

Military OneSource Podcast — Meet Military Spouse Employment Partnership Employer, Mothers Against Drunk Driving

SECO Program

Episode transcript

Intro voiceover:

Welcome to the Military OneSource Podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit [MilitaryOnesource.mil](https://militaryonesource.mil).

Bruce Moody

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody. We're bringing you an interview I did with Mothers Against Drunk Driving. We did the interview at our annual event with the Military Spouse Employment Partnership.

This partnership is a Defense Department initiative that connects spouses looking for careers with employers across industries who signed actual documents to recruit, hire, promote and retain military spouses. They sign it, and we truly hold them to it.

Every October we have a big ceremony. This year, we are really pleased to welcome First Lady Dr. Jill Biden. As we welcomed in this year's group of new employers to the partnership, which now totals more than 700 employers, among them, Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

We sit down with them to talk about MADD, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and them being a part of the partnership. Here is our interview with Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody. I'm joined by two members of the organization, Mothers Against Drunk Driving. Would you please both introduce yourselves?

Stacy D. Stewart

Yes. Hi, I'm Stacey Stewart. I'm the chief executive officer of Mothers Against Drunk Driving, or MADD.

Kenneth H. Ceaser

And I'm Kenneth Caesar, and I'm a chief people and culture officer for MADD.

Bruce Moody

All right. We'll get into the organization and your mission, which is, of course, fascinating, but let's begin by sort of the reason that we're here together today, which is the Military Spouse Employment Partnership. So, MADD is now a new partner of MSEP.

We try not to use acronyms, but sometimes it just can't be helped. So Military Spouse Employment Partnership is going to be MSEP for the duration of this conversation.

Could you explain to me, as the chief executive officer, why you want military spouses working for MADD?

Stacy D. Stewart

That's a really great question. And I'll start, and Ken can add to it, because Ken's really responsible for us being a member here.

But let me just start with what MADD is. A lot of people know Mothers Against Drunk Driving or MADD. We've been around for about 45 years. A lot of people may not have heard about MADD recently, but what MADD is, is an organization started by mothers who were impacted with the loss of family members, children due to impaired driving, due to drunk driving crashes.

And so, we're an organization that is the leading organization really fighting to end impaired driving, ending drunk and drugged driving, which today kills about 13,000 people on our roads every single year. And in the last few years, we've seen almost a 31% increase in drunk driving fatalities.

So, our work is around advocating for policy change, making sure that people are safe on the roads and that we end drunk and drugged driving so that it saves more lives.

Bruce Moody

That's a mission statement I think we can all get behind. And in my lifetime, I've seen the cultural shift regarding attitudes toward drunk driving. And I — I've seen references to MADD throughout that change. So, what can a military spouse expect from being a part of MADD?

Kenneth H. Ceaser

So myself, being a veteran of the Air Force for 24 years and having a military spouse and understanding, knowing the transition that military spouses have and the difficulty they have of finding employment — and so I think that's why we're here today. The military spouse is an untapped true talent in our communities today.

And so, what we want to do is tap into that talent. We love their work ethic. We want to bring them. Our organization is 87% women, and we advocate for women and military spouses, whether it be women or men. We advocate for that. And so, that's what we're here today for, is looking for that talent for military spouses that we can join our organization.

So — what can they look for? An outstanding culture. A culture that's supportive, a culture that is inclusive, a culture that represents the communities that they come from. And so, we're looking for that and we're looking for that talent as well.

They will have an opportunity to grow within our organization, outstanding benefits and then portability as well, because we know, me being one of them — my wife had to move as soon as we got married. And so, being able to have that support, not only for the leaving the organization, but also moving around the country, they will find that support with us at MADD.

Bruce Moody

This is a really interesting conversation, because when you join when you join a company, you may not really care so much about the product that goes onto the loading dock and out towards vendors. But this is an organization that really gets the passions stirring. If you're an employee at the organization, how close do you feel to the core mission that you're trying to drive forward?

Kenneth H. Ceaser

So, I think that through several surveys that we've sent to our employees, our mission focus is one of our core values, and it's one of the highest. Our employees truly feel a sense of mission and they'll see it throughout the organization, because you're right, it is. It's dealing with individuals' lives and the importance of lives.

And so, people feel that passion behind our mission, being able to directly impact the victims and survivors that we meet and provide services to. Not only that, but our prevention programs as well, being able to stop — ending — impaired driving.

So, I think that that's the part that they get is that, as a sense of a mission with the military, because that's what they believe in — you'll get a sense, the same sense of mission at MADD.

