

Military OneSource Podcast — Voices From the Joint Service Teen Council, Part 1

Episode transcript

Intro voice-over:

Hi, I'm Bruce Moody. Today, we're bringing you an interview I did with an amazing group of teens from military families. So, these teens went to the Pentagon to brief leaders on the challenges that military teens face and, because these are smart teens, they brought solutions. I think that you'll find today's conversation inspiring, especially if you worry about whether today's youth are ready for the challenges of the future. And spoiler, they are. They totally are. I hope that you'll share today's conversation with other military families. We're on all the major podcast apps. Just tell them to search for Military OneSource. And go ahead and subscribe while you're at it.

I want to remind you that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department with personalized tools, support and resources for every step of military life. Now, let's jump into today's conversation.

Bruce Moody:

Alright. Well, good morning, everybody.

Jaiden:

Good morning.

Bruce Moody:

Alright. We are here to talk about the Joint Service Teen Council, but let's get some housekeeping out of the way. We are in Crystal City, right? If you don't know about Crystal City, then you don't know. So, give us an idea where, in relation to other things, are we currently located? Who's going to go with that?

Jaiden:

We're about five minutes from the airport and there's ... what else?

Keandre:

We're close, I would say pretty close, to the Pentagon — I think they said a train station away. We're a lot close to a lot of monuments and both Pentagon Mall and with the Lincoln Memorial, the MLK Memorial, Vietnam, Korean Memorial. So, there's a lot of sightseeing and a lot of important historical figures we could see around the area.

Bruce Moody:

Yeah, and you're close to the Pentagon, which really matters to this conversation. Okay, so we got that figured out. Let's get some introductions, and also so people understand the scenario, you guys are basically at a conference this week. We're in a hotel conference room. We've all been at conferences, and I can tell you, this is what it looks like. We all have the nametags. We're having bacon and eggs for breakfast from a buffet table, and we're sitting around and brainstorming. Typical conference stuff. This is what you'll be doing with your lives. So, it's a good primer. So, now people know the setting, so let's get some introductions, here. Again, just first names only. Let us know the service that you're with and the installation that you're with.

Xavier:

My name is Xavier. I represent the Marine Corps, and I'm from Miramar Military Base.

Jonathan:

My name is Jonathan. I represent the department of the Air Force, Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma.

Matthew:

My name is Matthew, and I'm from the department of Marine Corps, and I'm from Iwakuni, Japan.

Keandre:

My name is Keandre, I represent the Army and USAG Rheinland-Pfalz, Baumholder, West CYS Services in Germany.

Jaiden:

Hi, I'm Jaiden. I represent the department of the Air Force, and I live at Moody Air Force Base in Georgia.

Leihlani:

Hi, my name is Leihlani. I represent the Marines, and I am from Camp Pendleton, California.

Bruce Moody:

Alright. Well, welcome. I'm really so glad that you're all here, and we want to get into a lot. Now, the main thing that you guys are doing is presenting a report and a brief to leadership, and you're going to be mentioning the top issues that you want to bring to them. We're going to do a separate podcast episode, and we dive into those issues specifically. So, we're not going to get into those specifically during today's conversation, but let's talk about the council itself. Generally speaking, how would you describe the goals of this council?

Yeah, go for it.

Matthew:

So, like talking about our problems, trying to compare them and trying to find solutions to fix the problem.

Keandre:

So, we try to find problems that are faced in military branches. I know there's some programs that focus on one branch specifically, but this is for branches globally, and it's helped fix and give a quality of life to those who might think that military life is harder, or those that have it harder in military life, and they need a better outlet of resources, time, funding, and we try to provide that with reasons and solutions on how and why we should fix it.

Leihlani:

It's not only where we solve problems; it's a place where a bunch of military teens who are alike can come together to collaborate. Yeah.

Bruce Moody:

Okay. So, how are you able to represent the military teens? How confident are you that you're bringing an accurate picture to leadership?

Jonathan:

I think we're doing very well because we know how they ... we're living how, what they're living, how they live. So, I think we have the best way to figure out, and they're going to listen to us because we know. We know what the teens are thinking and what they want. So, I think they're going to listen to us, and they're going to listen to our

brainstorming ideas and our issues and why we think we should do certain things and why we think we should add on, and that's why they added us here, just to talk about it and that we know what they're doing firsthand.

