

# VETERAN FAMILY SUMMIT 2025: POST-EVENT SUMMARY REPORT

January 23 – 24, 2025



## ABOUT THE SUMMIT

The Veteran Family Summit is hosted annually by the Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families. This two-day virtual event focuses on the needs and experiences of Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Veteran Families. Created in collaboration with Veteran Families and those who support them, the summit's purpose is to provide Families with access to knowledge, resources and supports specific to their unique needs – right from the comfort of their own home.

Each year, Veteran Family Summit attendees hear from experts in the field who share valuable knowledge and insights on issues crucial to the Families of CAF and RCMP Veterans. Participants also learn from the real-life stories and lived experiences of other Veteran Family members, reminding them that a community of support surrounds them wherever they are.

**Veteran Families have made sacrifices to support and serve alongside their loved ones.** The Veteran Family Summit provides an opportunity to recognize the unsung service of Families and honour their own brand of courage. As they navigate the impacts of their loved one's service, Families deserve a space where their needs and experiences can be truly understood.

# HOST BIOGRAPHIES

**Tabitha Beynen** served for 10 years in the Canadian Armed Forces as a Medical Technician. Her story of her experience with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) highlights the unique struggles related to women’s mental health, being in survival mode and learning to live again with feelings and emotions. She also focuses on the unique needs and experiences of single parents struggling with PTSD. She currently serves as Lived Expertise Lead, Veterans at the Atlas Institute.



**Laryssa Lamrock** is the National Strategic Advisor, Families at the Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families. She has a personal understanding of the many challenges facing Veteran Families as the spouse of a Canadian Armed Forces Veteran who was medically released with PTSD and depression, and as a mother supporting four children impacted by the operational stress injury of their loved one. Laryssa draws from these experiences as she advocates passionately for and represents the voices of military and Veteran Family members.



# EVENT SUMMARY

Veteran Family Summit 2025 spoke to the sacrifices and pride of Families who have been touched by the cost of service. It was clear from the presentations that many aspects of a Veteran's life and service impact Families, who have their own need for support, guidance and help navigating complex systems.

## KEY THEMES:

- **Many people are included in the definition of Family.** The Family not only includes partners, spouses and children (both young and adult), but also parents, grandparents, siblings and close friends that become Family.
- **The Family is important.** Keynote speaker Gary Hollender emphasized that the Family is the most important part of a Veteran's life and as such, they require and deserve their own support in return. We also heard about how important it is for Veterans to show appreciation for their Family and focus their time and attention on those connections.
- **Families are resilient.** Veteran Families develop resilience through the challenges and changes they experience. Resilience doesn't have to look pretty and doesn't mean someone isn't hurting – it just means that they're able to keep doing the things that matter most to them, even during difficult times.
- **Veteran Families do a lot to support their loved ones.** Family members support their Veteran loved ones in many ways. Their support can come at a personal cost to their mental and physical health, career and relationships. While many Veteran Family members are proud of their own way of serving, they need to be recognized and appreciated for their efforts.
- **Community and connections are important sources of support for Veteran Families.** Veteran Families spoke about finding community in unexpected places and relying on those connections to support them through new or difficult experiences.
- **Veteran Families are not alone.** Though many feel caught between worlds, Family members found common understandings and shared language with others at the event.
- **Veteran Families matter and their voices need to be heard.** This year, nearly 900 people registered for the event to hear from Veteran Families. Above all, Veteran Family Summit 2025 commemorated Families by listening to their experiences and fostering meaningful conversations to empower Veteran Families through knowledge, community building and hope.

## FROM OUR ATTENDEES

[I enjoyed] hearing from the Veterans and service members just how important their Family was to them in their healing and recovery. Family is a very important part of the well-being of the Veteran/ service member. To be acknowledged by all of the speakers on both days about how important Family was to them when they were serving as well as after their release was very much appreciated.

I am so happy and excited to see (finally) that lived/living experiences are being valued for the critical insights they provide.

I enjoyed hearing the Veterans and their partners disclosing their experiences and challenges and how they are doing. Especially appreciated the information sharing of the Invictus participants and spouses/partners. Thanks for your courage to share. It helps us other injured Vets immeasurably.

I am validated, I am not alone and I will not lose hope that better days are ahead for my spouse, our marriage and hopefully our adult children.

I loved all the stories and the information provided. It definitely hit home in some areas.

I enjoyed hearing from individuals with a variety of lived experiences, speaking openly about the challenges they have faced and the learning they have gained.

I'm not alone with this struggle.

