

Military OneSource Relocation Podcast — Sponsorship and Getting Settled at Your New Duty Station

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.

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody.

Our service members and their families are on the move to new duty stations every few years. Whether you have orders for temporary duty, a permanent change of station, or even if you're separating from the service, your Relocation Assistance Program can help you prepare for a move and make the connection so that you can settle into your new home quickly and smoothly.

In this podcast, we're going to talk about how Military OneSource, your installation's Military and Family Support Center and military sponsors can all help you master your next move.

With that, let's bring in our guests. My guests today are Dionne Vassell and Ellie Bogensperger. Dionne, let's begin with you. Why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself and your background with the Relocation Assistance Program?

Dionne Vassell:

Thank you so much for having me. My name is Dionne Vassell, and I serve as the Defense Logistics Agency Headquarters Family Program Specialist. I support family programs managers at DLA host sites in Richmond, San Joaquin, Susquehanna, Columbus and Battle Creek. DLA is what many would consider a purple organization, as we serve members of all branches, all DOD agencies and partnering entities. Our customers include not only those assigned or attached to DLA, but also include active-duty Guard, civilians and veterans within close proximity to our host sites.

Although I operate within a multi-service environment, I specialize in providing relocation and deployment services, and I work closely with our family programs managers to provide training and maintenance of the defense installation messaging system or DIMS, which is our primary source for installation-specific information and resources.

Bruce:

It's good to have you with us. And Ellie, let's go over to you and let you introduce yourself to us.

Ellie Bogensperger:

Thanks so much, Bruce. I actually serve with the Department of the Air Force Relocation Assistance Program, where I am the program manager within the Airmen and Family Readiness Operations Division Headquarters Air Force Personnel Center. Basically, in my position, I provide operational oversight and training for more than 117 total force Military and Family Readiness centers. Between my time in the Air Force, as well as my time with federal service, I've spent over 20 years helping our total force members and their families navigate that military lifecycle and the stressors and challenges, especially those that come with relocation and PCS. I'm so excited that you have me today, and I'm looking forward to our conversation.

Bruce:

Absolutely. I'm looking forward to this conversation, as well. Moves are, well, disruptive, right? There are resources available that can help service members and their families, and they help them stay organized before, during and after the move. Ellie, let's start with you. Talk about some of the tools and the resources that are available and really touch on those available at an installation Military and Family Support Center.

Ellie:

Well, there are so many great avenues for support and services that are available to relocating members and their families virtually, as well as in person, which is wonderful about the relocation program. Our Military Relocation Assistance Program offers key resources to help members and their families, as well as civilians, adjust to their new location. They offer workshops, briefings and numerous other services that you could actually go to at your Military and Family Support Center; things like newcomers' orientation or an installation and community tour. They also provide welcome packets that are just full of information and tidbits to help you settle into the area.

Our centers also provide internet cafes so that, during the relocation process, you have access to the internet, where you can get ahold of services, help look for providers in the local community, as well as just to help you reach back to friends and family members. The Military and Family Support Center also offers access to experts in the relocation field. They can help you with one-on-one assistance, so if you have questions about how much you may need for a down payment or where to contact your local Transportation Office, all of these things can be found within your Military and Family Support Center.

Another great thing specifically within the Department of the Air Force, and it's not just for our airmen and our guardians. It's for anybody who's relocating to an Air Force-led installation. We offer a virtual pre-arrival orientation that helps incoming members and their families connect to local resources and information before they arrive, so families

can better be prepared for their PCS. We also help people with loan locker items because many of our Military and Family Support centers have loan lockers, and this is where you can borrow free essential items – so small household goods such as dishes, pots and pans, cooking utensils and even more so, that much-needed coffeemaker, to help you settle in.

Bruce:

I have great memories moving into temporary quarters with the loaner furniture. Good, good memories. Good memories. Dionne, did you want to add to that?

Dionne:

Oh, absolutely. Thank you so much, Ellie, for mentioning all those specific resources. But in addition to the specific resources through our centers, at DLA, we rely heavily on the DOD and private sector collaborations because of our unique population. I imagine that the National Guard reserve units and other third state agencies may experience a similar situation.

For example, we do not have military housing on some of our installations such as Headquarters DLA in Columbus. However, that does not relieve us of our duty to provide services and assistance. Therefore, we rely heavily on working with sponsors, guiding clients to resources on Military OneSource and even connecting clients with community partners. That's crucial for agencies such as DLA. The key resource is your family programs staff. That's the safest place to start if you're not sure where to access resources and how to connect with a sponsor.

Bruce:

All right, there we go. Let's focus in on sponsorship. So, we hear a lot about sponsorship, and this is definitely a commander's program, but tell us a little bit about what a sponsor can do for both a single service member and also service members with families, during the relocation process.

