



**For Immediate Release**

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**New Initiative Encourages Military Youth to Set and Achieve  
Personal Development, Public Service and Physical Fitness Goals**

*Organizations team up to provide a global community for children in military families*

WASHINGTON - The Military Family Advisory Network (MFAN) and the Congressional Award are forming a partnership to engage more military youths in a program that can build continuity and community into the often transient life of military youths during a crucial point of development - the teen years.

The Congressional Award is a nationally recognized program that teaches young people to set and achieve personally challenging goals that build character and foster community service, personal development and citizenship - values that are shared by military families.

"The Congressional Award is particularly relevant to children from military families because it allows them to develop a sense of community and resilience through volunteerism, mentorship and personal accomplishment," said Shannon Razzadin, MFAN's executive director. "The Congressional Award can be part of their teen years no matter how many times the family may move in response to the call of duty."

**HOW IT WORKS:** The program offers six levels, with varying requirements and time commitments, providing built-in flexibility to accommodate the military lifestyle. It is open to all young people ages 14 to 23, regardless of physical or developmental disabilities. Those interested can register when they are 13½ years old and begin their activities as soon as they turn 14; the program must be completed before the participant's 24th birthday.

"I owe a great deal of who I am today to the program," said Ashley Eisert, an Air Force daughter and 2010 Congressional Award Gold Medalist. "Each program area challenged me to grow as an individual and an emerging mentor for others. I learned that every challenge can be overcome by surrounding oneself with mentors, advisors, family and friends, and those who can share life lessons." Ashley is now studying business administration at the University of Nebraska Omaha.

MFAN is informing military families about the Congressional Award by delivering a toolkit of materials to key installation personnel, who will then distribute them to military youths. The toolkit is also available for download on the [MFAN website](#).

"We are excited to partner with MFAN to deliver a structured program that gives military youths the opportunity to achieve personal goals while they take on new responsibilities, discover new talents and advocate for others," said Erica Wheelan Heyse, national director of the Congressional Award. "By partnering with MFAN, we will be able to deliver this already recognized and successful program to military families across the nation."

Congress established the Congressional Award in 1979 to recognize initiative, achievement and service in young people. The program empowers America's youth by challenging young Americans to achieve what is important to them. Currently there are over 38,000 young people working to earn the Congressional Award.

To learn more about MFAN and the Congressional Award, and to download the toolkit, visit [militaryfamilyadvisorynetwork.org/congressional-award](http://militaryfamilyadvisorynetwork.org/congressional-award).

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#### **About the Military Family Advisory Network**

The Military Family Advisory Network (MFAN) is a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to building a community of military and veteran families at home and abroad who are knowledgeable about resources designed to serve them, equipped with tools for success, connected to leaders who serve the military family community, and embraced by the general public. We translate the needs of military families in a way that service providers can understand, and translate services in a way that speaks to our families. To learn more about MFAN, visit [militaryfamilyadvisorynetwork.org](http://militaryfamilyadvisorynetwork.org).

#### **About the Congressional Award**

The Congressional Award, a public-private partnership established by Congress in 1979 under Public Law 96-114, is a noncompetitive program open to young people ages 14 to 23, regardless of mental or physical challenges or socioeconomic status. The Congressional Award Foundation teaches participants to set and achieve personally challenging goals that build character and foster community service, personal development and citizenship. More information is available at [congressionalaward.org](http://congressionalaward.org)