# REGISTRANTS: BY THE NUMBERS

*Note: In the registration survey, registrants could choose more than one identifier, which means these combined numbers add up to more than the total number of registrants.*



## Who registered?

- 869 people registered for the 2025 summit
  - An increase of nearly 250 registrants compared to 2024
  - More than double the number of registrants for the first Veteran Family Summit in 2023
- 619 Family members of a serving member or Veteran of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) or Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)
- 221 service providers
- 220 CAF Veterans
- 115 government employees
- 54 researchers
- 51 CAF members (still serving)
- 20 RCMP Veterans
- 12 policy makers
- 8 RCMP members (still serving)



## Where are registrants located?

- Individuals from every province and territory registered.
- The top 5 were:
  - Ontario
  - Nova Scotia
  - Quebec
  - Alberta
  - British Columbia

# DAY 1: JANUARY 23, 2025

## KEYNOTE PRESENTATION – FLOURISHING: A 37-YEAR JOURNEY OF RESILIENCE AND GROWTH AS A MILITARY SPOUSE

### Presenter biography

**Jennifer Eyre** is a bilingual teacher, facilitator, instructional designer, the spouse of a retired Canadian Armed Forces member, and mother. With many domestic and international military moves under her belt, she has worked and volunteered in many educational capacities, from high school classrooms with various school districts to instructional design with the Government of Canada. Jennifer has also taken educational opportunities such as becoming a Master Resilience Trainer with the University of Pennsylvania and the United States Army. She has a Bachelor of Science (Honours) with a major in Biology from Queen's University and a Bachelor of Education from the Collège universitaire de St. Boniface (University of Manitoba).



### Presentation summary

**Jennifer Eyre** shared her inspiring journey of 37 years as a military spouse, offering a heartfelt exploration of the resilience and growth forged through a life of service and sacrifice. Through personal stories and lessons learned, Jennifer highlighted how the challenges and triumphs of military life have shaped her strength and adaptability. Jennifer's approach to navigating challenges and unexpected changes helped her develop resilience, which she described as taking care of what is essential to you when things are not going well, without trying to do everything perfectly. She emphasized the importance of finding purpose amidst the chaos, looking for the good in each day and creating connections with others to build a compassionate support network.

**“One of the best things to help me was my connection to people, my friends and my support network that I created for myself.”**

### Key messages

1. Finding and nurturing your own purpose can help you navigate and embrace change. Purpose can be a source of strength that helps you transform challenges into opportunities for growth. Remaining flexible when faced with challenges can help you adapt to new circumstances and find different avenues for living out your purpose.
2. Resilience means taking care of what is essential to you when things are not going well, without trying to do everything perfectly. Being resilient can mean that you are not doing okay but you are doing what you can to function. It isn't always pretty – it just means that, somehow, you can get through.
3. The power of a strong support network is crucial in overcoming the unique challenges faced by military spouses. Fostering connections and leaning on others can provide the emotional and practical support needed to thrive.

# SHAPING LIVES: THE JOURNEY OF ADULT CHILDREN FROM CANADIAN MILITARY FAMILIES

## Presenter biographies

**Laryssa Lamrock** is the National Strategic Advisor, Families at the Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families. She has a personal understanding of the many challenges facing Veteran Families as the spouse of a Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Veteran who was medically released with posttraumatic stress disorder and depression, and as a mother supporting four children impacted by the operational stress injury of their loved one. Laryssa draws from these experiences as she advocates passionately for and represents the voices of military and Veteran Family members.



**Deborah Norris, PhD** is a professor in the Department of Family Studies and Gerontology at Mount Saint Vincent University. She has developed and taught many Family studies courses in that program, including a course focusing on military and Veteran Families. An abiding interest in the interdependence between work and Family life led to Deborah's early involvement in planning and implementing military partner programs and parent education programs at the first Military Family Resource Centre located at Canadian Forces Base Halifax.



## Presentation summary

This session delved into a research study focused on the adult children of CAF Veterans and military members. **Laryssa Lamrock** and **Dr. Deborah Norris** highlighted how important it is to explore the unique experiences of adult children of Veterans and the effect of military service from their perspectives to understand how growing up in a CAF Family impacts outcomes later in life. The presenters discussed how adult children develop resilience through their early experiences, noting that it isn't an individual experience but is often developed through and by connections to other people. Resiliency was associated with some of the key findings of the study.