Ellie:

Having a sponsor is so important, not just for service members but for any relocating member. So that's going to be spouses, family members and civilians, as well as the children who are relocating. The reason that they're so important is because they are trained. They're trained to provide you as well as they've experienced the ins and outs of relocating themselves. A sponsor is going to be typically of similar rank, duty and family status as the person that's relocating. So that's going to help just really start that foundation and that connection to the new installation, the new unit, as well as the new community.

And the other things that sponsors can do, just besides being that friendly face as they help build that foundation for success, is they're going to help ease the adjustment to the new duty station by being a source of current and local knowledge. They'll be able to help you figure out what are some of the more enjoyable neighborhoods to live in,

where you might not have to travel two hours based off of commute times and things like that. They can help pinpoint different types of areas that might make it easier for you to access the installation. They can also help you with knowing what their favorite restaurants are or activities to do. So, you can actually hit the ground running when you start in your new duty location. So that's going to be for single members, as well as those with family members.

Some of the biggest benefits to having a sponsor is that they are going to be able to answer your questions, and I can't stress that enough. They're going to be able to answer questions you have about the local area. They're available to text, to call, to reach out to. You don't have to necessarily worry about duty hours or business hours.

Another great thing that they can do, a sponsor can do that is, they are a great way to help your children get settled into their new area, as well. So, if you reach out to your installation School Liaison Office for more information about the youth sponsorship program because children will also benefit from joining in familiar activities, as well as having new opportunities to meet other military-connected children. Basically, these youth sponsors can help children overcome their concerns about starting a new school and making new friends. For both adults and youth, sponsors are really just there to listen, support and be there for you throughout the PCS transition.

Bruce:

Very true. Very true. How do you request a sponsor?

Dionne:

There are a few ways to request a sponsor. You can contact your gaining units or duty location and request a sponsor that way. The installation Military and Family Support Center is another avenue, because they will provide the service-specific information that you will need about your sponsor. All family support centers have staff dedicated to assisting relocating members and their families. Another great option is to use the military installation's website to find more information about the specific location and also specific information on how you can request a sponsor. For DLA, for example, we have phone numbers on the website. We have direct points of contact for all branches of service on how to request a sponsor if you are entering DLA headquarters.

Bruce:

Thanks a lot for that. Ellie, over to you. Military OneSource offers a course for families to learn more about sponsorship, and it's called Sponsorship Awareness and You, and it has a wealth of relocation resources and information. From your experience in helping so many families through a PCS, what are some other Military OneSource tools and resources that service members and their families should be aware of. And just as we go forward, let's just note that in the program notes of this episode, we're putting in all kinds of links. As you note these resources, folks, just note that we have all of these resources in the program notes. Ellie, if you could jump into that.

Ellie:

Oh, definitely. So, the Sponsorship and You Sponsorship Awareness Course is really a great tool, especially for family members that want to learn more about the resources available to make their PCS as easy as possible. However, if members are interested in becoming a sponsor, one of the things Military OneSource offers is e-sponsorship application and training or ESAT. And that course provides basically, the information, that foundation, on what members need to do to become a sponsor to help other service members have a successful move.

Military OneSource is just a plethora of information. They offer this really handy, customizable, unique, personalized tool. It's called Plan My Move. And what that does is, you take your installation, your leaving installation. You're moving from Base A, you're going to Base B. You put in your information, you put your timeline in there, and it has all sorts of helpful information, a checklist, point-of-contact information to let you know what you're supposed to be doing at what time. It's a really great tool. You can save this information to your phone so you have it with you always, as well as just printing it out if you're old school like me and like things written down so you could scratch things off.

Another great tool that Military OneSource has is MilitaryINSTALLATIONS. MilitaryINSTALLATIONS is going to be your go-to source because, since we are a purple organization, things are very different for each service. Even though the premise is all the same, the how-to changes a little bit more. On MilitaryINSTALLATIONS, you will find everything you need to know about your gaining installation. It'll have all of your major units on there; it'll have pictures; it'll have hours of contact information; it'll have steps for newcomers to do pre-arrival, post-arrival. It has so much information on there, and specifically it's going to be service-specific information, which is really helpful as well, especially if you find yourself, for instance, in the Army or the Navy and you're PCSing to, let's say, an Air Force installation. Then you're going to have, once again, that personalized specific information that's up to date and vetted so that you know exactly what's going on.

Bruce:

And Dionne, did you want to add to this?

Dionne:

Absolutely. I've had personal experience with Plan My Move and some of the resources that Ellie mentioned earlier, and I can tell you, it made life so much easier. I also had an onboarding staff member earlier this month, and he is a veteran. And the minute he learned that he'll be working with Plan My Move, he got so excited because of his personal experience with the platform. He used it while he was exiting the military and relocating from military housing to his now permanent home, and he just went on and on; so excited, so enthused about how much that Plan My Move resource assisted him.

