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Caring Connection

Deployed Love, a small nonprofit, is making a big impact on military families across the country and the world

Cover Story

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A new nonprofit organization, Deployed Love, is spreading happiness, joy and fun to military families who are facing the stress and strain of deployment by organizing a series of special events spread throughout the year, as well as hosting numerous virtual events monthly.

"Our mission is to connect military hearts by creating a community that brings joy and excitement to everyday life," says Sabrina Johannes, Deployed Love's founding executive director. "We are a small, but ever-growing, nonprofit organization that creates and hosts really fun events for military families throughout the year, especially those going through deployments."

Deployed Love originated with a group of photographers in Texas who wanted to give back to the military community by offering free photo sessions. They put together an annual event, called Holiday Mini Sessions, which are held in the fall to enable families to send special photo messages to their deployed family in time for the December holidays. "Our Holiday Mini Sessions remain our primary event that each base we are at looks forward to

hosting each fall in order to send the love of the families on the home front to those deployed overseas," Johannes explains. "We love to be able to have professional photographers from within the community donate their time and talent to these families, who then get the images back with plenty of time to create special gifts for their loved ones down range."

"Often, during deployment, families put their lives on hold and feel like they should wait to make memories and take pictures," she continues. "This is hard on families, and we like to welcome them in and help them realize that although it is a hard time, it's still a time to remember. It's a great way to document just how strong your family is. We also like to extend our hand to Gold Star families at all times throughout the year."

Last year, the organization was located at five military bases and reached more than 250 families with its Deployed Love Holiday Mini Sessions. This year, the group has expanded to 10 sites and is currently operating at Fort Bragg, Fort Benning, Fort Campbell, Fort Hood, Fort Stewart/Hunter Army Airfield, Fort Carson, Schofield Barracks and Fort Sill, and also in the Wash-




Deployed Love organizes a series of special events, including free photo sessions, for military families.

creating lasting memories among families from photo shoots to art projects, we hope to create happy memories during times that are often riddled with anxiety and the unexpected.

"We have podcasts with great resources each month, along with events that can connect them with the community around them and allow them to find their bearings in new places," Johannes adds. "We hope to really defeat the isolation and hard times of feeling alone during times separated by keeping fun events coming and creating everlasting memories. And by sending beautiful

pictures of families to military members serving overseas with the hope of bringing a smile to their faces!"

The organization is supported exclusively by donations and volunteers, with 22 local coordinators and seven board members. Johannes says she was inspired to create the group by her own family's military background. "I have military in my blood. My grandfathers on both sides, as well as my father, all served in the military well before I was even born, and my brother currently serves as well," she notes. "My husband joined the military straight out of high school when we were just dating, and served in the Army for almost nine years. He is no longer active duty but still works for the military in other ways. But I have loved so much being part of the military community over the last 14 years, and was eager and excited to become this beautiful nonprofit organization that could provide community at bases across the country.

"Military families overcome some majorly difficult times," Johannes adds. "They often deal with separations ranging from a few days to more than a year. Parents are missing birthdays, holidays, anniversaries, first days of school and so much more. They also have to deal with being far from family and moving across the country and starting over every two to six years, which is something not many people have to deal with that often. This can all cause a lot of stress for families, so we want to make those changes and difficult times easier for them in any way we can. I think our volunteers get just as much back after our events knowing that those families feel loved and maybe just a little less isolated." 

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ington, D.C., and Norfolk areas. "We are hoping to extend to more bases each year, and are always looking for leaders at new bases who would like to help us start a new base local to them," Johannes notes. "We also have a virtual event program called Deployed Love Academy where we host virtual get-togethers twice a month [for] mental health panels, art classes, sign language and more. This is great for military families wanting to take advantage of our events but who may not be near one of the bases where we are currently located."

Deployed Love also is expanding its events to include numerous family fun activities. "Already this year, our bases are hosting play dates, park clean ups, moms' nights out, cookie decorating events, as well as Patriotic Mini Sessions," Johannes points out. "Each of these local events reaches from five to 25 families, and hopefully will reach more each time as we start to get our name out in the communities. Our events provide opportunities to meet other individuals in the community that are going through the same things, like deployment, training exercises, and just general military life. While also