Bruce Moody:

Now, your connection to other teens, obviously besides having your friends, is the teen center, right? So, how much did the teen center itself, your local teen centers, have a role in getting you here today?

Xavier:

I think just meeting the staff at first and building relations with the staff, and then your peers there at the center, it kind of just builds up a profile for yourself that you evolve over time, and you learn these new skills in life, and you grow as a person. And then, you kind of just want to help people around you. So, going to the big stage and helping teens across the world that are going through what you're going through, it's a really cool experience, but it's also something meaningful that it's something you don't get to do often, but it's something that you'd want to do.

Matthew:

In my opinion, first you need to get to know the staff and then, later, they'll see how you're improving over time, with a lot of discipline and courage and then helping a lot of teens, that's really a good opportunity.

Bruce Moody:

Okay. Let's talk a little bit about what you're going to be doing tomorrow. So, it's Wednesday. Thursday is when you actually go into the Pentagon, and you're going to be talking to leadership. What is that going to look like tomorrow?

Keandre:

It's going to be interesting because this is, I'm going to say one of the most hardcore things you could do because we have to rehearse and make sure we present what we want to present in the right way because these are very important people we're going to be talking to, and we want to make sure we're ready and we're prepared so that we don't mess up. We give them the problems and the solutions, and they agree with us and actually implement those into our branches, communities, into our world.

Bruce Moody:

And to the parents listening, I will say that the group that you're briefing, the leadership, they represent a bunch of different offices in the Pentagon, each of which has its own unique perspective on how to take care of warfighters, how to take care of the families,

how to focus on the mission when they're also looking at families. So, it's not like you're just interviewing a bunch of people from one single office — it's a whole wide variety of people. So, does that intimidate you or excite you or what does it feel like to you?

Jaiden:

It's kind of a mix of both because I love doing this type of stuff. I love advocating and I love being able to make change, but it's also nerve-racking because these are the people who make decisions, and they're very important people, and you want to speak properly and act out what you need and what you want the right way.

Leihlani:

It's also a little nerve-racking because it's something new and something different that I've never seen or done before. Even just being here in Washington today, it's completely different and just out of the daily stuff that I would do. But I'm also very excited for it. I think it's a new opportunity, and being able to tell these people, "I went to the Pentagon," is something you don't get to say every day.

Bruce Moody:

Yeah, it's definitely cool to put this on your resume. Let's go back to the teen centers, right? Because you have a lot of opportunities besides the Joint Service Teen Council. So, when you look at the various things that you have available at your teen center, how do you think that that prepares you for today?

Jonathan:

Well, there's things called 4-H, and there's things — Keystone — that help you with leadership and helps you gain confidence and it helps you become more open-minded and outgoing. I definitely think the 4-H was one of the first events I could have went to see more leaders, and that definitely helped me right now, where I'm at today, where I can talk to everybody and give out ideas and give out plans and give out issues that we think we need right now. So, the 4-H and all the other services and all the different events we have, it's definitely helping, I think, everybody. When they go to that, it's like you come back even better. And you come back, you get more plans for your youth center, for your teen program. So, yeah, I think it helps you overall.

Bruce Moody:

Right. So, let's talk more about that. I know we're here specifically to talk about the Joint Service Teen Council, but really, from your perspective, and just correct me on this, but I mean, you have a lot going on at the teen center. This is one of those events. They all kind of tie together, that they're teaching you skills that you can bring into your adult

life. They're giving you the opportunity to shape the lives of your fellow teens. So, this is one of several. Let's talk a little bit about both.

There was Keystone. So, for those who don't know, that's the Boys & Girls Club of America, and I want you guys to explain that. But let's also start with the 4-H, right? And how many of you have experiences with the 4-H?

So-so? You do? Okay, because I was in a meeting last night, and actually it was run by a bunch of teens who are in the 4-H, talking about some of the things that they do. And if you think that they're just planting flowers, you're really wrong. So, what is it like to be part of the 4-H? What are they doing as a military teen?