**“We can only understand the experiences of adult children from CAF Families by asking them – the lived experience embedded throughout this project makes the study meaningful.”**

## Key messages

1. Childhood experiences as a member of a CAF Family influence outcomes later in life. The study showed traits of a military child transferred through to adulthood, including physical, emotional, and social traits that study participants used to describe themselves, their worldview and their relationships across the lifespan. Many of the participants had devoted their lives to service, even if they hadn't joined the military themselves.
2. Resiliency in adult children is strongly associated with social capital, manifestations of military culture within the household and pride of service. The military lifestyle requirements may have been instrumental in developing resilience as it became part of the “fabric of life” for children in military Families.
3. When given the opportunity, adult children express a deep appreciation and enthusiasm for sharing their experiences. This emphasizes the often absent, unheard and overlooked viewpoints of this vital perspective amongst Canadian military and Veteran Families.

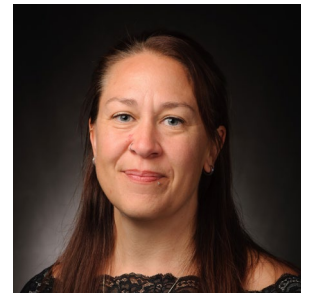
# L'ESCALE: A BREAK TO DEFINE MYSELF AFTER THE CAF

## Presenter biographies

**Myriam Dutour** has more than 23 years of experience in justice, delinquency and mental health, expertise in individual and group interventions, as well as in mediation training in justice and citizenship. For the past seven years, she has been the coordinator for the Veterans Program at the Military Family Resource Centre (MFRC) in the Montreal region, where she has established and developed services for Veterans released for medical reasons and their Families. She collaborates with various stakeholders in the Veteran community, as well as with community and public organizations, to raise awareness of issues related to Veterans and their Families. In this way, she facilitates the transition and integration of Veterans and their Families into post-service life.



**Audrey Gallant** in her role as MFRC Family Liaison Officer (FLO) has more than 15 years of experience working with Families of ill and injured military personnel, as well as Families of the fallen. Primarily a front-line clinician, she provides individual and couple counselling related to grief, adaptation to illness or injury, burnout and other challenges affecting military personnel and their Families. As one of the first 10 FLOs in the country, she was invited to participate in the national working group for the Veteran Family Program. She has fostered collaborations with service partners to support Families at her local level.



## Facilitator biographies

Captain (Ret'd) **Hélène Le Scelleur** enlisted in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) in March 1990 when she was only 17 years old. She joined the first female cohort in the infantry trade at the Régiment de Maisonneuve in Montreal. Hélène then joined the Regular Forces in 1999 where she served a further 17 years. Hélène has had numerous assignments and deployments, notably in the former Yugoslavia and in Afghanistan between 2007 and 2008. Hélène's career came to an end in 2016 following a diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder linked to her last mission in Afghanistan. Deciding not to give up, she pledged to pursue doctoral studies to find solutions to deal with the identity crisis that follows the transition to post-service life for military personnel living with an operational stress injury.

**Lori-Anne Thibault** is the Bilingual Communications Specialist at the Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families. As the daughter of parents who have served and the spouse of a serving Canadian Armed Forces member, Lori-Anne brings an understanding of the challenges that emerge from a life of service, the cost of service, and in that is deeply passionate in working to address the need for appropriate care for Veterans and their Families. She also brings experience working with serving Royal Canadian Mounted Police members, having a special interest in telling their stories and advocating on their behalf.



## Presentation summary

**Myriam Dutour** and **Audrey Gallant** presented “L’Escale,” a workshop they developed for medically releasing military personnel, Veterans, and their spouses at the MFRC in Montreal. The workshop provides Veterans and Families with tools to navigate their transition and to better understand themselves and each other. The workshop explores changes in identity and lifestyle, as well as the grief that both Veterans and Families can experience during the transition from the military. It also highlights the opportunities that become available to Veterans and Families with the transition and the importance of understanding one’s own needs, values and strengths to determine what to prioritize in the next chapter of life.

## Key messages

1. Transition from the military can present challenges for both the Veteran and every member of the Family. Veterans and Family members may experience grief or mourning as they face changes in lifestyle, daily activities, location, connections with others, and loss of meaning, purpose or role. It’s normal to have emotional responses to these changes and discussing what each person is feeling and experiencing can help members of the Family understand each other.
2. During the transition from the military, Veterans and their Families have the opportunity to rediscover themselves and redefine their identity and roles in life. Asking questions about one’s own values, needs, strengths and desires can help a person determine their priorities for the next chapter of their life, including activities they previously didn’t have the time or ability to act on.
3. Transition from the military can present new opportunities for Veterans and Families. Relying on skills and strengths that they already have can help them identify which opportunities are right and actionable. It’s helpful to take things step by step rather than trying to do it all at once.