I'm also personally responsible for updating things like MilitaryINSTALLATIONS. And those pages, they just provide a wealth of information. As Ellie mentioned, agency-specific or branch-specific or installation-specific information that you need for your duty station. It's impossible to know everything that you need when you're relocating. However, just by browsing the websites, just by browsing through the information that we mentioned here on this podcast, you will get way more than you need. You will find out information that you did not know that you need. I cannot recommend or echo enough the importance of just tapping into these resources that are provided through your online resources and through your family programs managers.

Bruce:

All right, so where can families go for relocation support at their installations? Ellie, let's start with you.

Ellie:

Well, first I want to really foot stomp the Military OneSource website. They have a lot of tools on there where they can actually have a live chat with one of their consultants on Military OneSource. However, if you are looking to go locally at your installation, there are going to be several places you can go.

I think that first we need to talk about what a Military and Family Support Center is, because every branch of service has a different or service-unique name for their center. For instance, with the Army, it's Army Community Services, but we also have Marine and Family Programs, Fleet and Family Support Program; and, in the Department of the Air Force, we have the Military and Family Readiness Center. But there are also Guard and reserve family program sites, too. These family and military support centers are available to help service members and family members, regardless of activation status or location, in person, by phone and online.

So, what's going to be great about reaching out to one of your local installations or even your gaining installation, is that they have an established network of programs and services, federal, state and community-based agencies and organizations to help just you in the relocation process, as well as to promote positive outcomes for your families across all the domains of Military Family Readiness. That's going to be things like career, social, financial, health and community engagement. The best place to find these centers' contact information, though, is going to be on that military installation's website, which you can access through Military OneSource or even just through a quick internet search.

Bruce:

Yeah, we're pretty proud of that, to be honest. Dionne, you were going to mention some classes, I think.

Dionne:

Absolutely. Our situation happens to be very similar because we serve all branches, and they are accessing a lot of those services through their branches of service. Now, our DLA family programs managers offer several classes. They distribute free information packets at events, and they provide electronic and hard copy resources to families with children because we tend to focus on those families because they usually have a few more needs than, for example, a single service member who will be relocating. So, as far as accessing information and resources, those are usually distributed throughout the communities on the installation and also via online classes and online platforms such as Facebook pages.

All the MWR websites may also have advertisements for classes that are hosted by our family programs managers. Our MilitaryINSTALLATIONS page also provide information on our local school district, and although we do not have certain resources like EFMP on our DLA installation, we provide clear guidance through MI, for example, on how to access those resources at the closest installation. We're always finding new ways, new avenues to make resources and information accessible to all of our clients.

Bruce:

I see. Now, Ellie, at the service level and at installations, they're trying to make the process of getting information as easy as possible. Can you talk a little bit about this?

Ellie:

Oh, definitely. Like Dionne just said, most installations are going to have some type of Facebook page. A lot of units and work agencies will also have a Facebook page. But moving beyond that, installations will have a resource page or a welcome and landing page for newcomers that will cover all the digital resources, the step by step, the how-to process and go through and move through your PCS. If reading through or shifting through all of these resources and tools are just too much for you to navigate by yourself, or if they're providing another layer of stress, then by all means, reach out and call the experts at the Military and Family Support Center or even your sponsor, once again, just to help you figure out what it is. Because there is, once again, like Dionne and I have said, there is so much information out there. We just want to make sure that you guys know where to find it and how to use it.

Bruce:

Absolutely. Well again, we've covered a lot of ground, but I'll give final thoughts to the both of you. Ellie, let's begin with you.

Ellie:

Well, first of all, I want to say thank you again for letting me be here today. I've had such a great time chit-chatting with you and Dionne. But my final piece of advice is going to be: Get a sponsor. Sponsors are the backbone of the whole entire relocation process and your PCS. They are going to provide you with a valuable service to you and your

family. It is going to be personalized. They're going to be able to answer the questions that you have and not give you that standard textbook answer. But they're going to be able to speak from real-life experiences to give you that insight about the community, the base mission, the local schools, housing, what you want to pack, what you may want to bring, what the weather is like, as well as great resources for recreational facilities, restaurants, information and more, especially when it comes to all of the things that we worry about during a PCS process.

Bruce:

Thank you so much. And Dionne, we'll give you the last word.

Dionne:

Thank you so much once again for having me. My final thought, start early. Start early, ask questions and use all the resources available to you. As providers, we need to view relocation on an individual basis and not generalize, as moves can be different for every single service member and their family.

Bruce:

Well, thank you. Thanks very much to the both of you. And I'll remind everybody that we have a ton of information in the program notes. Go ahead; there's plenty to click on. And I just want to thank both of you for being with us today.

We want to remind all of you that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We are a website. We're a call center. We're all over social media. And well, now we're a podcast, so we want you to subscribe because we cover a ton of resources, a ton of topics that help military families navigate military life. Tune in so you can learn what's going on and what we have to offer.

Thanks very much for joining us today. Have a great day. Bye-bye.