Jonathan:

So, as a military teen, it's not about the plants and the agriculture. It's all about community service, and they really just want to get out there and let everybody know that community service is something that you should do and not something that people want you to make you do. So, that you should just go out there and do it. So, when everybody gets together at the 4-H, everybody has different events and different places they're going to go to talk to in front of doing presentations, kind of like how we going to the Pentagon. Some people went to the Pentagon, some people went to AmeriCorps, some people went to different places in D.C. But to talk about why they should involve more community service, why they should involve more teen activity. And I think the 4-H is a big thing that everybody in the bases should do, in teen programs and the youth programs, and I think everybody should just be more involved with it.

Bruce Moody:

Yeah, we will have more to say about 4-H on this podcast, so we're excited about that. Alright. So, Keystone. You want to talk? Okay, awesome.

Keandre:

So, Keystone is I think what they call the highest leadership program, a part of BGCA and ...

Bruce Moody:

Boys & Girls Club of America.

Keandre:

Correct. So, it's from the Boys & Girls Clubs of America and it's basically a program where we give back to the community as much as we can, and there's levels to it. So, you first start off as a charter, and they give you challenges according to the year. So, this year's theme was anti-bullying, and so we had to create challenges catered to that

to teach the youth about anti-bullying, and those who reached the silver level actually get to go to the Keystone Conference. It is a conference held, this year in Chicago, where thousands of youth from across the world and thousands of staff from across the world come together and network, celebrate the different accomplishments they made, whether that's charter, gold or legacy, thank you.

And being part of the steering, excuse me. Being a part of the steering committee where I plan the conference for these thousands of youth, I've definitely seen a lot of behind the scenes, and it's such a powerful and important part of the year that I'm so glad I could be a part of and so glad I can have some amazing speakers to help motivate and inspire the youth.

Jonathan:

It's also a very good connecting way because you get to talk to people that's non-traditional and then traditional. So, non-traditional is, of course, people that's non-military, it's just the regular Boys & Girls Clubs bases in the counties. And then, you got military and then they're all connecting, and then you see the other bases and youth centers, and you see how they live and you see how they go off and how they get there. How they even got to the Keystone, it's even amazing itself. So, you see their ways, how they kind of got there and how they bring themselves up.

Bruce Moody:

Yeah. With Boys & Girls Club of America and 4-H, you're in a mix of military and civilian teens. And from my perspective, I think when you see how much you have in common and when you see the different ideas that are out there, different perspectives because they're from all over the country, I think that really makes it an even stronger experience for you. Let's just talk about the teen center in general. What is the difference between being a part of the teen center and maybe not being a part of the teen center? What do you see in yourself versus some of the teens that you know who are not going to the teen center? I'll get to you next.

Xavier:

So, I would just compare the relationships between my peers at the center and peers at school. It's a completely different ballgame; whereas at school, you meet up pretty much every day just as you would at the teen center, but you kind of have to act more professional, and you kind of have to be a little bit more serious with your friends. Where at the center, they try and get you to be more open. They try and get you to have fun. So, you can show other people who you really are, your true colors, and you get to learn new people, their backgrounds. You get to — they kind of throw you in just a ball pit of different experiences, which will all benefit you later on. And I think it's just a really great experience to meet the staff, the teens and to have the opportunities to do cool things that you wouldn't get to do just being a normal civilian.

Matthew:

In my opinion, the difference between the two is that if you were in a teen center, you would've met the staff, made a lot of friends, played games, have fun, know about Keystone, maybe going to the Pentagon, a good opportunity. And the difference between the other one, without going to teen center, is just going to school like normal, just walking with your friends, and you'll never know the path to success. A lot of discipline.

Bruce Moody:

So, I think what you're describing to me, I mean it's definitely a lot of fun. It's definitely cool. It's a lot of things that you maybe wouldn't have been able to do on your own. I mean, it sounds like you're genuinely trying to make life better for the teens around you. So, how do you sustain that, right? Because I know that you're all getting near that age where you're going to be going off and graduating high school and going off to the next chapter in your lives. So, how do you make sure that the younger teens in your life are able to continue the work that you're doing?

Keandre:

I'm moving into a senior year, and I will say, the most important thing is that you pass that torch on. When I was in ninth grade, I got the torch passed on to me, and that form of torch was a social media account because we have a social media account for our Keystone club. We tried to do that for the next generation and the next generation because it makes sense to have those youth have the same opportunities as you. And if not, have the better opportunities as you, because I don't think I would be here if I hadn't had the torch passed on to me, and I wouldn't be sitting here talking to you guys about JSTC. So, it's really important that we help start the next generation so they can get a new beginning for themselves and for the next generation.

