



# What You Need to Know About Hidden Helpers

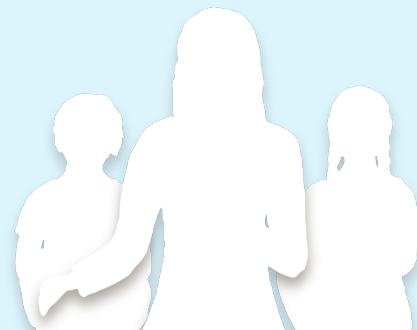


## What you need to know about Hidden Helpers

- There are approximately 2.3 million children under the age 18 living with a disabled veteran in communities across the U.S.
- Military and veteran families experiencing high levels of disruption because of the veteran's and service member's illness, or injury are more likely to report high levels of child distress.
- Hidden Helpers are more likely to experience isolation and have fewer opportunities to interact with peers; have difficulties expressing emotion and learning in school; experience health problems such as stress, burnout, and fatigue.
- Some Hidden Helpers may develop an increased sense of personal strength and self-efficacy, as they are taking on more responsibilities at home.
- Not all injuries incurred in military service are visible. Invisible injuries like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury also require attention and management by family members. A responsibility unseen and often unacknowledged by individuals unfamiliar with these injuries.
- It is important to recognize the stigma around help seeking, especially amongst military and veteran families for whom self-sufficiency is a prized attribute.

## Who are Hidden Helpers?

Hidden Helpers are the children and youth who live in homes with wounded, injured, or ill service members and veterans. Based on census data analysis, we estimate there are approximately 2.3 million Hidden Helpers who everyday provide an unseen, unrecognized, and unsupported national service. Often these individuals are taking on monumental responsibilities within the family unit whether assisting a warrior in performing Activities of Daily Living, taking care of other children in the household, or helping to manage finances. As part of our efforts to support and celebrate military and veteran families, the Elizabeth Dole Foundation and Wounded Warrior Project's Hidden Helpers initiative seeks to uplift the voices of military caregiver kids, better understand the unique challenges they face, and enhance the support services available to them.



## Quick Tips for Policy Makers

**ASK:** Until the Elizabeth Dole Foundation initiated work and invested in research on children living in military and veteran families, little was known. We still need to learn more and turn to the Elizabeth Dole Foundation if you are interested in the latest update. Finally, read the Mathematica report, commissioned by the Elizabeth Dole Foundation to learn more.

**CONNECT:** Engage with your constituency. In your role as a policy maker, at all levels, you have a unique convening power and often serve as the hub for promoting and engaging your community around a variety of services that includes social services, economic development, and general support. Take action to bring people to the table and connect residents with needed resources.

**UNDERSTAND:** Policy measures such as identifying students as Hidden Helpers is foundational to understanding where help should be focused. Investments in community assessments, Census, and simple additions to intake forms in schools is a first place to start.

**TALK:** While data collection and analysis are critical, equally important are hearing directly from parents and children and adolescents on their experiences. The Elizabeth Dole Foundation can connect you to parents, children, and adolescents whose lived experience will expose the gaps and opportunities and help you understand the impact of existing policies and frame new ones.

**CONSIDER:** Not all injuries suffered by service members are physical. For veterans of America's post 9/11 conflicts, many more veterans are suffering from the invisible wounds of war like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or Traumatic Brain Injury. These injuries require a different type of attention by family members, which can be emotionally taxing and distressful. We call upon policymakers to expand their understanding of what constitutes a disability and the ways veterans with disabilities need support.



### Hidden Helpers and Local, State, County, and National Policies

Policy makers at the local, state, and national level have an opportunity, through legislative and administrative means in securing a bright future for Hidden Helpers. From improved data capture to expanding access to safety net supports, it is incumbent on policymakers to include this population in future and ongoing legislative efforts.



### Connect with EDF

Need help getting started? The Elizabeth Dole Foundation team is here to help! Please reach out to us at [HiddenHelpers@elizabethdolefoundation.org](mailto:HiddenHelpers@elizabethdolefoundation.org) with any questions!