Being in a Service Family:
Caleb and Rachael's Story

Story, concept and design by
Marg Rogers
Co-authors: Michèle L. Hébert, Emily Small,
Tegan Kanard, Margaret Sims, Michelle Gossner,
Amy Johnson, Victoria Williamson,
Majida Mehana, Philip Siebler,
Adam Ren and Einar Thorsteinsson
Illustrations by Tanya Cooper
Edited by Amy Doyle

Forewords

As a mother in a military family, I understood my children would face challenges and unique stressors their civilian friends would not. I did my best to acknowledge and support them, but spent little time considering or talking to them about the positive, protective and advantageous aspects of being a 'military brat'. Now, as my adult son shares his reflections on his upbringing, I hope this helps other parents, educators, and support workers better understand how to support young service family children in their lives.

Laryssa Lamrock
National Strategic Advisor, Families
Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families

A strong community, purpose, and shared values often shape children in military families. The characteristics children develop in these early years (compassion, duty, and respect), help nurture the building blocks that will guide them as they grow. These qualities facilitate their development as individuals in ways different from those of non-service family children. For many kids, life's difficult moments can feel overwhelming without strong support at home or in their community. But for children in military families, the shared core values demonstrated by the service community can become a steady hand to lean on.

Some of my fondest childhood memories in the community were also the most formative for my character. Military Family Resource Centre events, family days on base, and the simple act of being among others who understood our lives created a sense of belonging that felt almost instinctive. Even as a child, I felt comfort and trust around people in uniform, not because I knew them personally, but because I knew they possessed the same values as my family. Military families can form a close-knit community unlike any other, and growing up in that circle taught me early on that I was never alone. The base wasn't just where my parents worked; it was our backyard. We belonged there, and we were welcomed.

Through this life, I learned traits that would become part of who I am: discipline, structure, respect, compassion, integrity, and a deep acceptance of differences. Military life exposed me to people from countless cultures, religions, and backgrounds, and the message was always the same: everyone deserves respect. Everyone is deserving of compassion. I grew up believing that people went to work for the sole purpose of helping others. My earliest memory of what it meant to be a service family was understanding that it wasn't only my father's purpose to help others, but also mine. The sacrifices we made weren't burdens; they were part of our own duty. Many children serve alongside their military parent, but in a different way. We did it for people we would never meet, from places we had never been, who didn't share our culture or our faith.

When I looked at a person in uniform, I didn't see differences. I didn't see gender, race, or rank. I saw the values I was raised with reflected back at me: courage, service, and compassion. Those values became the common thread connecting every service family I knew.

These experiences can shape children from military families in different ways. For me, they helped shape who I became, including learning to step up, trying to do the right thing even when it was uncomfortable, and speaking up when something felt unjust.

We learn it by watching our parents serve, not just through a specific deployment, but in living these values every day, which show who they are and what they stand for.

This book celebrates those moments. It honours the unique strengths, joys, and lessons that grow in the homes of military families. And it offers children and the adults who care for them a reminder that this life, while challenging, is what makes them extraordinary.

For every child from a military family, these experiences don't just shape their childhood. They help create a cascading effect in service beyond themselves.

C. Underhill
First responder who grew up in a military family

If you're reading Caleb and Rachael's Story, chances are you care deeply about a child in a service family. You know that service life often means new schools, new friends, new routines, and big feelings that come when life shifts. This resource was created with you in mind, to guide you in creating steady anchors across home, school and community that support service children to grow strong.

As the adult child of a Vietnam Veteran, I grew up in a post-service family, and I attest to the importance of having grown-ups around who are supported to anchor children in an ethos of care. I commend this resource to you because it is written from the child's point of view and captures so clearly what they value. It tells us what matters to them and shows us how to provide opportunities for them to express everyday strengths and grow the ability to adapt. You'll notice that the story keeps circling back to what matters most: relationships. The simple message from children is that they grow strongest when the adults around them are steady, kind, and consistent—when we listen well, set fair limits, and help them practice small skills every day. The ideas here are simple, evidence-informed habits you can use together so that children are seen, feel safe and can learn how to handle the big feelings that come with growing up in a family with a parent (or parents) who serve.

The activities in this book will help you support the children you care about in finding steadiness in connection and play—through shared games, drawings, and imaginative problem-solving; expanding their horizons with new activities. These small acts of care make hard moments feel smaller and togetherness feel bigger. In these playful, relational spaces, they practice calming and mastery, turning small adventures into safe opportunities to stretch and grow.