# 'TO SLEEP, PERCHANCE TO DREAM': AN OVERVIEW OF COMMON SLEEP ISSUES, TREATMENTS AND 'MYTHS'

## Presenter biography

**Craig P. Stewart**, MB BAO BCh, MA, FRCPC is a Consultant Psychiatrist and Interim Medical Director at the St. Joseph's Operational Stress Injury Clinic (London, ON), working out of the Greater Toronto Area satellite site. He completed a Clinical Fellowship in Sleep Medicine at the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry at Western University (London, ON) where he serves as Adjunct Professor in the Department of Psychiatry. He holds a master's degree in behavioural neuroscience from Brock University (St. Catharines, ON) with a focus on neurophysiological correlates of sleep, with additional research experience in circadian rhythms. He also practises at a community sleep clinic in the Greater Toronto Area.



## Presentation summary

**Dr. Craig P. Stewart's** presentation provided insights into the critical role of sleep in mental health and how it specifically impacts Veterans and their Families. Topics included common sleep challenges faced by Veterans [such as insomnia, nightmares, the effects of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and obstructive sleep apnea] and some actionable strategies and resources for improving sleep. Craig discussed sleep treatment challenges and "myths" about what helps. He also noted that many Veterans and their partners or spouses sleep separately and have strategies for safely waking up the Veteran. Sleeping separately is not a reflection of the relationship and can be a helpful strategy for improving sleep.

**"If we can decrease symptoms of PTSD in general, nightmares decrease as well."**

## Key messages

1. Sleep disturbances are prevalent among Veterans with mental health challenges. Although there are common ways different sleep disturbances can present, each person is unique. Veterans and Family members can be supportive of one another by first developing a shared understanding of their sleep disturbances and impacts, which can reduce stress and shame. Together, they can then identify practical strategies to improve their sleep.
2. Treatment of sleep-related difficulties needs to be individualized. While cognitive behavioural therapy for insomnia is often the first recommendation, the most helpful treatment options (which can include medication) are tailored to the person seeking help.
3. Sleep "myths" are information that may not be helpful, or worse, potentially damaging to best practices for sleep. Strategies for "sleep hygiene" (such as reducing blue light before sleep, tracking sleep with wearable devices or going to bed at the same time every day) may be well-intentioned but lack the evidence to suggest they work. Instead, it's more helpful to find appropriate treatment and adjust sleep-related behaviour to help associate the bed with sleep (such as using the bed only for sleep or sex and going to bed when sleepy).

# PANEL PRESENTATION – PARENTING BEYOND TRAUMA: INSIGHTS FROM VETERANS AND VETERAN FAMILIES

## Panellist biographies

**Andrew Gough** is a medically retired police Sergeant (London Police Service in Ontario) and soldier. Injured by an “act of terrorism” in Tripoli, Libya, and having also been involved in the evacuation of the Canadian mission to Libya in July of 2014, coupled with years of policing, Andrew was diagnosed with a complex posttraumatic stress injury (PTSI) in 2016. Andrew has turned his injury into advocacy, starting a federal not-for-profit, Veterans and Everyday Heroes (V-EH!) in 2018. Andrew has been married to his high school sweetheart Elizabeth for more than 21 years. They have two teenage children together. Andrew can always be found with his service dog Riggs.



**Helena Hawryluk**, PhD, RSW is one of the co-founders of Families First: Supports for Occupational Stress Inc. and director of the National Warrior Kids Programs offered through Wounded Warriors Canada, available to children and youth from military and first responder Families impacted by a parental psychological injury. Helena has spent more than a decade creating a space for the development and provision of meaningful mental health services for Veteran and first responder Families. She believes in critically examining what the research offers in terms of new knowledge on this population and translating this into evidence-informed practice.



**Rebecka Mason** has parented for the past 12 years alongside her husband, a Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Veteran living with a PTSI. Their journey with PTSI has had its highs and lows, which they have faced together as a Family, ensuring open communication with their daughter about her father’s experiences and challenges. Rebecka has dedicated eight years to providing peer support to other Families through the Operational Stress Injury Social Support (OSISS) program at Veterans Affairs Canada and has also been actively involved in co-developing a new resource on parenting with PTSI with Atlas.



**Luisa Russo-Lemay** retired from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) with 40 years of experience as a police officer and civilian. She has led multidisciplinary teams for the purposes of security, law enforcement, investigation, human resources, strategic planning and operational support to preserve national safety and integrity. In 2018, faced with a diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression, Luisa sought treatment at the operational stress injury clinic in Ottawa in the hopes of developing methods and skills to assist herself, her husband and their two children to better understand and manage the diagnosis. Over the past six years, she has openly discussed her diagnosis and has developed strategies, with the assistance of professionals, that work for her and her Family.