Bruce Moody:

Did you want to add to that? Oh, okay. You kind of look like you did. Okay. Oh, you have a ... okay, go ahead.

Xavier:

Yeah, I feel like being in the situation that most of the younger kids is now, you kind of are a little bit experienced on what it's like to not yet have the torch to pass on. You kind of have to think in the mindset of them, and you have to be sort of a role model and have them look up to you in the sense that you want them to someday advocate for teens across the globe, and you got to teach them how to do it and teach them the reason why they're really doing it. Not just to go on cool trips like this, but to really

understand the meaning of what it's like to be a military youth and the challenges that they face every day, and just ideas and ways to better the lives of those.

Bruce Moody:

So, like I said, we're going to get into all of the challenges —we're not going to multitask during ... what are the challenges? Okay, I'm calling you out. Alright. So people, just so they know, I caught you. You're looking at your phone as we're having an interview, and that's totally fine because that's the world in which we live. We have a lot of things coming at us at the same time. So, what is that like? What do you see in the area of technology and social media? Is that good or is that bad, or is there a little bit of both? I'll start with, alright, we have a lot of hands raised, so we've tapped into something. I think we've actually touched on something good. So, I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable.

Keandre:

So, being the techy guy I am, I have a little bit of experience with this. It's important, in the technology we're living in today, because I can guarantee everybody in this room can agree that we can't live without technology these days. If the internet would've shut down for a whole day, a lot of things would fall apart.

Bruce Moody:

Oh, I would collapse.

Keandre:

Right.

Bruce Moody:

Yeah. I will admit, my attention span is a fraction of what it used to be.

Keandre:

But even further than attention span, we have all these new technologies such as new advancements in the medical field. We have airports. All sorts of systems in place because of technology. And if we didn't have to go back to filing cabinets, this is what the world would be like. And now that we're living in it, it's such an important matter and such an important standpoint that we keep improving it and keep having it support us in our future.

Jonathan:

I think it's a good and bad. I think, okay, the good: I definitely think, if you need to fall back on something, the internet's there to fall back on. Now you got good information. If you need information, where are you going to run to? You either run to your mom and dad or you're going to run to Google. Now, I think everybody's usually running to Google, though. So, I think the internet is here to help you, but there is some costs. But it's also good for advertisement, too. If you want to advertise your youth center, I think most people are advertising on social media, or they're advertising on paper, but I think mostly it's on social media.

So, I think the internet is definitely good with use, but I can see some bad because social media can also mess up your little kids, seeing some things that you don't want to see. As a young kid, you watch the wrong video, you watch the wrong, you click the wrong thing. I can see why there's some bad in it, and I understand why some people want to kind of engage off of social media and stuff, but there also is some good.

Matthew:

I'm going to be honest, probably good and bad at the same time because in the bad part, for kids, really young kids, kind of bad because it gets addicting over time. They'll get too addicted and then later they'll get really angry after their mom or something like punishing like, "Hey, you can't use this anymore." And the good parts, I mean, we do really need it because if we don't have electricity, the whole world will go all the way down.

Bruce Moody:

Did you want to say something? Oh, you're swatting a fly. Oh, go ahead please.

Leihlani:

Okay. So, building off of what Jonathan said about how the teens can use it to advertise, that's what we do at our center. So, we have a social media page where we post, and we can send our invitations or what we're doing there, and it makes our teen center seem more welcoming than it already is. And for our kids in the area, they could follow it and keep up with us. So, even if they aren't registered for the teen center, they could get a sense of what it is before they start going there.

Bruce Moody:

So, let's delve a little deeper into just some of the challenges of being a military kid. We're going to get deeper into it in the other episode, but just give us an idea of what does it mean to be a military kid? Let's start with you.

Jaiden:

I mean, I can't speak for everybody, but I know that for me, so I move around a lot since my dad — we're active duty — so we move around a lot. And it's always difficult to move from place to place and always to meet new people and to make new friends. But I've found that with my center, I've met a lot of new people, younger, older, and I've been able to create those relationships that I can keep for a while. And I know that even if I do move in the future, I'll still be able to keep those strong relationships and just stay close and just keep everything. So, yeah.