The magic in Caleb and Rachael's story is that you don't need special training to use the activities well. Your everyday presence will do most of the heavy lifting. Their story reminds us that resilience is all about meeting strains and challenges with relational support until balance returns, and that love, routine, and play remain powerful medicines.

Associate Professor Martine Cosgrove
Head of Practice and Service Development
The Bouverie Centre, La Trobe University
Where families matter

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY

Properly supporting the psychological health of service families is not just morally the right thing for employers to do; it also directly impacts how well uniformed personnel carry out their duties.

For instance, research has shown that deployed military personnel are more likely to experience mental health problems themselves if they are worried that the family members they leave behind are not properly supported. Our research team at the King's Centre for Military Health Research (KCMHR) has been carrying out military family research for many years, as well as a number of studies on non-military uniformed groups such as police officers. Unsurprisingly, we have found that having a service parent with a mental health condition can have a negative impact on partners and, importantly, children. Children frequently worry about a lack of contact with their service parent, and around one in five are concerned about their family having to relocate because of their parent's job. I served in the Royal Navy for more than 23 years and appreciate the family stressors that an armed forces career can generate.

However, it is also important to have a balanced view. For instance, our work at KCMHR has also identified that military children also regularly report being proud of their parent's service as well as appreciating the financial benefits of service life. I very much hope that this book will provide service families with an important tool to protect the mental health of service children and, in turn, this is likely to benefit service members and their spouses as well. The book aims to help parents talk about the real, and ever present, challenges of service life. What is more, it is based on good evidence and has been produced with the help of service families as well. So, give it a go; use it as a way of talking with service children and engaging them practically using the activities described. Good luck, and thank you for your service.

Professor Neil Greenberg
President of the Society of Occupational Medicine
Professor of Defence Mental Health
King's College London

KCMHR
KING'S CENTRE FOR MILITARY HEALTH RESEARCH

Who is this book for?

While this book is written for those in service families, it is suitable for most children. It can support children to better understand their peers who grow up in service families. You can also read the book with a child one-to-one. This approach allows the child to ask questions and potentially share their experiences in a safe and comfortable environment. They may not wish to share, but just talk about the character's experiences. This might feel easier for them, rather than sharing what is happening in their family. They might share later, when the book is read again, or when they feel more comfortable and have time to process what they have learned.

Ages

We piloted this with parents and educators who read the book to children. The book has received positive feedback from families with children and young people of all ages; however, we have written the book to be most suitable for 5-9-year-olds. *Teenagers with good reading and comprehension skills will be able to understand the research pages and modules.

How to use this book

The various sections and resources are for different audiences.

Aims of the book

The book's aims are on page 27.

Section	Who is it for?	Page	Notes
Forewords	Adults	2-4	These are written by people with lived experience in service families. Some are also support workers, researchers, educators and clinicians.
Story	Children (with an adult)	6-24	This co-created story is based on lived experience narratives, as well as a mix of stories from those who support them and the research literature.
Activities	Children (with an adult)	25-26	These pages provide a springboard for discussions about the storyline and the topic.
Research pages	Adults Teenagers*	27-34	These provide easy-to-understand, evidence-informed information about life in service families.
'Being in a service family' modules	Adults Teenagers*	Online	These are part of the free, evidence informed Child and Family Resilience Programs, co-created for parents, educators, support workers, and clinicians. ecdefenceprograms.com/modules

