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# TAYA AND CHRIS KYLE FOUNDATION

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2021 Summary Update

MAY 5, 2021

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## A Message from TACK-F's Founder & Executive Director

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Dear Friends at Gary Sinise Foundation,

Your support of our programs and the service families we endeavor to help, has made a world of difference! As we have forged ahead into the digital world of virtual groups in live sessions, I am pleased to report we continue to see the life-changing and life-saving effects of offering lifelines for those who are hurting while serving.

It is because of your generous support that we have been able to continue to dream about even bigger ways to serve where we can help more people with high impact. Service members run into literal and virtual fires for us, and with your help we have been able to run into the fire of their eroding or damaged relationships for them.

As you know, 80% of suicides are relationship related. In one of our recent virtual Empowered Spouses sessions, a participant shared, "You all know I was in a really dark place when we started this group..." She continued to express how things were changing in a positive direction in their family. She concluded with, "...this foundation saved my life in ways I'll always be grateful for." This is our "why".

I had the blessing of talking with a friend of Chris's who was a Ranger before becoming a SEAL. He is and always has been an incredible, humble officer who leads with a true servant's heart. He is a phenomenal husband and father to three young pre-teens. He shared with me how his new job in Law Enforcement (in a highly specialized part of LE) has him more worn down than ever. The assassination and persecution of LEO's in addition to the effort to balance family and work in such a hateful environment has him feeling differently than he ever has, and it's not good. He is as good a man as I have ever met or known. It broke my heart to hear the quiet pain in his voice. The night before we talked, he told his wife, "I would rather be carried by six than judged by twelve. I don't know that I will be able to pull my gun even on a search or arrest warrant. I would rather die than have my whole life's work of fighting for the safety and benefit of others to end in not only jail, but character assassination and persecution of my family."

We are diligently and aggressively developing a group of warriors who can bring aide in the form of community and safe conversation for warriors like my friend who need to know, there is hope and there are people like you all and people like us, who care. We have not given up and we will not stop in our passion to bring healing to those who need it most. With your help, we have been able to add another incredible person to our lean and mighty team. She will be charged with developing the dream we have long had, but not been able to finance, of having at least one clinician in each state who is licensed to help the couples who are applying for our services. These clinicians will be added to our arsenal of highly recommended, culturally competent coaches and practitioners who will also have completed our Service Marriage Counselor Certification Program (SMCCP) developed with Baylor University.

The SMCCP is designed for the virtual world and includes six hours of carefully curated information presented in an engaging and interactive video format. We often hear from couples who tried to get help outside of the military, where they felt safe to be truly transparent, but left discouraged and disappointed by a well-meaning civilian counselor who did not understand the unique dynamics making service marriages entirely different than civilian marriages. The SMCCP is a stamp of approval by TACK-F

showing service members seeking help which clinicians have taken additional training to address their unique needs.

Finally, friends, I have had some great conversations with Military One Source and the Department of Defense that lead me to believe we are on the brink of helping more people in the military by offering them the help they need in the private sector through a partnership where we are all focused on helping the military members heal which, as you know, increases force retention and readiness. Your help and TACK-F's passion to bring our programming to more families in need will no doubt make their worlds, and our world a better place.

Thank you for trusting us to never quit on the people who trade a more peaceful life for the noble work of serving our communities and country as first responders and military warriors. We are humbly honored and incredibly blessed to be forging ahead with you!

Your partnership has given us hope, strength, and encouragement. Sometimes, as we all know, that makes all the difference. The financing to back it up so that we can grow and help more people has stoked our fire of urgency to get to families before service life gets them. Thank you!

Please reach out to our organization or me personally anytime.

God bless you,

**Taya Kyle,**  
**Micah 6:8**

Taya Kyle, Executive Director  
Taya and Chris Kyle Foundation – Service Family Strong

## Executive Summary

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Today our world is a safer place, thanks to our military and first responder community, but it's not without significant sacrifices from them and their families. With this sacrifice comes on the job stressors which contribute to a breakdown within the marriage relationship and adversely impact the family unit. TACK-F focuses on preservation and restoration of the marriage and the family to impact generations. We know that being mission ready and prepared to respond wherever and whenever needed comes at a cost. TACK-F leads the charge in providing insight and targeted programmatic interventions to offer service families hope and, importantly, statistically significant outcomes when it comes to a multitude of force readiness and wellness issues. Amid a global pandemic, TACK-F has answered the call to pivot and is launching hybrid-based programs to ensure service members have access to the hand up approach through TACK-F. Focus groups of past alumni and outreach to couples waiting to enter our pipeline have allowed TACK-F to collect and evaluate anecdotal data to address the "needs" heard through programmatic channels with additional programming and support.

