



Learnings Report **MFANetwork**

PCS Pantry Restock Box Pilot
Fort Cavazos, Texas



Military Family
Advisory Network

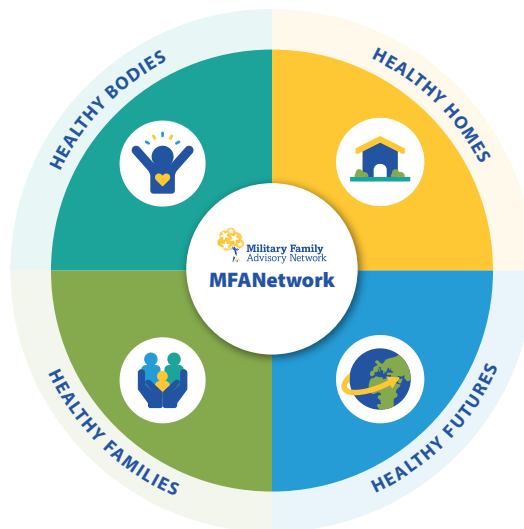


Introduction

The Military Family Advisory Network (MFAN) is a national nonprofit working to understand and amplify the needs of military-connected families and inspire data-informed change. We design scalable, measurable programs that are grounded in research and built for lasting impact.

Our goal is to shorten the amount of time between the identification of an issue and when military families can see and feel progress toward change. We act with agility, and at our core, we believe in collaboration.

Our latest program, the MFANetwork, is a prime example. MFAN and our partners are addressing issues in our community through four key pillars that are foundational to military family well-being:





Easing the Financial Burden of a Military Move

The Challenge

Military families who recently completed a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) or military move are at greater risk of food insecurity, economic hardship, loneliness, and housing cost burden. And with the average military family moving every 2.5 years, it is difficult for them to get ahead.

The Data

Of respondents to the 2023 Military Family Support Programming Survey who moved in the past two years:

- 51.6% were experiencing food insecurity
- 25.7% were significantly more likely to report poor family well-being
- 52.1% rated their experience in finding a place to live as difficult or very difficult

The Opportunity

Level the playing field for military families: Lighten the financial burden of a military move, help families settle into their new home, and connect them to their new hometown.

The Outcomes

More than half of the newly arriving military families in Fort Cavazos who received a PCS Pantry Restock Box reported a significant reduction in financial stress, while an overwhelming majority reported feeling a greater sense of belonging in their new community. Additionally, nearly a third of recipients returned to local partner locations, creating valuable connections and paving the way for ongoing support in their new environment.

54.8%

Slightly over half of respondents moved within the past two years due to military orders

2023 Military Family Support Programming Survey

Enter the PCS Pantry Restock Box

Pilot Program

The MFANetwork kicked off with the launch of the PCS Pantry Restock Box pilot at Fort Cavazos, Texas in November 2023. This program is designed to offer stigma-free, low-barrier support to families who have recently moved on military orders. The “welcome kit” includes \$150 worth of food and household essentials to help families settle into their new homes, offset moving costs, and offer a pathway to community connection and ongoing support.

Family & Financial Impacts of Frequent Moves

Frequent moves offer incredible benefits, like travel and cultural competency. However, as identified in our research findings, these moves can also lead to moments of acute vulnerability and present financial and emotional well-being challenges. MFAN is committed to standing with those who serve and their loved ones every step of their journey. The PCS Pantry Restock Box alleviates some of the burden of frequent moves by addressing immediate and long-term needs related to our Healthy Bodies pillar.



Fascinating Find

Most respondents reported spending between **\$500 and \$1,000 out of pocket** on moving expenses over what was reimbursed by the military.

29.2% of respondents reported staying in temporary lodging between 11 to 30 nights and another 20.6% of respondents between 31 to 60 nights.*



Why The Great Place?



28.9%

of **active duty families** in Bell County, TX experienced food insecurity in 2023*

As a data-driven organization, MFAN identified Fort Cavazos as our pilot location because of high levels of food insecurity in the military community and ongoing community partnerships resulting from our six previous food distributions. In the first few months, MFAN staff focused on distribution and logistics processes to ensure scalability and viability of additional distribution sites. In early 2024, we began a heavy focus on outreach, adding additional distribution sites, and deepening our community relationships on and off the installation. Working with distribution partners, we have tested additional models, such as attending community events during PCS season to engage with as many incoming families as possible and adding staff to provide on-the-ground support.