Characters

Caleb

Enjoys:
playing instruments
and drawing

Caleb's Father

Enjoys:
fishing
and orienteering

Steph – Caleb's Stepmother

Enjoys:
rock climbing
and running

Rachael

Enjoys:
motorbikes and puppets

Harry – Rachael's Twin

Enjoys:
playing piano and
photographing sunsets

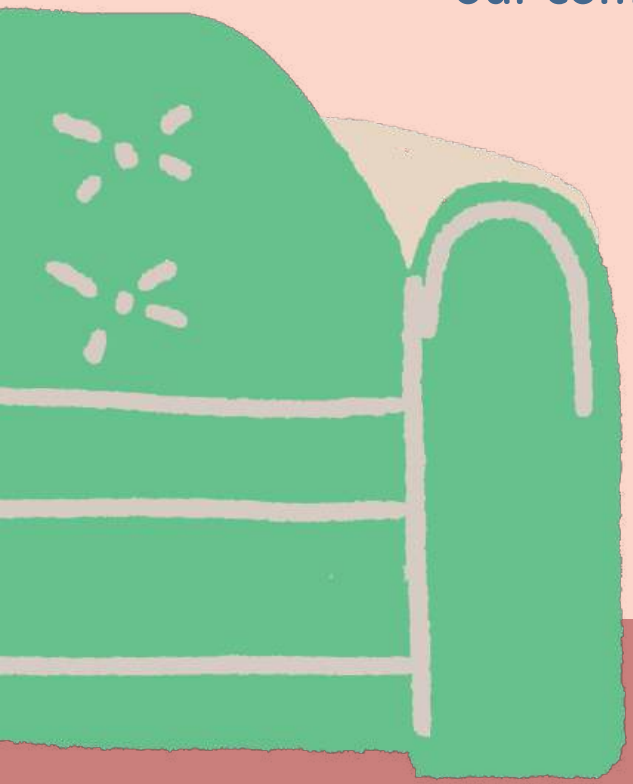
Harry and Rachael's Mother

Enjoys:
playing saxophone and
country dancing

Harry and Rachael's Stepfather – Frank

Enjoys:
playing the trumpet and
Rock and Roll dancing

Hi, my name is Caleb.
My Dad is a policeman, and my stepmother, Steph, is in the Navy. This means that we are a service family because my parents serve our community and our country.



I have a friend called Rachael,
whose mother is a firefighter.
She has a twin brother, Harry.
Her stepfather, Frank,
is a veteran.

Rachael and Harry were still babies when their mother met Frank. He was in the Navy. They are also a service family.

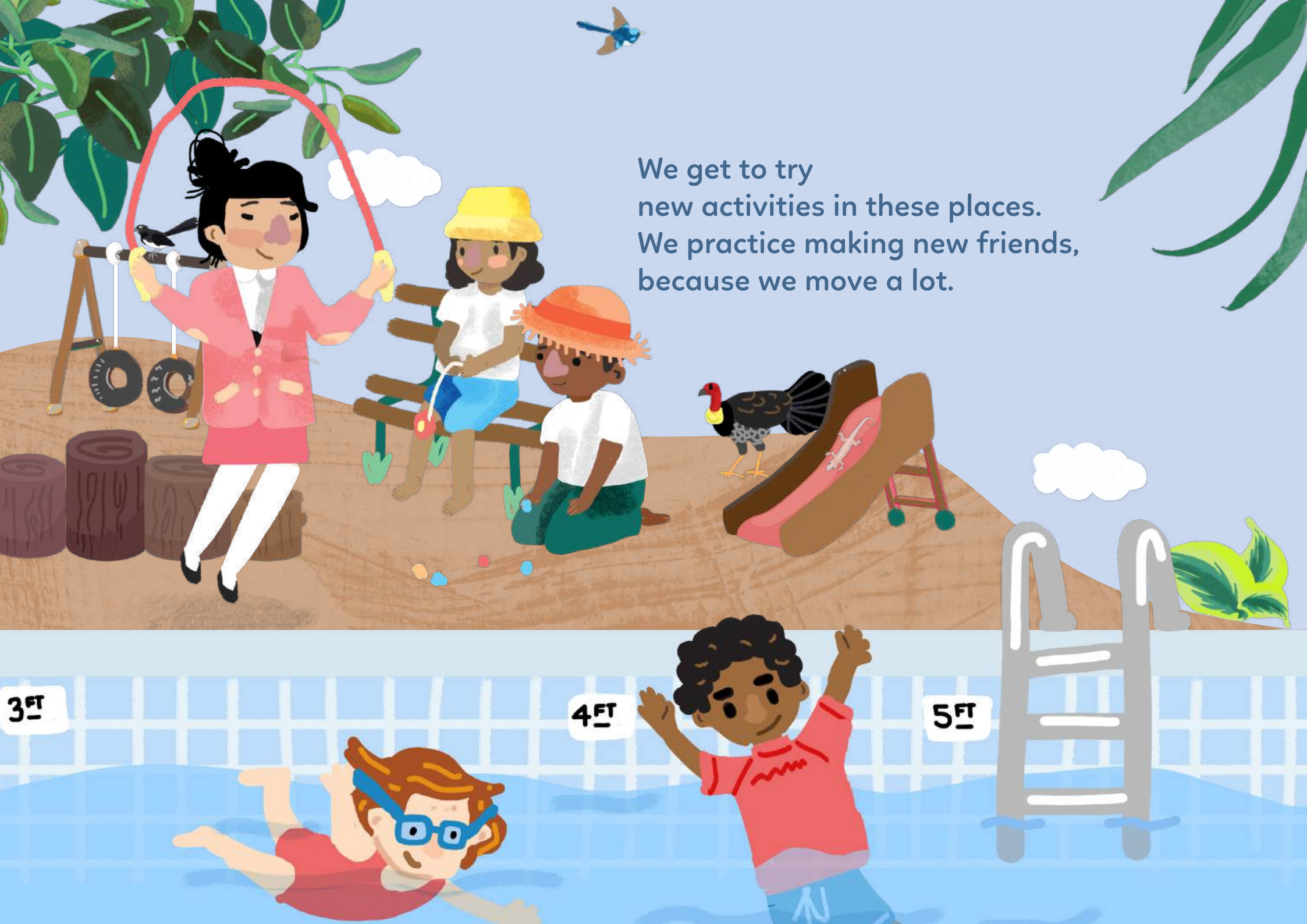
There are lots of names for service families. Sometimes we are called a first responder family, sometimes a PSP family (for public safety personnel) and sometimes a garnet family because the red garnet stone represents life.
This is because people in service roles put themselves at risk to help other people.
I am very proud of the work my parents do.