### **TACK-F recognizes that initiatives should be focused with these three key issues in mind:**

1. Unhealthy service community marriages/intimate partner relationships put the service population at high risk of suicide.
2. Mental health in service culture impacts service community retention and future force readiness.
3. Addressing mental and physical health for our service community requires a comprehensive approach that integrates the entire family unit and not just the service-member.

Statistics fail to capture the people impacted by a life of service – people like U.S. Capitol Police officer Howard Liebengood, who took his own life just days after the riots at the Capitol. He was not a number to those who loved him. Deaths like his have become far too commonplace among those in the service community. At TACK-F, we are unifying service community families by creating connection through impactful programmatic experiences. Connections within the marriage are powerful but increasing this bridge beyond the family and into the community is where the impact for generations is felt. Our partners become friends of and advocates for service marriages and increase our ability to continue strengthening the families that protect and defend all of America's families.

## QUARTER 1 FOCUS

TACK-F is on a mission to establish, promote, and create tools and resources that build connections. We are actively engaging in programmatic content that bridges the divide between the service community and the people they serve. Continuing to support this community through a global pandemic has required TACK-F to build the infrastructure for scalable programs and programmatic content while continuing to grow organically. To adapt to the changing COVID-19 environment and restrictions, TACK-F has been agile and at-the-ready to support service members when current events call. To achieve this goal of managing scaled impact balanced against agility, we recently focused on five key priorities in Quarter 1:

1. **Adapting to digital delivery.** TACK-F programming and resources have focused on an intensive in-person connection. We translated what we have learned and know works into the digital space to meet the needs in our new, post-COVID world.
2. **Adding capacity.** The need is greater than our capacity to fill it. Q1 efforts include planning to scale up to serve more couples and better meet the urgent need in this community.

3. **Building infrastructure.** We must serve now and plan for the future by laying the groundwork for an ambitious vision of future growth and expanded impact.
4. **Growing our network.** Focusing on community outreach and engagement to build awareness, create connectedness, and serve more couples.
5. **Listening more.** Listening directly to the people we serve is essential to ensuring our programming is evolving to continue to meet the most urgent and important needs of service families.

#### QUARTER 1 IMPACT SUMMARY

- Outreach and engagement efforts delivered tools and resources to **287 service couples** experiencing challenges and additional marriage stressors.
- Listening Sessions provided direct connection to **20 first responders** to ensure TACK-F programming continues to address the community's most urgent needs.
- TACK-F is currently supporting **20 couples in Strength Training** with culturally competent, licensed clinicians.
- Hybrid Empowered Spouses: 2 cohorts of 12, for a total of **24 service community spouses** committing to the **10-week program**
- Infrastructure building: TACK-F increased its roster of clinical clinicians from **1 to 4 licensed professional counselors**, quadrupling our ability to provide culturally competent care and coaching to families in need.
- Program delivery: TACK-F began the process of adapting its signature, proven programming by creating a **hybrid model that blends TACK-F curriculum** with online delivery during COVID
- Note: Each program addressed in Quarter One is also accompanied by a **Go-Forward Planning** to continued building TACK-F's impact. That information is provided in the detailed outline below.

## TACK-F Overview

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### OVERVIEW

TACK-F has seen the impact of vibrant and thriving marriages, building a foundation of safe and healthy families, which also translates into improved health outcomes for service members and their families. Creating a positive environment for service families who experience higher levels of trauma has been difficult as cultural, logistical, and environmental barriers to help-seeking behaviors in the service community are magnified. Finding solutions in the private sector, at no cost to service-members, seems to remove many of those barriers.

TACK-F is leading the charge in providing insight and targeted programmatic interventions to offer hope and, importantly, statistically significant outcomes related to marriage (and conversely, the dissolution of marriage) when it comes to a multitude of force readiness and wellness issues, including suicide prevention.

### ABOUT THE TAYA AND CHRIS KYLE FOUNDATION (TACK-F)

TACK-F is founded with a special operations mindset: *You can't mass produce what we do; our work is detailed and specialized. You can't produce what we do in an emergency or in a hurry. We've taken the time to build, research, assess, and measure the impact of our programming. While we aren't built to do everything; our specialized programming is made to change everything.*

This mindset is why TACK-F works to collaborate with other experts in their respective space in the service community to provide the “wrap-around” (complementary) services that many families need to heal from the trauma and invisible wounds of a service lifestyle that often spread throughout the entire family. We welcome the opportunity for our couples to experience other services through the GSF network and the reverse is true: **we welcome referrals from the GSF alliance into the TACK-F pipeline of couples we intend to support and serve.** We see the ability to refer in and out of our shared networks easily occurring when we explore programs that may be synergistic, such as TACK-F's Date Night Out folded into a Lt. Dan Band Concert or couples from GSF being selected for Strengths Finder Coaching or a Mastering Your Marriage program.