Stacy D. Stewart

I think, just to pick up on that, I think there are a couple of things. One is that a lot of the jobs that MADD offers are, as Ken mentioned, providing services to victims and survivors. There are people that have gone through a lot of trauma, a lot of emotional pain.

And I think a lot of military spouses can definitely relate to that. I mean, a lot of military spouses, unfortunately — there are a lot of great things about being a part of the military. There are a lot of things that, you know, where families go through a lot of challenges.

And so, I think there's a level of empathy that I think a lot of military spouses naturally have to a group of people who may be going through very tough challenges in their lives, and that's a lot of who we deal with every day.

I think the other thing, though, is, being in the military is one of the toughest jobs. And we all recognize that. It's why we value our members of the military so much. And we know the sacrifices that spouses make.

I think part of what we see in the military is because our mission is so tied to alcohol use, to, unfortunately, people making poor decisions to get behind a wheel after they've been drinking.

Unfortunately, many members of the military are often victims and survivors of impaired driving, or find themselves making poor decisions because they may be having challenges with drinking.

So, there's another aspect of this that allows military spouses, who may understand that experience, right, or may have witnessed it or have seen it or lived around it, that they can bring a level of understanding of what a lot of people in our communities around the country are dealing with.

About two thirds of all Americans are impacted by impaired driving, one way or another. We're touched by the issue: a friend, a family member, someone we know has been involved. We have not only 13,000 people that die because of impaired driving every year, we have hundreds of thousands of people who are injured.

So, it is a major issue that affects community health, community safety, and the military is a part of that. And so, having spouses as a part of this is really an important opportunity and a way for spouses to give back to communities in ways that they may not even be aware that they can give back today.

Bruce Moody

Would you talk to me about the types of positions that you maybe are seeing yourselves looking to fill over the next several months, and the skill sets that you'd like to see brought to them?

Kenneth H. Ceaser

That's a great question. And so, we have, as Stacy mentioned, we provide services to our victims and survivors throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. And so when it comes to, where is the reach? Our reach are directly to the military communities, because we're portable throughout.

As you know, drunk driving is indiscriminatory. And so, some of the services or positions that we're looking for are victim services, you know, working with our victims and survivors, providing them services, support, also court monitoring specialists.

They will walk through and help victims as they're going through the court systems themselves, working with our development fundraiser, help support community engagement efforts, our program and prevention programs, going out to high schools, youth activities to present our programs that we offer.

Bruce Moody

Are these positions in a particular geographic area? Are they remote? What is the work environment like?

Stacy D. Stewart

Yeah, I mean, they're all over the country. We have between three and 400 employees that are all around the country. Our — what we call our headquarters, or our mission support center, is actually in Irving, Texas, right in the Dallas suburbs. And so, we have a lot of need for people there.

I think the other thing, too, and just to go beyond — we're a nonprofit organization. We're leading national nonprofit organization. So, all of those regular jobs that you would find in any organization — IT jobs, finance jobs, administrative support jobs, marketing and communications, all those are jobs that are available at MADD from time to time. And so, those are the kinds of skill sets we're looking for.

And I think the other thing is that we're an organization that tries to reach a variety of diverse audiences. We want to make sure that, from whatever walk of life you're coming from in the military, whatever demographic group, if you're African American, Hispanic, white, Asian American, it doesn't really matter.

We want to make sure that if you see that MADD is a place that connects with you and you feel like you can really contribute, and we find your talents really attractive, that you would see a place here at MADD because your presence, the diversity of our workforce, is what makes us stronger.

The diversity of our workforce is what allows us to engage so many different kinds of communities. As Ken mentioned, the issue of impaired driving does not discriminate. It

can impact anybody of any age from any community. And so MADD has to reflect a lot of the diverse communities that we try to serve. And so having a diverse workforce is really important.

Bruce Moody

Now, we were talking before this interview about your journey to MSEP, which actually starts a couple of jobs ago.

So, talk to us about how you first came to understand about the partnership and what it means for a company to be in it. Because you're going to sign a big ceremonial agreement today, but you're actually signing an agreement. So, what are you rogering up to do for military families to be to be in the partnership?

Kenneth H. Ceaser

And so, again, and knowing the commitment that we have, I started with MSEP back in 2000 when it first started with former companies, knowing that the commitment that is needed, and not only the commitment to hire military spouses, but also commitment to grow, engage military spouses when they become a part of your organization.

And so we are committed to do that at MADD: promotional opportunities within the organization, career path, training, opportunities for them to give back to their community as well, and also help us recruit.