Every service family is different. Some children enjoy moving, and some find it hard. It's okay to have different feelings about moving.

I miss our friends, houses, educators, neighbours, places and communities. Sometimes I feel lonely and sad.

This can be when one of my parents is working away. At other times, it is when I have just moved and do not know many people.

I can join different groups in new places, such as bands, sports teams, or community activities. Sometimes these help me feel like I belong. At other times it takes time to find where I fit.


We get to try
new activities in these places.
We practice making new friends,
because we move a lot.
3FT
4FT
5FT

We are part of different groups
in our towns and cities.
I am part of the children's town band where we live now.
We go to family activities too,
hosted by Steph's Unit.
It helps me feel like I belong.

I have something in
common with other service families
everywhere in the world.
The friends we make
in service communities
can be special.
This is how I met Rachael.
I hope we stay friends forever.

We are good at finding people to help us.
I talk to my friends and family. My teacher helps me too. Some schools also have counsellors, social workers, support groups or mentors.
We like it when people try to understand what we are going through.

Some service families
like to live in the
community.
My family enjoys living
on base.
It's like living in a small
town, where everyone
knows each other and
many people say they
feel safe.

When you live on base there are
lots of community events
such as BBQs, Hanukkah, Christmas,
Diwali, and other parties.

Other families live in the
nearby town or city.
Some families do a mix of both.

Our families often go to
commemorations together such as
Remembrance Day services.
We learn a lot about our history
at these events.
There are badges, medals,
photos and other items to collect.
We learn why ceremonies, respect and
remembrance are important.
We serve our community, too.

Children from service families learn to take special care of their family when they need it. Sometimes, when Harry is worried about Dad at work, Rachael gives him a big hug.

She also spends more time playing with him in the first weeks at each new school, when he misses his old friends.

At school, we really enjoy show and tell because we always share stories about our adventures.

If our parent is sent overseas to work, we might get to travel far away and learn about other cultures. One of my favourite experiences was visiting a German folk festival. The music and dancing were so much fun!

We learn to be independent. We try new adventures in all of these different places.

We have similar lives to other service families around the world. This helps us find friends wherever we go, even if it takes time.

Children from service families learn how to cherish their time together.

We learn how to
communicate in creative ways.
We use all sorts of
communication technology,
even when we are young.

I email Steph when she is away.
I will still play video games with
Rachael when she moves away.
We can also stay connected through
texts, phone calls, and video calls.
We can send letters, cards,
parcels and drawings.

Children from service families learn to be flexible.
Sometimes parents work away.
I miss them.
But I know I can contact them by text or email,
which they can read later.

We learn how to be supportive by doing our chores.
We are great team players.

My friends and I feel proud of the hard work and sacrifices our parents make for our communities and our country.
We are proud to be in a service family.