## Programming Summary ~2021, Q1

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The content below is a summary of the intensive work that has been occurring both behind the scenes and in direct engagement with the military, veteran, and first responder community and TACK-F. During this time, our goal has been to ensure we keep the best of what we know works in our programming while still adapting to the needs and constraints of a COVID and post-COVID environment. Adaptability is something required constantly for service member families, and it is a cornerstone of how TACK-F aligns its values and programming to support these families.

### Engagement & Outreach

During a global pandemic TACK-F saw the exponential growth in the list of service couples applying to participate in the tested and research-based programs at TACK-F. Through the rebrand and reactivation of the mission supported by GSF's grant, the staff was uniquely equipped to engage and connect with these service couples and to triage support needs, focused first on the substantial wait list of couples seeking services and support.

**Engagement (Wait-listed Couples):** TACK-F has a waitlist of couples who want support to save their marriage and their family. With GSF's support, we've been able to organize staff support resources to develop an outreach system to connect directly with couples on the TACK-F wait list who are clearly and directly requesting support for their family.

In Q1, the TACK-F team developed an engagement and outreach process designed to assess urgency and provide support. TACK-F staff provided TACK-F and supporting organizational resources to 287 couples and was able to share the organization's transformation and rebrand from CKFF to TACK-F. In building this direct connection with our service couples we anticipate that we will...ascertain that our impact and success of reapplication to our offering of services will increase and the outcomes will have an increased positive statistical outcome.

- Impact: Outreach to provide tools and resources to 287 service couples experiencing challenges and additional marriage stressors
- Going Forward: TACK-F continues to evaluate its application process and streamline access to resources for couples in our que. Processes must be refined to ensure no couple is left in the trenches. We must constantly aim to increase our reach out upon application

**Focus Group Listening Sessions:** In February 2021, TACK-F enlisted the assistance of targeted focus groups of 20 couples from the Veteran, First Responder, and Active-Duty communities for Listening Sessions. In working with these couples, TACK-F aims to increase our on-the-ground awareness of current and continued needs so that we are aware in an intimate and authentic way of what issues are most pressing to each component of the service community and so that we can incorporate this feedback into a continuous-improvement process regarding TACK-F programmatic changes. Feedback was key during this discussion as well as listening to the community we serve. It is critical to our success to be able to address the current situational challenges that are increasing in the service community.

### Key Takeaways (What We Learned!):

- **Active Duty:** "The military doesn't prepare you for marriage. They prepare you for battle, not battling FOR your marriage. Families need stability:



- “Less family fun days and more practical help like rest and childcare.”
- “Everyone is DAMAGED from the years of stress. They are coping with alcohol and communities are shutting in. Service members are taught to take a defensive posture and plan for a counter attack.”
- A "Zero defect" mentality is adding to the mental wear and tear for families. Participants report that “there are no work boundaries, no rest, and the work climate continues to get stressful.” They feel like they are never “off.”
- **First Responders:** Fear of retaliation, morale is low and they feel "beat down. "
  - The media narrative makes families feel “under siege” and they are “*retreating at home...until it all fades away before coming out of their homes.*” Some families even report setting up meal delivery groups to support families that are shutting themselves in while waiting for the media to calm down.
  - Fort Worth specifically delivered a male-focused debriefing or program designed (like ESR) to provide a place to decompress and address critical issues. Even the fire department is noticing aggressiveness towards them. “*People are angry and on edge, but don't know why.*”
  - With more retirements and fewer recruits, first responders are in forced overtime, meaning their families are placed under another stressor they have no control over and may not be set up to support (in terms of child care or elder care).
  - Programming Idea: Request for a local chapter for alumni, a network of support. Could we build a "swift response team" locally with resources?
- **Veterans:** Concerned about effects on children after years of moving and stress
  - “*Not messing up our kids*” is the number one concern. They seek clinicians that can serve service member children and who understand their stressors. Some of these families made the decision to depart service based on the impact on their family and family well-being is a top-of-mind acute stressor.
  - “*If the kids aren't thriving, the marriage won't either.*” This acute sense of concern and guilt spills out into how couples interact with each other.
  - Programming Idea: Could MYM include teens or could we focus a module to address these specific issues?
- **Engagement & Outreach Go-Forward Planning:** TACK-F must evaluate the anecdotal data provided following the focus groups and translate to test strength and adaptation of programs. TACK-F will consider creating an ongoing advisory board or a listening session series to provide on-the-ground information and feedback about the service communities evolving needs and program desires.