**Shawna Stewart** is a dedicated educator with a rich background rooted in military, public service and Family. She is the daughter of a retired military Veteran, the wife of an RCMP officer living with PTSD and the mother of both an Emergency Services Operator and a serving soldier, as well as serving as a reservist for six years. Shawna has a deep personal understanding of the unique challenges faced by military Families, first responders and those living with trauma. With a Bachelor of Education and a master's degree in curriculum and instruction, focusing on trauma and resilience in classroom settings, Shawna is committed to creating supportive learning environments where all students can thrive – especially those impacted by trauma.



Moderator: **Laryssa Lamrock**

### Panel summary

This panel highlighted the experiences of CAF and RCMP Veterans and Veteran Families, as they each cope uniquely with the effects of PTSD. Panellists shared their journeys and offered practical strategies for parenting amidst the challenges of trauma.

The panellists discussed the importance of having age-appropriate conversations about PTSD that are tailored to the children and Family, because children can perceive more than we realize. A hopeful message was that children and the Family could be the biggest catalyst for healing and inspiration to keep moving forward.

**“We’re stronger together than apart. We have to fight the isolation of PTSD because when we let the isolation take over, we let it win.”**

### Key messages

1. Although it may seem better not to mention the injury, children are perceptive and can sense that there is something different or that there is “an elephant in the room.” Acknowledging the impact on the Family and having conversations about PTSD can help the Family be stronger together. Having open conversations about what is happening in the home can help lessen the burden or isolation of the injury and help normalize conversations about mental health.
2. Coming together as a Family to get through the experience can build resilience and foster emotional intelligence in children. Talking about strategies together can help the Family as a whole and can help teach children important communication and mental health skills.
3. It’s important for parents to have compassion for themselves while remaining accountable for their own behaviour. People do the best they can with what they have. At the same time, it can be important to acknowledge mistakes or apologize not only because it can help others heal, but because it shows that you don’t have to be perfect.

# DAY 2: JANUARY 24, 2025

## KEYNOTE PRESENTATION – ‘IT’S ME, MOM’: SERVING CANADA AND YOUR FAMILY

### Presenter biography

**Gary Hollender** started his service in uniform as a Cadet with the Seaforth Highlanders of Canada at age 12. He went on to serve in the Reserves before becoming a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Auxiliary Constable in 1988. After postings in Manitoba and across Alberta, he retired in July 2021. Gary has volunteered with the Special Tactical Operations Team, as a tactical medic with the RCMP Emergency Response Team and on the Community Liaison Team. The highlight of his career was as an Operational Trainer/ Mentor to the Afghan National Police, in Kandahar, from March to December of 2009 while seconded to the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and United States Army.



### Presentation summary

In this presentation, Staff Sergeant (Ret’d) **Gary Hollender** offered an inspiring account of the importance of Family. Gary described two types of Families that Veterans have – the “home Family” (one’s partner, spouse, children, parents, grandparents, extended relatives and very close friends) and the “service Family” (people that a Veteran has served with, who can understand and who share experiences from their service).

He spoke about the experiences of Veterans as they transition from the RCMP or CAF and encouraged them to reconnect with their home Family after “hanging up the uniform.” Gary emphasized that members of the home Family have sacrificed and endured hardship in support of the Veteran’s service and should become the priority in post-service life. Refocusing on the home Family and communicating one’s appreciation for everything they do can be a way for a Veteran to give back some of what the Family gave up in support of their service. Gary’s overall message was that the home Family is the most important part of one’s life and that their needs deserve to be attended to.

**“You can hang up the uniform, walk out of the armories, wave goodbye to the people you served with... it’s your Family who will be there for you at the end.”**

### Key messages

1. It is important for Veterans to think about transitioning out of the RCMP or CAF as early as possible so that the right plans can be made for them and their Family. This includes defining their expectations for a career with the RCMP or CAF and understanding how those expectations meet their own needs and those of their Family.
2. If the home Family is not prioritized, the consequences can negatively impact a person’s home life, work and health. A person may have adapted to stressful events in their career, but if their connection with their home Family is breaking down (because it wasn’t made a priority) they can experience additional stress that affects their work.
3. The only guarantee is one’s home Family – it’s important not to lose sight of loved ones. Prioritizing and refocusing on the Family can help loved ones feel appreciated rather than taken for granted.