Activities for children

1. Draw a map and mark all the places you have lived.

2. Ask each of your family members to write a sentence or draw a picture about what being part of a service family means to them. Discuss how each person's answer is similar or different.

3. Create a find-a-word or crossword with all different types of first responder and/or military jobs in it.

4. Create some symbols of connection by making things like keyrings, friendship bracelets, painted or pet rocks (or any other craft idea) that can be exchanged before a parent goes away to work or someone relocates.

5. Make another map showing where some of your friends and extended family live.

6. Create a memory scrapbook or journal to record places you have lived. This might include fun things you have done, photos of houses and communities where you have lived and early childhood services or schools you have attended. This could be done in one of two ways.
   - As a family, this could be a keepsake for each of the locations where you are posted.
   - This could be a nice thing for children to do whilst a parent is away for work, so they do not miss out on what is happening at home.

7. Draw a picture of the main characters, then cut them out and stick them to paddle pop sticks (popsicle sticks). Act out some of the scenes in the book.

8

Create a word cloud of all the positive parts of being in a service family.

9

Use clay, plasticine or playdough to create a scene that shows your service family, or a service family you know.

10

How do you show your family members that you care for them?

11

Paint or use clay to create a scene of some of the activities you have tried in new places.

12

Paint or draw a picture showing the best part of being in a service family.
Create another picture of the most difficult part.

13

Create the text and picture for a new page of the book to show another good part of being in a service family.

14

Children in service families sometimes get to do things other families might not. They might get to see inside a police car, an ambulance, a fire engine, a Navy ship, or a military plane. What special things have your family done?

15

Read about Caleb and Rachael in other books in this series. You can find Caleb in a book called *We're Moving Again: Caleb's and Grandpa's Story.* You can see Rachael and her twin brother in these two books: (i) *Where is Work? Harry's Story*, and (ii) *What Do You Do When You Miss Your Parents? Rachael's Story*.

How was this research-based storybook written?

The storybook was co-created using lived experience narratives from military and first responder families combined with the literature. The information below and in later pages, explores research informing the book and the literature in this field.

Research question

How can the use of a storybook assist children from service families build their knowledge and understanding of the benefits, challenges and protective factors of service family life?

Research statement

This storybook was designed to build on children's knowledge and understanding of:

- the positive and challenging aspects of service family life
- the protective factors (supports) within the service community
- the benefits of life on a military base
- the connection to service communities elsewhere
- the coping strategies used by service families.

This storybook provides a starting point for parents, educators and support workers to talk to children about some of the common experiences in service families. It can also start conversations about ways to support children within service families.

The illustrations assist all children to understand the experiences of service family life and how it impacts the children from these families. The storybook is designed to build community understanding and to then build peer and community capacity for connection and support.

What does the literature and research say?

By Marg Rogers

There are many well documented challenges service families face (Cramm et al., 2020; Sharp et al., 2022; Williamson et al., 2023). Despite this, there are many protective factors that are provided by service family life as well as benefits (Rogers-Baber, 2017; Rogers et al., 2024; Sullivan et al., 2021).

These can include:

Financial and service organisation supports

Most service organisations provide a reasonable and steady household income, building the family's capacity to have healthier and happier lives. Additionally, there can be other service benefits (Doody et al., 2022). These could include support with housing, health care for the member, training support for the spouse, and designated places for early childhood education and care near bases.

Community

As they can be located away from their extended family, service families often work together to provide a supportive, close knit environment. This can be very helpful for families as they relocate in and out of different communities (Johnson et al., 2022). There might also be opportunities to meet others, at planned and funded social and sporting activities. These communities often provide the family with models of coping strategies they can copy and adapt to suit their own circumstances. Sometimes these friendships grow into lifelong connections despite relocations. Additionally, family members can connect with other current or previously serving families later in life as they have shared experiences.

Family relationships

Within the family, there are interpersonal relationships that can buffer family members from the stress of service family life (Doody et al., 2022). This can also include extended family who might be available locally, or provide support from afar (Rogers, 2020).

Opportunities

Service family life provides unique opportunities to experience different communities and cultures. They can sometimes learn new languages and get to know different education systems. They could get to try a variety of hobbies and extracurricular activities.