MFAN in Texas

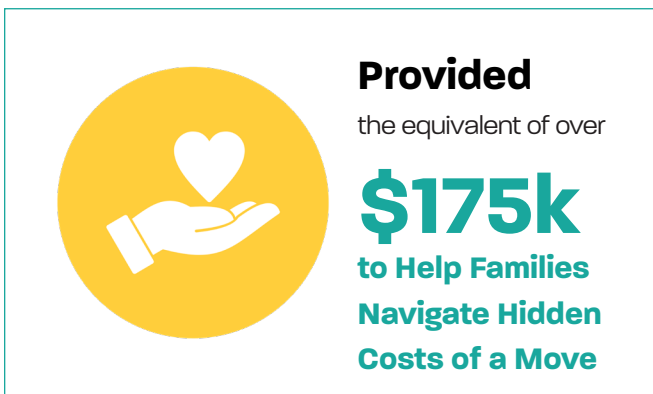
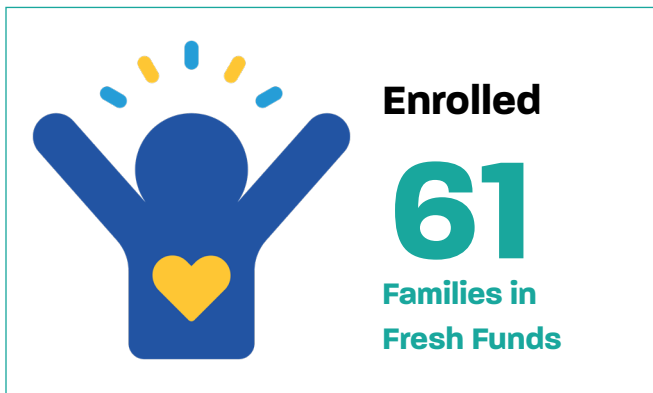
Nearly **\$2M invested** to support the basic needs of Texas military families



508,334 meals to **3,510** military and veteran families

Pilot Program Results

Families Supported - As of July 31, 2024, MFAN has:



In Their Words...



“It was unexpected and helped tremendously! Having a few of the necessities right upon arrival helped my family feel more at home and relaxed after our move in was complete after this PCS.”

—Active duty Army family



The Impact

Military Families Given Spending Power

More than half of respondents strongly agreed that receiving a box reduced financial stress. In a follow-up survey:

More than a third thought they had
**saved between
\$101-\$150**
as a result of receiving the box

Families Feeling Understood, Seen, and Appreciated

84%

said the **PCS Pantry Restock Box** made them feel welcome

Families Learning About Local Resources

This model enabled providers to educate and connect families with community resources, including food support when necessary.

Community Partners Helped Get Families in the Door

About one-third of families who completed the final survey shared that they returned to the partner location where they picked up their box.

Community Partners Gaining Greater Visibility

Our local partners have confirmed that the box is a “win-win.” Families may learn about the box through social media or word-of-mouth and come to a location solely for the box. While there, partner staff use the opportunity to talk about their programs and services.

“We loved this program and wish we had it longer. As a military family who moved recently, times have been tough with groceries and bills. Thank you.”
—Active duty Army family



Learnings & Action Items

MFAN is incredibly proud of our joint accomplishments through this pilot program. We also recognize that there is always room for improvement. Below are key learnings and steps MFAN will take as we move forward.

Learning #1: Stigma around accessing support continues to exist. Lowering barriers to support programs is essential.

During the pilot phase, MFAN staff learned from local partners that families were reluctant to be seen as 'needing help.' Based on this feedback, we updated our registration process to reduce the number of intake questions and adjusted our messaging to reflect the "no rank requirement." It was important to our team that we balanced the need for a low barrier to entry with the data required for important programmatic updates.

Action Item: Conduct pulse checks with families who are accessing support to understand barriers to entry in receiving support and adjust program entry accordingly.

Learning #2: Plan for the unpredictable. Adapt when needed.

As our team established local relationships, we learned of significant changes to deployment schedules and operation tempo, leading to many families delaying their moves.