# INVISIBLE CAREGIVERS: THE UNTOLD EXPERIENCES OF PARENTS OF CANADIAN ARMED FORCES VETERANS WITH OPERATIONAL STRESS INJURIES

## Presenter biography

**Linna Tam-Seto**, PhD is an occupational therapist and Assistant Professor in the Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, Temerty Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto. Linna's research focuses on the identification and clinical implementation of occupation-specific cultural competencies, understanding the role and identity experiences of women in security and defence careers, and the impact of security and defence careers on the life course of Families. She works closely with local, national and international collaborators and organizations in support of security and defence Families.



## Presentation summary

In this presentation, **Dr. Linna Tam-Seto** shared information from a study on the experiences of parents of Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) Veterans living with an operational stress injury (OSI). She explained that parents of Veterans often become the overlooked caregivers, particularly those supporting adult children dealing with military-acquired injuries such as an OSI. These parents face emotional, physical and relational challenges and often feel isolated and unsupported despite their critical role. Linna emphasized how important it is for parents to be included in the definition of Family and to have dedicated services and care that reflect their needs and experiences.

## Key messages

1. Parents can be important caregivers to their ill and injured children who are Veterans. However, supporting CAF Veterans with OSIs takes a significant emotional, physical and relational toll on parents. They can experience career and financial strain, health consequences and relational impacts including loss of connection and social isolation.
2. The evolving responsibilities of parents as caregivers can deeply affect Family dynamics, often without them receiving the recognition or support they deserve. They may experience Family tension and negative impacts on their relationships with their other children and Family members.
3. Parents of CAF Veterans can feel that they are “picking up the pieces alone” while making sacrifices to advocate and care for their child. Strategies such as Family-centred care, system navigation assistance, peer connections and public awareness can make a meaningful difference for Families of Veteran caregivers.

## MY TRANSITION

### Presenter biographies

**Francis Auclair** has been CANEX's Eastern District Manager for the past year. He is responsible for the management team for 12 CANEX stores located on eight military bases in Eastern Canada: Bagotville, Gagetown, Goose Bay, Greenwood, Halifax, Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, St. John's and Valcartier. Before earning the title of District Manager, Francis began his career in 2018 with CANEX as the Recruit School Store Manager for the Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu base. After three and a half years, he was promoted to Area Manager for a period of two and a half years. This position enabled him to acquire the skills and qualifications needed to become Eastern District Manager.



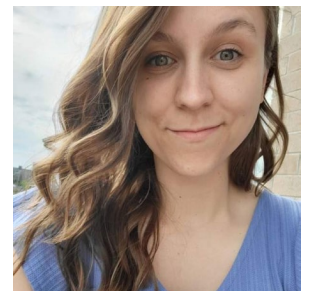
**Marie-Eve Bastien** is the Veteran Family Program Coordinator (VFPC) for Military Family Services in the National Capital Region. She works directly with members transitioning medically from the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and their Families, while also accepting non-medical referrals. Marie-Eve has nearly 20 years' experience in intervention and mental health, mainly in community organizations. She also has a personal understanding of the challenges Veteran Families can face. As the spouse of a CAF Veteran with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) who medically transitioned and a mom to a little one impacted by operational stress injury, she draws from these experiences as she works and advocates for military Families.



**Farah Dib** is an investment advisor with more than 15 years of experience in the financial services sector, both abroad and in Canada. With a deep understanding of the unique financial needs and challenges faced by military members, she is dedicated to helping serving members, Veterans, and their Family members build and manage their wealth effectively. As an experienced investment advisor, Farah provides tailored guidance in retirement planning and investment strategies that align with the career transitions and financial priorities of military life. By offering a full range of financial solutions, she empowers military Families to reach their financial goals with confidence and peace of mind.



**Michèle Gauthier** is a counsellor with the Military Family Services (MFS) Family Information Line (FIL). Before joining the MFS team, Michèle worked with Families under the Director of Youth Protection. Working directly with children and youth, she has learned a great deal about intervention and emotional support, offering clients a safe space to express and share their emotions. Working with FIL since 2022, Michèle has adapted her skills and learning to her current work environment. She asks clients questions in order to fully understand their issues and refer them to the best resource, and listens to the emotions and concerns of each caller.



**Erik Gravelle** has been in the insurance industry for 21 years and strives towards a holistic approach when dealing with clients. He enjoys the interaction and is always looking for ways to simplify financial questions. In his free time, he volunteers with different local organizations and enjoys cycling around Ottawa, discovering numerous bike trails.