It's funny that you say because we're getting ready to start our first veterans' employee resource groups that will entail military spouses. Our call for military spouses brought ten of them that we did not know that we had at MADD.

So, we're really excited about this opportunity. And not only that, our employees are excited about this as well, and our commitment to our military spouses, our veterans.

Bruce Moody

When you're an employee at MADD, and perhaps not working in your Texas headquarters office, what do you do to keep people in your organization connected? What do you do to make sure that they know that their efforts are kind of tracking with what it is that the organization is currently trying to achieve?

Stacy D. Stewart

That's a really good question. And I mean, Ken and I work a lot on that issue because it comes down to the culture of the organization, which is often hard to build when we've got a pretty virtual organization. So, we've got a few offices, but we've got a lot of folks that work virtually and work from home.

And so, for us, it's always about being intentional to build a team, a team atmosphere, a team culture. And even beyond that, I think part of what we've done this year, for example, is to really get clear on our strategy, you know, how we're going to drive impact, how we're going to make sure that we reduce the number of people that are dying and being injured on our roads.

And that comes with everybody in organization being engaged in some really good thinking around what are our priorities and getting our board engaged on that, our national board of directors. So it's communication. We spend a lot of time online. We're experts at Teams, as all of us got to be during the pandemic, but that continues.

In some ways, it's a good thing, right? Because with so many, especially women, that work in the organization and a lot of people in general, young people who love the flexibility of being able to work from home, it actually works out pretty nicely.

But then, we are also very intentional about times when we can come together and be together, because I think there's nothing that replaces the ability to speak one on one and with somebody, a manager, to meet with their employee, teams to come together and bond with each other.

So, between our strategy, internal communications, really being intentional on making sure that we hold everyone accountable for the kinds of, not just the work product, but actually what it looks like to be a good team member and a good teammate, to be collaborative and to be invested in the in the organization's success, are some of the things that we really prioritize.

Bruce Moody

You know, what I like to do as we wind down this interview, is to get you to make a pitch to military spouses. And I would tee it up in this way: I'm retired military, as are you, Kenneth. We spent a good chunk of our life following mission, a life in service, and that comes to an end.

But going into the next step for a great number of us, we want to be part of something that continues to have a mission, to have a culture that we can get behind.

And so, what I would ask to do, and I'll start with you, Kenneth, is to just make a pitch to military spouses who feel that what they want to do is continue to be in an environment and a culture of service, in a place where there is a mission.

Kenneth H. Ceaser

I would say, and I'm going to use a tagline: Your mission continues at MADD. And so, when you come to MADD, you will continue to have that mission. You will continue to have that focus to be able to make an impact into the communities that you'll build.

You'll continue to have that sense of camaraderie that you have within organization as well.

So honestly, the mission continues at MADD.

Stacy D. Stewart

You know, I would just say, my biggest pitch is joining a place where you can feel every single day that there's such a great reward for the work that you're doing. You know, military spouses sacrifice a lot, and they commit a lot to so many other people. And this is yet another way to do that, but doing it outside the boundaries of the military. Right?

Every person in the military is still a part of community, is still a part of working and living and playing and having fun and all of those things in communities. And so, I think the idea of how our military spouses can be doing things that are productive, that are important, that actually are lifesaving and that are a part of the broader community is a fulfilling opportunity, and it's a great place to work.

I've been here not even a year. Ken's been here over a year, and already we've seen the organization transform into, you know, an amazing place. It already was amazing, but it's growing to be an even more amazing place, and we're excited to attract new and hardworking and passionate people to our mission.

Bruce Moody

Stacy Stewart, chief executive officer, Kenneth Caesar is chief people and culture officer at Mothers Against Drunk Driving. It has been a pleasure talking with the both of you. I'm so grateful to have this opportunity.

Stacy D. Stewart

It's so great to be with you. Thank you.

Kenneth H. Ceaser

Thank you very much.

Bruce Moody

Thanks so much to Stacy and Kenneth of Mothers Against Drunk Driving for joining us on the podcast. And we're going to put a link in the program notes that will be to our Military Spouse Employment Partnership. Yes, we do call it MSEP, but one of our New Year's resolutions is to cut down on our use of acronyms. But, you know, we're the military, so we'll see how it goes.

I want to remind you that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We have another link in the program notes. With that, you can send us a question, a comment, maybe an idea for an episode to hear sometime in 2024.

Be sure to subscribe to this podcast wherever you listen to your podcasts because we cover a wide range of topics to help military families navigate military life.

I'm Bruce Moody. Thank you for listening. Take care. Bye bye.