Purpose, pride and parents' job satisfaction

Children from service families can develop a strong sense of purpose, service and sacrifice. This can help them make sense of their challenging lifestyle and build their coping strategies. They have an opportunity to serve a community during difficult times. They often take great pride in what their parents and family do to serve the community. Many children from service families go on to serve the community in some way. Those in service organisations often experience high levels of job satisfaction.

Confidence when faced with change

Service life can build children's confidence and adaptability, which can support them as they move into adulthood. They may be more likely to take a job in another region or country because change is familiar to them and they know they can cope.

Narratives and communication

Service families often use narratives to support their children's understanding of what is happening and the reasons behind the challenges they face. This assists the children and family to function well during challenging times (Rogers et al., 2024). These coping strategies are positive and can support them later in life. Also, children often learn to use a range of digital communication tools to support their relationships with their parents and friends who might be in different geographical locations (Johnson & Rogers, 2023).

Build social cohesion through storytelling

In her 2025 Boyer Lecture, Larissa Behrendt stated:
'Telling stories is a powerful strategy for achieving social justice because it shifts issues from the abstract to the human, from statistics to lived experience. Facts and policy arguments may inform, but stories engage the heart, making the realities of injustice tangible and relatable. They allow people to see the world through another's eyes, breaking down stereotypes, prejudice and apathy. Storytelling also reclaims agency. For communities who have been silenced, telling their own stories counters attempts at erasure and at the same time, asserts identity, culture and truth on their own terms. Narratives can mobilise empathy into action, build solidarity across divides, and influence public opinion in ways that can pressure institutions to change. In legal, political and cultural movements, from Mabo to #MeToo, stories have reframed debates, inspired allies, and made justice seem both urgent and possible' (Behrendt, 2025).

References

Behrendt, L. (2025). Justice, ideas, inclusion. *ABC Listen, 2 November, 2025*. https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/boyerlectures/larissa-behrendt-justice-ideas-inclusion/105872300

Cramm, H., Norris, D., Schwartz, K. D., Tam-Seto, L., Williams, A., & Mahar, A. (2020). Impact of Canadian Armed Forces veterans' mental health problems on the family during the military to civilian transition. *Military Behavioral Health, 8*(2), 148-158. https://doi.org/10.1080/21635781.2019.1644260

Doody, C. B., Egan, J., Bogue, J., & Sarma, K. M. (2022). Military personnels' experience of deployment: An exploration of psychological trauma, protective influences, and resilience. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, 14* (4), 545–557. https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0001114

Johnson, A., Ames, K., & Lawson, C. (2022). Archetype profiles of military spouses in Australia
Identifying Perfect Partners and Mean Girls. *Armed Forces & Society, 48* (4), 828-848. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095327x211029318

Johnson, A., & Rogers, M. (2023). Strengthening and supporting parent child relationships through digital technology: Benefits and challenges. *Journal of Family Relations, 1* (18). https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12960

Rogers, M., Johnson, A., & Coffey, Y. (2024). Gathering voices and experiences of Australian military families: Developing family support resources. *Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health, 10*(5), 79-94. https://doi.org/10.3138/jmvfh 2023 0057

Rogers-Baber, M. (2017). Protective factors in families: Themes from a socio ecological study of Australian Defence Force families experiencing parental deployment. *SAGE Open Access, 7* (2) 2158244017706711.. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017706711

Rogers, M. (2020). Recommendations to support young children from Australian military families: A report for policy makers, family and social workers and educators J*ournal of Management Policy and Practices, 21*(2), 1-26. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.33423/jmpp.v21i2

Sharp, M. L., Solomon, N., Harrison, V., Gribble, R., Cramm, H., Pike, G., & Fear, N. T. (2022). The mental health and wellbeing of spouses, partners and children of emergency responders: A systematic review. *PLoS one, 17*(6), e0269659. https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0269659

Sullivan, K. S., Hawkins, S. A., Gilreath, T. D., & Castro, C. A. (2021). Mental health outcomes associated with risk and resilience among military-connected youth. *Family process, 60*(2), 507-522. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7997811/#S33

Williamson, V., Murphy, D., Stevelink, S. A., Jones, E., Allen, S., & Greenberg, N. (2023). Family and occupational functioning following military trauma exposure and moral injury. *BMJ Mil Health, 169*(3), 205-211. https://combatstress.org.uk/sites/default/files/Files/2021_Williamson_MI%20Family%20Impact.pdf

About the authors and contributors - Child and Family Resilience Programs team

Associate Professor Marg Rogers works in Early Childhood (University of New England, Australia), and is a Research Fellow in mental health (Manna Institute). She is a service family and narrative researcher, children's psychosocial storybook author and the lead researcher for the Child and Family Resilience Programs.