Action Item: Stay in regular contact with base leadership as well as partners and supporters so the delivery can flex, as needed.



Learning #3: Relationship-building takes time but is paramount to success.

Establishing and cultivating strong relationships on- and off-installation and securing buy-in from Fort Cavazos leadership was crucial for the success of this pilot. MFAN invested time in building trust with all stakeholders, ultimately demonstrating the power of public-private collaboration.

Action Item: When starting up a location, meet with stakeholders monthly and then move to a quarterly cadence to strengthen and enhance collaborative efforts.

Learning #4: Local presence matters.

Throughout the pilot, MFAN continually adjusted our outreach strategy to increase awareness and build engagement across the Fort Cavazos community. For example, we learned that one of the more successful engagement opportunities is in local military spouse Facebook groups, but we experienced challenges joining these pages because our staff was not local to the area. We also received frequent requests to participate in various on-base events.

Action Item: Hire a local outreach coordinator, preferably a military spouse, to support on-the-ground logistics and outreach.

Learning #5: Diversification of distribution sites is important.

An installation the size of Fort Cavazos necessitated diversifying the box pickup locations to both on-installation and off-installation locations—and we achieved that diversification during the pilot phase. However, not all locations were evenly trafficked. The locations tied to where families were already conducting business tended to be where families picked up boxes with the highest frequency. We believe that having multiple pickup locations is valuable for families. However, encouraging families to visit new locations can be a challenge.

Action Item: MFAN continues to find the right balance of locations and we are also using these learnings to help inform strategies such as direct mail.



Learning #6: Post-program feedback is critical but difficult to capture.



Initially, MFAN saw low response to post-program survey. To help increase response rates, we added a third reminder, updated our communications to ask families for feedback, and highlighted that their participation could help support other military families.

Action Item: Closely monitor survey responses and adjust social media and email communications as needed to highlight the importance of feedback.



Learning #7: Curate the basics and allow for client choice for specifics.

Thanks to the fluid feedback from program participants, MFAN made real-time updates to the PCS Pantry Restock Box. We do, however, recognize that there are opportunities for further refinement, especially related to dietary needs.

Action Item: Review feedback quarterly to determine if modifications to box contents are requested and are feasible to implement.

Learning #8: The demand is growing.

This program fills a real gap in support for families, especially as programs like Lending Closets are limited or discontinued. Military families—particularly those already stationed at Fort Cavazos who are preparing for a PCS move—have asked when this program will expand to other installations.

Action Item: Thanks to the generous support of our partners, MFAN plans to expand this program in 2025.

What's Next?

MFAN will continue to build upon the key learnings garnered during the pilot phase. By integrating feedback from participants and stakeholders, the program will refine its approaches to ensure that it effectively addresses the needs of newly arriving military families.

As the program scales to additional locations, MFAN will utilize the insights gained from Fort Cavazos, which will be adapted to fit the unique contexts of each new site. This tailored approach will involve collaborating with local partners to understand specific community needs and challenges, ensuring the program remains relevant and impactful. By leveraging the experiences from Fort Cavazos while respecting local dynamics, the program aims to foster sustainable practices and create meaningful outcomes in each community it serves.



Acknowledgments

At its core, the MFANetwork is a collaborative effort of organizations committed to supporting military and veteran families worldwide. Our work is made possible by our “boots on the ground” allies who share our mission of serving those who serve. We are immensely grateful to the diverse coalition of public, private, and nongovernmental organizations that are making an impact on the lives of military families through this program.

The MFANetwork is made possible in part by the steadfast support and generosity of:



We are also incredibly grateful for the logistics and distribution support provided by Umoja Supply Chain Solutions.

Our efforts to alleviate some of the burden families experience during a military move would not be possible without the support of our MFANetwork distribution partners who help get PCS Pantry Restock Boxes directly to military families and tirelessly work to provide support services to those in the Fort Cavazos community. We extend our gratitude to the following:

Armed Services YMCA Killeen
Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at Endeavors
Food Care Center
Army Community Service
Cavalry Family Housing

American Red Cross
First Heroes National Bank
Fort Cavazos Food Pantry
Harker Heights Chamber of Commerce
Manna Church