**Margaux Wolfe** has been a dedicated advocate for military Families since 2018, when she joined MFS as the Veteran Family Program (VFP) Coordinator. She later took on the role of VFP Manager in 2020. In 2021, Margaux transitioned to the Spousal Employment Team, where she currently serves as the Employment and Entrepreneurship Program Manager. In her role, Margaux focuses on bridging employment gaps for military spouses by fostering partnerships with employers who are committed to hiring and retaining military spouses throughout their careers. She oversees and leads strategic initiatives within the Military Spousal Employment Network, including the Employer Spotlight Series, which highlights companies dedicated to supporting military Families and supports the creation of meaningful employment connections between skilled military spouses and committed employers.



Facilitators: **Hélène Le Scelleur** and **Lori-Anne Thibault**

### Presentation summary

This presentation focused on the services offered by Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services (CFMWS). CFMWS serves military members, Veterans, and their Families. The presenters explained that the services CFMWS offers relate to many aspects of well-being. Each presenter discussed the program or service they work with, explaining what the service is, who can access it and how it can help Veterans and Families navigate the transition out of the military. Overall, the presenters emphasized that there are many services and supports available through CFMWS and that they understand the adjustments that military Families need to make prior to, during and after release or while supporting an ill or injured member.

### Key messages

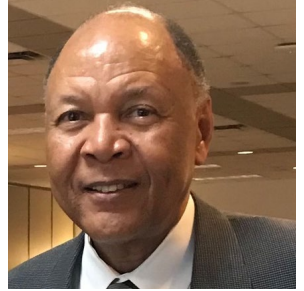
1. CFMWS offers services targeted to different areas of Veteran and Family well-being as they transition out of the military, including financial and employment services, social groups, peer groups and mental health support through a crisis line or individual counselling.
2. The employment services CFMWS offers include a job fair where Veterans and Families can connect with vetted employers who have ensured their organizations are compatible with the military and Veteran lifestyle and community. CFMWS also has programs to offer refresher training to spouses of military Veterans to help with job-seeking. For Veterans, CFMWS offers programs to help assess one's own experience and highlight skills and competencies that can be matched up with job market needs.
3. CFMWS offers financial information and services. Through the Service Income Security Insurance Plan (SISIP) Financial program, CAF members, Veterans, and their Families can receive financial services and advice about investments, insurance and retirement.



# MORAL INJURY AT HOME: A FAMILY'S GUIDE TO RECOGNITION, SUPPORT AND EXPECTATIONS FOR INTERVENTIONS

## Presenter biography

**C. Richard Spates**, PhD is a clinical psychologist and professor emeritus at Western Michigan University. His research focuses on anxiety disorders, trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with extensive work on eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) and cognitive-behavioural treatments. Richard has also explored technology-based interventions for mental health issues. As a consultant, Richard has worked with various organizations, including the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, providing expertise on PTSD treatment and program evaluation. His work with the Michigan Department of Mental Health has influenced policies on clinical standards and behavioral services. He has also served as an expert witness in cases related to trauma and PTSD.



## Presentation summary

This presentation explored moral injury, focusing on its impact on Families. In the presentation, **Dr. C. Richard Spates** introduced the concept of moral foundations to explain how violations of core values lead to moral injury. He shared case studies illustrating how moral injury manifests differently for individuals and discussed common symptoms and their effects on Family dynamics. He also outlined therapeutic approaches such as expressive writing, narrative exposure therapy and EMDR, emphasizing how these can help realign moral foundations. Throughout the presentation, Richard provided practical tips for Family members to support their loved ones and care for themselves.

**“Moral injury is not a character flaw but a deep wound to the soul.”**

## Key messages

1. Moral injury is psychological distress that results from actions (or lack of action) which violate an individual's moral or ethical code. Moral injury can be associated with persistent questions about the fundamental meaning of life, growing distress, feelings of betrayal, intense shame and guilt. Veterans with a moral injury may experience isolation, withdrawal, sleep disturbances, self-blame and self-destructive coping.
2. A moral injury can impact a person's relationships, social life, work life and self-care. The Family can also be impacted and might experience changes in roles within the Family, communication patterns and emotions. Children may adapt their behaviour to “fix” their parent or be “perfect” and the Family as a whole may be organized around protecting the Veteran and caring for their injury.
3. The treatment path for a moral injury may involve recognizing the injury and understanding one's personal values, processing the injury and associated moral challenges, integrating new values with one's new reality and transforming the injury into wisdom. There are several treatment approaches that may be helpful, such as narrative exposure therapy, adaptive disclosure, acceptance and commitment therapy, and adaptations of EMDR. There is emerging evidence of these treatment options being applicable to moral injury, although none are fully validated through research as effective treatments.