Dr Amy Johnson is a military family sociologist (Central Queensland University) and researches the impacts of military service on communities, including veterans and families. She has personal experience as a Royal Australian Navy Reserve officer and the partner of an ADF veteran.

Emily Small is an Australian early childhood teacher who specialises in, and advocates for, the inclusion of military families in early childhood programs. She is the daughter and sister of veterans, and the sister of a first responder.

Tegan Kanard is an arts-based and play-based therapist who works with a diverse range of children and families. Prior to this, she led a team for a defence charity as a family worker, supporting the loved ones of veterans who had died or experienced significant health impacts due to their service. Tegan has several first responders in her own family.

Professor Einar Thorsteinsson works at the University of New England, Australia, in the School of Psychology. He is a Senior Researcher in the Manna Institute. His research focus is in the area of health psychology, including adolescent mental health and coping.

Dr Michelle Gossner is a Lecturer at Central Queensland University with a background in education and psychology. Her research focuses on understanding and addressing the diverse factors that influence the wellbeing, development, and educational outcomes of children and young people. She is also a member of the Manna Institute.

Dr Philip Siebler worked with the Department of Defence for over 20 years, including with the formerly named Defence Community Organisation (now Defence Member Family Support), mental health branch, and he established and led the military family research program in 2020 until his retirement in 2022. He has a background in primary teaching and social work and is an adjunct at UNE.

Professor Margaret Sims is an Australian early childhood and families researcher and has worked in family support and disabilities for many years. She is an Honorary Professor at Macquarie University.

Dr Adam Ren is a Lecturer in Early Childhood Education at the University of New England. His current research portfolio encompasses a range of international collaborations, including studies involving vulnerable populations.

Others

Dr Michèle L. Hébert is the Founder and Chair of Buds in Bloom/ Bourgeons en Éclat, Registered Charity for neurodiverse children and families, long-time paediatric occupational therapist, and a prestigious CIHR postdoctoral Health System Impact Fellow in partnership with the University of Alberta and Autism Alliance of Canada.

Kelly Briggs is a program manager of the Military Families Resource Centre as part of the Canadian Forces Morale Welfare Service. She is also a social worker.

Dr Majida Mehana is a lecturer in Early Childhood (University of New England). She researches early childhood in different contexts and early intervention programs. She is an external researcher in this project.

Dr Victoria Williamson researches psychological adjustment after traumatic events including combat trauma, human trafficking and moral injury in the UK.

Lisa Vaters is the Policy Development & Research Manager, Veteran Family Program, Military Family Services with the Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (CFMWS).

Anne Chartier is the senior manager of the Child Care Primary Office and Chair of the MFS GBA Plus Working Group, Military Family Services at the Canadian Forces Moral and Welfare Services.

Lily Baber is a mental health support worker who is studying an undergraduate health science degree.

Captain John VanStone is a Chaplain with the Canadian Armed Forces, in the Princess of Wales' Own Regiment. He co-leads Military Dads and supports military families with challenges, especially moral injury.

Amy Doyle is the Project Manager, Strategic Partnerships and Initiatives at the Canadian Institute of Military Veteran Health Research (CIMVHR).

Acknowledgement

The University of New England UNE acknowledges the Anawain people, the traditional custodians of Armidale, and shows respect to their elders past, present, and emerging. This book was created by people on the lands of many other nations, and we show our respect to the Indigenous people of these nations. The authors recognise that sovereignty was never ceded by the traditional owners of the lands on which UNE sits.

Editing, and additional concepts and story writing

Alison Cotton, Lynda Manser, Anne Chartier, Kelly Briggs and others from the Canadian Forces Moral Welfare Service, and Amy Doyle from the Canadian Institute of Military Veteran Health Research.

From the authors

The authors would like to acknowledge the children and their families, friends, educators, carers and support workers of children and parents. They sacrifice much so their parents can serve.

Copyright, ethics and citation

Being in a service family: Caleb and Rachael's Story is licensed under Creative Commons Attribution Non Commercial Share Alike 4.0. CC BY NC SA. Digital design and graphically designed characters are Copyright © 2026 Marg Rogers and Tanya Cooper. All rights reserved.