### **Clinical Programming ~ Strength Training**

TACK-F's Strength Training Program provides service couples with five clinically based coaching sessions with a TACK-F trained military spouse clinician. With GSF's support, we were able to expand our clinician roster from one counselor to four counselors, quadrupling our ability to serve those on our waitlist and new participants.

Strength sessions provide couples with flexibility despite inconsistent schedules. Coaching, rather than counseling, reduces the mental health stigma associated with asking for help. The Gallup StrengthsFinder Assessment teaches couples how to value each other's strengths, work better together as

a team, and reduce conflict through better communication. As positive reinforcement and a positive “capstone” experience, couples receive an all-expense paid overnight retreat to connect and celebrate each other and their hard work. Our staff concierge plans each aspect of their retreat with the couple’s input and feedback while coaches teach them how to be mindful and protect their time from sabotage.

- TACK-F is currently supporting 20 couples in Strength Training with culturally competent, licensed clinicians.
- Go-Forward Planning for 2021: TACK-F is building the infrastructure to create a 50-state network with culturally competent clinicians! Stay tuned, and join us in this national effort!

### **Clinical Programming Hybrid Launch!**

TACK-F’s signature Empowered Spouses Retreat (ESR) remains a significant differentiator in TACK-F’s approach to marriage programming. The program has long focused on the supporting spouse’s needs in a way that reactivates the scales in the service family. The rejuvenation of the supporting spouse has been proven to renew the health and wellness of the spouse and encourage and nurture positive relational tools in the marriage.

With spouse suicides on the rise, TACK-F knew that more needed to be done to address the mental health needs of spouses that are the backbone of force readiness, retention, and stability in the home. With the support of the Gary Sinise Foundation, TACK-F was able to employ two additional clinicians and a program led to coordinate an online virtual (pilot) launch of the ESR program as a hybrid experience. This structure allows TACK-F to provide programmatic interventions effectively via online resources and to ensure that service families continue to receive needed support now. This integrated approach still supports the connection need to restore relationships which begin to unify service community marriages and families.

In March 2021, TACK-F launched the two pilot cohorts of Hybrid ESR. ESR has traditionally been a five-day retreat-based program hosted in Jackson Hole, WY in collaboration with Safari Club International. (We have also hosted in collaboration with Camp Southern Ground, the passion project of Grammy-award-winning musician, Zac Brown.) Empowered Spouses Hybrid is completely online, providing 10 weeks of support for military, veteran, and first responder spouses. Facilitated by our TACK-F clinicians and an alumni peer leader, spouses walk through service-related topics while connecting with others who understand and decompressing in a safe environment. Spouses also receive one-on-one support from clinicians as needed.

During this 10-week journey spouses participate in group discussion which builds trust and healthy takeaways. They are provided with a homework assignment, which encourages continued work between sessions that allows for self assessment, introspection, and empowers positive situational analysis. They also participate in a private Facebook Group to connect in between group sessions and undergo one individual session with one of the facilitators.

Finally, throughout the 2-current pilot cohorts of Hybrid ES, curriculum will begin being built out that will continue through a total of 3 phases. This is essential to create, test, and support the program’s integrity.

- Launch Impact: 12 supporting spouses per Cohort, TOTAL of 24 spouses – 24 families representing 24 service members and 18 children -- led by 2 new TACK-F clinicians
- 2021 Planning: With GSF support, TACK-F can build on this pilot launch to lead the charge in supporting spouses with plans to launch up to 6 additional ES cohort in 2021 for a goal impact of 72 spouses and families.

## **Conclusion & Go-Forward Planning**

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With support from the Gary Sinise Foundation, TACK-F has been able to:

- Adapt and revitalize its proven programming model to support couples during COVID-19, a time when stressors have increased.
- Invest in critical infrastructure building to plan for scaling up operations as we move forward into 2021 and beyond.
- Dream big about new programs that align with our shared values to ensure service families – no matter where they are – have the support and expertise they need to manage service life stressors.

We know that GSF understands that the invisible wounds of war are the only wounds that are contagious, and that trauma reverberates through service families in a way that is cumulative and generational. You cannot heal the warrior if you do not heal the family. We look forward to additional collaboration and partnership to better serve these families. TACK-F is grateful beyond measure and looks forward to growing our work and our impact collaboratively.