# PANEL PRESENTATION – VICTORY AND VULNERABILITY: FAMILY SUPPORT THROUGH THE INVICTUS GAMES AND BEYOND

## Panellist biographies

**Jenna Babin** is a dedicated advocate for mental health, particularly for Veterans and their Families. As the spouse of a Veteran husband living with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), she intimately understands the challenges faced by those navigating the complexities of mental health care. Her commitment to raising awareness and creating supportive environments is further exemplified by her husband’s involvement in the Invictus Games 2025, where they both champion resilience and recovery. A Family-oriented individual, Jenna is passionate about fostering community and encouraging open discussions surrounding mental health.



**Mike Babin** is a retired Warrant Officer who served with the Royal Canadian Dragoons as an Armour Soldier and remustered to Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Operator with the Canadian Special Operations Forces Command (CANSOFCOM). Medically released due to physical and mental injuries sustained from service, he understands the struggles of trying to serve and be a part of a Family. He hid his injuries for over a decade before it started to affect his work and everyday life and he finally accepted that something was not right. He shares about how PTSD along with physical injuries cannot be fought alone and how support from the medical community, friends and Family is a must.



**Dean and Gailynne Irvine** are 2018 Invictus Games alumni. Dean was medically released in 2018. His Invictus experience taught him tenacity and reinforced his “no quit” attitude, no matter what. In 2024, Dean battled an aggressive cancer. He reflected back on the Invictus Games and used many skills that I learned from the Games to fight hard through his chemo treatments. Through it, he found himself rediscovering Family again. He shares that it’s important to never give up and keep moving forward, whatever your forward is, as everyone’s journey is different. In all the ups and downs, they have seen that their Family is always there and that they are Invictus.



**Brad LeBel** currently serves as a Sgt Vehicle Tech at 2 Field Ambulance in Petawawa, ON. He is married to Julie and they have two daughters, Kaydence and Kailynne. Brad grew up in Gillam, MB and joined the Reserves in Sault Ste. Marie in 2001 while going through college as an automotive technician. He has been on four operational deployments and has been posted to multiple places across Canada. This year, he is fortunate to have been selected as a participant in the 2025 Invictus Games, participating in sitting volleyball, alpine skiing and indoor rowing.



Moderator: **Laryssa Lamrock**

## Panel summary

This panel joined past and present Invictus Games participants, together with their supporting Family members, to explore the complex challenges they have faced through the Games and to talk about their individual journeys of recovery. Family members spoke about the positive shifts they observed in their Veteran spouses as they prepared for the Games, expressing joy at seeing their partners find new motivation and excitement that had been lost post-service. Similarly, the Veterans shared that their Families were a source of strength and support that helped them apply themselves to training for and participating in the Games. Panellists discussed the range of emotions they experienced before, during and after their participation in the Games, from disbelief at being chosen to courage to self-compassion. Through each of their experiences, the panellists found a place to rediscover themselves, connect with others and express resilience in the face of challenges.

**“Yes it’s an invisible injury, but I’m right here.”**

## Key messages

1. Family support was central to their Veteran loved one’s success at the Invictus Games. Families took on new roles to support their Veteran’s training schedule and travel, emotional highs and lows, and changes as their partners rediscovered or embraced new aspects of their identity. Families were proud to support their Veteran loved ones on their journey.
2. Understanding and prioritizing mental and physical health were essential for Veterans taking part in the Games. They described participating in the Games as an important step in improving their mental health, along with seeking the necessary support outside their Family to be well during their training and competition. Participating in the Games empowered and motivated the Veterans to overcome barriers and challenges in other parts of their lives.
3. The Games helped Veterans reconnect with their passions and find community with others. The panellists expressed gratitude for the opportunity to participate in the Games and meet others who understand what it’s like to be or to support an injured Veteran. Opportunities for connection arose as they supported each other and had the courage to try.

# WHAT WE HEARD

*\*based on 95 responses to a feedback survey on Veteran Family Summit 2025*

## KEY FEEDBACK

### What was the most important thing you learned from this event?

- I feel seen and validated as a Veteran Family member
- I am not alone
- Families and connections are important
- There are resources and supports available to me

### What did you enjoy most about the summit?

- Panels and presentations
- Specific presentation/topic
- Personal experiences and stories



**92%** of respondents were somewhat or very satisfied with the event overall.



**84%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the summit improved their understanding of Veteran Families' mental health and wellness needs and experiences.



**75%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their experiences were reflected in at least one session on Day 1.

**81%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their experiences were reflected in at least one session on Day 2.