Bruce Moody:

It seems like the moving, at the rate that we do, is sort of like social media. There's good and there's bad. It's not all one thing. On the balance, do you prefer? Are you looking forward to putting down some roots and staying in one area once you have the opportunity? What are your thoughts on this?

Xavier:

I mean, obviously nobody, almost nobody is going to want to like the feeling of change. And I know, as my experiences, I haven't moved around as much, but it really does take a toll on the mental health of a military youth, especially when you move to a new place, a new environment, new people, new schools, new communities, all this. It's something that you definitely have to adapt to, which, it makes us strong in our own unique ways, but it really does take a toll that not everybody really understands in terms of just normally moving across the state.

Bruce Moody:

Yeah. And we're going to unpack that, but was there another aspect to military life that you wanted to jump in about?

Keandre:

So, I kind of live a different perspective. A lot of people in the JSTC I have noticed are retirees, but for me it's a little bit different because I'm also a retiree family overseas, which is a completely different life. In America, I've noticed that it's mixed, where you have schools that have some public school kids and some military school kids. For me, it's all military school kids. And so, I could say almost all of my friends have moved away from me and have not come back. So, I have to make new friend groups every two years and meet new people all the time, which was kind of hard for me. I did find my balance after a little bit, but it is kind of hard when you have it in a different place away from everybody else.

Bruce Moody:

So, we're going to get more into that. Let me just ask you from a different perspective. So, you're all from military families, which means that you've got somebody in uniform in your family who has to go out and support a mission. Just looking at your own personal lives, how is your being here, how is being part of the teen center and that kind of involvement and having that in your life, how does that aspect of your life — what do you see that in the ability of the service member in your family to kind of focus on their jobs?

Jonathan:

I think it gives them a little bit of a relief that you know they're doing — I think they know that we're doing great things when they're not home. That kind of gives them like, "Oh yeah, I can let him go out with an advisor because I know he's going to do, he's doing a good thing out there." They don't even question no more. If I go out to Washington, D.C., or I go to Atlanta, they're just like, "Okay, go ahead and do that." And I think it gives them just a relief, and it gets them relaxation. If they're at home, they get to be at home by when they're not doing work, of course, but they get to be at home and chill a little bit and just let them have to take a deep breath and let them release it. It gets them a little bit more time by themselves.

Bruce Moody:

Yeah. Any other thoughts on that? Okay.

Leihlani:

So, I was thinking about that. So, when my parents see me with the teen center and all this stuff and being here today, they know that I'm off doing something bettering my future and that I have this leadership that's different, and that's why they're allowing us to do these things. And also, while I'm here, I'm able to connect to my dad who's in the Marines. I'm able to connect to him. I've seen him talking and briefing his little military kids about what they had to do in bootcamp when he's recruiting them or to even just what that exercise is going to be for the day. I could connect to him, even though we're so far away and so far apart of doing completely different things. And just, I'm here doing this presentation, and I could relate to him briefing his kids about stuff. So, yeah.

Xavier:

So, I think just as a kid, watching my parents go on deployments to better the lives of everyone, joining the youth center and them allowing me to go on these trips is, I see in a sense is, it's my way now, it's my turn to better impact the lives of military youth across the world because you don't know what either the military youth or the military parents that go off to serve the country are going to go through when they're separated

from each other. So, here on this conference, we're just kind of, and better improve the situation so that way it's less stressful so everyone can do their job a lot better, and that way there's not as much worry on everybody's plate.

Bruce Moody:

Yeah, yeah. Alright. I need to wrap it up. So, I just want to say ... what, did you have ... did you want to ...

Jaiden:

No, no, no. I just say, I wish it could go longer.

Bruce Moody:

I know, I know. Well, that's why we're going to do a whole 'nother episode because I know you have a lot to say, and honestly, most of the audience of this podcast are military parents. So, I think what you're saying is both valuable, but I also think it's reaffirming that you're in good hands and you are helping your fellow teens. So, I really appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today and to share your conversation with the rest of the military. So, just stand by while I do my readout and remind everybody that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We always like to hear from you. So, we have a link in the program notes, and you can send us a question or a comment about what you've heard today. And be sure to subscribe to this podcast wherever you listen to your podcasts because we cover a wide range of topics that help military families navigate military life.

I'm Bruce Moody. Thank you for listening. Take care and bye-bye. And thanks, everybody.

Alright.