Pseudonyms have been used in this book. Ethics approval was gained from The University of New England. For further information or requests for permission, contact Dr Marg Rogers https://orcid.org/0000 0001 8407 7256

To cite the storybook: Rogers, M., Hébert, M. L., Small, E., Kanard, T., Sims, M., Gossner, M., Johnson, A., Williamson, V., Mehana, M., Siebler, P., Ren, A., & Thorsteinsson, E. (2026). Being in a service family. University of New England. https://doi.org/10.25952/dawz-qn35

ISBN: 978-1-922639-55-4 e-book

Acknowledgements

Cash support from:

CIMVHR | ICRSMV
CANADIAN INSTITUTE FOR MILITARY AND VETERAN HEALTH RESEARCH

Legion 100 1926 · 2026

In kind support from:

une University of New England

manna INSTITUTE
Mental health research and training for regional Australia

SMALL HANDS EARLY LEARNING

CQUniversity AUSTRALIA

Communauté Pivot Community

RESOLUTE READY
One Stop, One Call, One Life

CFMWS

KCMHR
KING'S CENTRE FOR MILITARY HEALTH RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF BATH

Praise for the book

from anonymous survey participants.

I would recommend this … because it presents service family experiences in a strengths-based, accessible way that is reassuring for both children and adults. The storybook is engaging, inclusive, and easy to relate to, and it supports positive conversations about change, belonging, and resilience.

It's great!

These are fabulous resources for families and children to help them see themselves in books.

It is nice to see the strengths of these children acknowledged and celebrated.

As a 46-year-old woman who grew up in a military family, this resource strongly resonated with me. It reflected my own experiences of frequent moves, adaptability, and a strong sense of pride in service. Reading it with my autistic son was especially meaningful; the clear language, visuals, and positive framing helped him understand why families move and how staying connected works. The story supported both of us in seeing our experiences as strengths rather than challenges.

As the spouse of an ex-serving veteran (34 years British Army and ADF service) and mum of two girls (now in their 20's) our experiences as a lateral serving family certainly have many parallels to the characters portrayed in the book.

I shared the text with my husband, who is a Veteran himself, and an adult child of a service (military) family, and his immediate reaction was he noted how different his two sisters were from each other - one very outgoing, the other very bookish and shy - and so this book got him remembering and telling me stories of various moves the family made. He ended up calling both of his sisters AND his elderly Veteran father within days of me reading him this book! So, I'd say this is a story book with the power to make an impact for sure! Not that they never speak, they all do - but the book spurred memories and new outreach!

It reminded me of some of the experiences I had as a child - going to CRASH on base in Sydney and connecting with other kids at functions and family days.

This reminded me of when my children were little and we used to be a service family. It also reminded me of many children in care that came from service families with some of them struggling with moving or parents being away for extended periods of time.

The storybook is good to emphasize the positives of being part of a service family for children of those families and also for other children to learn about other types of families and circumstances. Activities for children are a good way for children to reflect on their own experience.

Pride of children [I read the story to] in feeling represented in a story.

Adults thought it was sweet.

I would recommend the story book and the supporting materials to different people. The story itself could be useful for picture walks and also for social and emotional content. I may even use the illustrations as an art prompt. The other materials [back pages] may be useful for social and other community workers and allied health. It provides solid references for further reading and in some ways it may be more useful than the [story in the] picture book.

[I] really loved the positive coping strategies - like show and tell.

I learned about:
[A] more balanced portrayal of military children. [The] role of protective factors, [and] suggested activities.

I learned:

Although circumstances can be tough at times, service family communities offer support with housing, childcare, and health. Moving to different places means family members become knowledgeable about different parts of the country and make friends in a different places which makes them adaptable and resilient. Moving also gives families opportunities to participate in a wide range of activities and life experiences.

Children from forces families have a lot to give. They are proud of themselves and their parent's service. They value connection and safety.

There are benefits of living in a military family. A large variety of experiences Opportunities to stay connected through gaming.

This book was written, illustrated, produced and printed on Anawain land in Armidale, New England, NSW. The Anawain people are the traditional custodians of this land and have respected and nurtured it with the Kamilaroi, Dunghutti and Gumbaynggirr people.

LEGACY®

A $2.50 donation is given to Legacy Australia from the sale of this printed book.