her husband is stationed at Fort Leonard Wood. Missouri Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (MIC3) Commissioner Brian Henry said "Michele's past experience, knowledge and passion for serving military-connected children makes her a perfect fit for the position."

Sumter personally understands the challenges and rewards of the transient military lifestyle and how to make a temporary place "home". Michele recalls, "having experienced multiple moves with three children, I am very familiar with the demands children face when a military family moves." Some of the biggest challenges military-connect children face is making new friends, however, children involved in sports or band have an easier time assimilating into the school community. "Sports are the glue that help kids adjust to a new location," she added.

Building an inclusive environment within the school system and surrounding community because it connects the local community with the military community in creating a welcoming environment for parents and students. Her experience as a military spouse and parent is similar to that of a military-connected student, each move means leaving old friends and having to make new friends.

She was unaware of the Compact until four years ago. Sumter stressed the importance of educating communities and school districts about MIC3 through outreach and training. "Waynesville School District educates teachers and administrators annually on the Compact. Awareness is crucial to successful transitions," she said.

Because of her experience, Sumter provides transition tips to military-connected families. She advises them to be proactive or volunteering in the school system. She encourages parents to meet the principal, teachers, and school administrators, they are the local experts and are a parent's best support; each parent needs to form their own opinion of a base or school system.

Due to her experiences as a military spouse, parent to military-connected children, and educator, Michelle stressed that transitions are made smoother with positive attitudes and outgoing personalities. In addition, it is crucial for the parents of military-connected students to become familiar with the MIC3. “The Compact works if everyone involved is aware of the Compact and the implementation,” said Sumter.

The Military Interstate Children’s Compact Commission addresses key issues encountered by military-connected children, such as eligibility, enrollment, placement, and graduation. The Compact utilizes a comprehensive approach that provides consistent policy in every school district in every state and DC. For more information, please visit www.mic3.net.