Alex is a young man who considers himself a “military brat”; he grew up in an Air Force family. He’s also one of the Branch’s military-connected consultants who help us with research, writing, and their lived experiences in the military community. Alex is an individual living with a disability which did not significantly affect his education.

**Here is Alex’s education journey:**

“My journey through the education system was different from most civilian kids; by the time my family PCS’d (Permanent Change of Station) [[1]](#footnote-1) to Davis-Monthan Air Force Base near Tucson, AZ, my family and I had lived on or near four different military installations. I had skipped first grade due to the traditional beginning of the school year and my birthday in September lining up awkwardly. (It didn’t affect me much although I had to catch up with math). My freshman year of high school in Tucson would also be my second freshman year, as I attended my first year in Washington, D.C.

My first year of high school, entering as a 13-year old, was at an affluent all-boys school in D.C. It was a stressful experience. I still hadn’t made any good friends in the D.C. area after 3 years of middle school and my grades were decidedly mediocre. I was very unhappy, and I believe that repeating freshman year in Tucson was a very helpful, proactive choice that helped me mature.

At that stage in my life, I had gotten used to the frequent moves and was able to quickly introduce myself to groups of people with common interests. My club and high school swim teams were probably the best example of this, as a majority of my closest friends were my teammates. This was much different from how I had approached making friends when I was younger, and it resulted in much more self-confidence and substantial growth to my social and emotional capabilities.

**Inclusion in School**

By the time you reach high school age, most of your contemporaries have usually been going to school with the same people for 5 or more years. Trying to make friends when you feel like the “new guy” can be tough, especially if you’re seeing those friend groups as closed-off cliques. In many cases, these cliques aren’t closed-off at all. High-schoolers have a wide variety of talents, interests, and extracurricular activities that they might share in common with a group of people within their high school. This leads to a lot of overlapping when it comes to social circles and just depends on what you’re interested in.The fastest way to meet people who could be your friends is to introduce yourself.

**College Readiness**

Applying for colleges was not particularly different for me than it was for my civilian friends. A large percentage of colleges accept the GI Bill for tuition, so it was worth making sure that the schools I applied to have that as an option. For applying to service academies, there’s a lot more legwork. Applicants will have to submit a collection of personal paperwork including official military forms, transcripts, recommendations, interviews, and signed contracts guaranteeing that you don’t have any dependents.

It’s more important to know how you’ll be paying for college - filling out grant and scholarship applications is just as impactful as sending in applications to your school of choice. Higher education is an expensive endeavor and starting good money practices early is priceless.

As a high schooler, I was lucky to be surrounded by people willing to help. I went to a very good school, was inspired by my hard-working friends and coaches, and got tutoring for subjects that I had difficulty in (calculus especially). This environment fostered me during the time that my dad was deployed for his second time and helped make me strong for not only myself, but others as well.

As mentioned earlier, my family had PCS’d a handful of times before I was in high school. Learning how to “be the new kid” multiple times over eventually left some lasting lessons and definitely helped get me on my feet after the move.

**Boiled down, my best advice would be to:**

1. Actively partake in extracurriculars, even if they’re only mildly interesting: taking part in an activity that interests you with other people that are interested takes away the hardest part of meeting new people (introducing yourself). Take advantage of this to make friends with common interests.
2. Volunteer on the weekends: having a regular appointment at a soup kitchen or pet shelter keeps you productive and can show you the power of “doing good”. These activities are also noticed on things such as college, scholarship, and job applications.
3. The only person stopping you from meeting new people is you.
4. Have a hobby/something to do solo: I like to view a hobby as something you do solely for your own enjoyment. When the only person supervising your work is yourself, the quality of your results and work is completely up to you. This can help your work ethic, accountability, and self-confidence in your skills.”

1. Permanent Change of Station, usually known as “PCS”, refers to a move to the service member’s next assigned duty station. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)