



July 2004

NMFA 
National Military Family Association

SERVING THE HOME FRONT:

An Analysis of Military Family Support
from September 11, 2001 through March 31, 2004

FOREWORD

July, 2004

The National Military Family Association (NMFA) is a private, nonprofit organization serving the families of the seven uniformed services. Its primarily volunteer staff is made up of military family members, active duty and retired personnel, and civilians who care about military families. We understand the unique dynamics of the uniformed services families because we live that lifestyle.

This year the National Military Family Association celebrates 35 years of serving military families. NMFA has been honored to be the “Voice for Military Families” and will proudly continue to be that voice. Through our mission of education, information, and advocacy, we have strengthened and empowered military families. That is why we have adopted the motto “Strong Families, Strong Force” for our 35th anniversary year.

At NMFA we believe that to obtain a strong military force, we must have strong military families. It is especially fitting during this anniversary year that NMFA has conducted a family support analysis project. The analysis team, all military family members, examined issues of concern to military families and the availability of support services. This report summarizes the findings of the analysis team.

Uniformed service families all over the world serve on the home front to make their communities a better place. They serve their country proudly just as their servicemembers do. That is why we feel very strongly that the recommendations contained in this report should be adopted to further strengthen our families, our force, and our nation.

Sincerely,



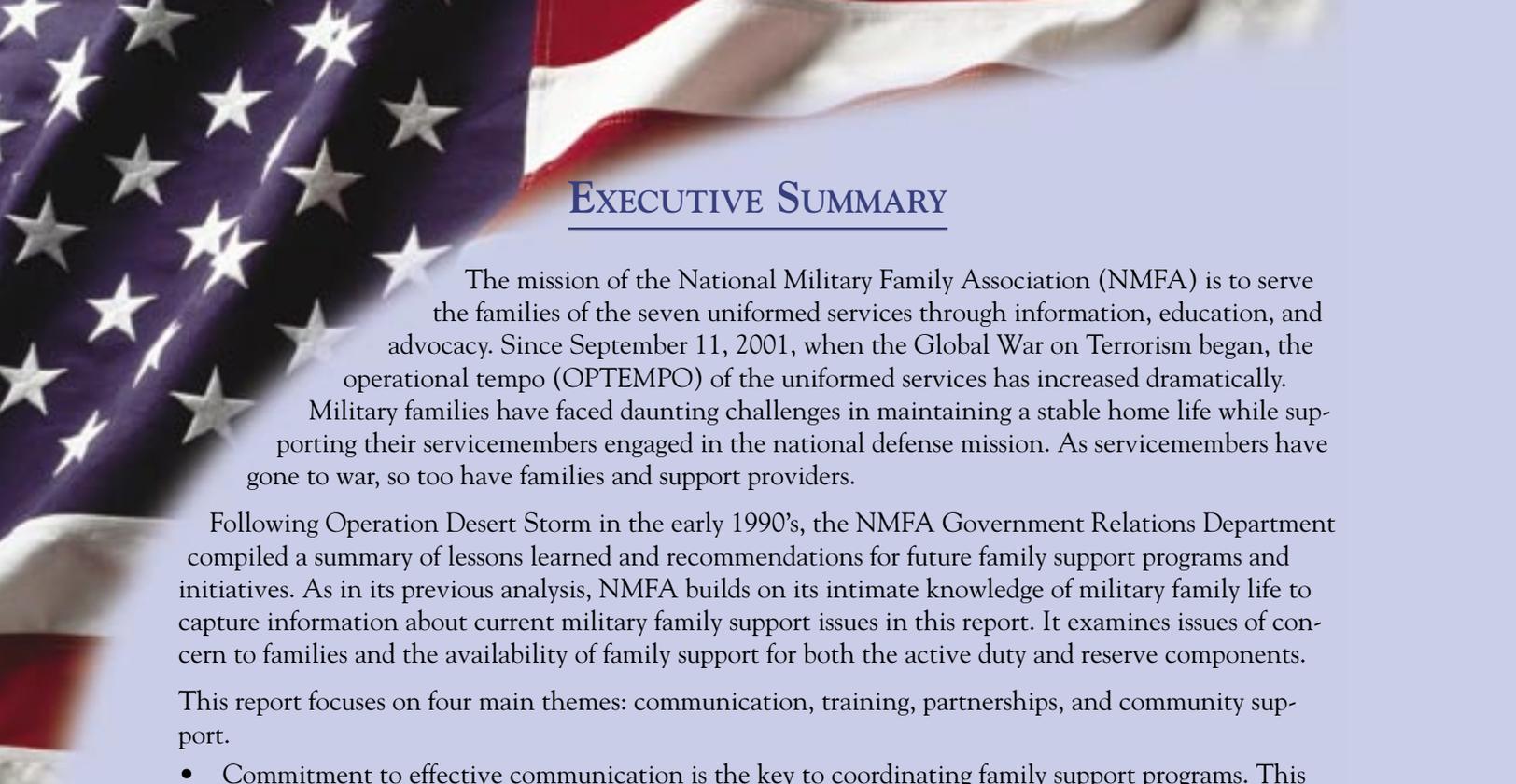
Candace A. Wheeler

NMFA President

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

NMFA extends its heartfelt thanks to those who contributed to this project, especially to all of the military families serving the home front. Without you, this report would not have been possible.

All interviews were conducted in confidentiality, and the names of interviewees are withheld by mutual agreement.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The mission of the National Military Family Association (NMFA) is to serve the families of the seven uniformed services through information, education, and advocacy. Since September 11, 2001, when the Global War on Terrorism began, the operational tempo (OPTEMPO) of the uniformed services has increased dramatically.

Military families have faced daunting challenges in maintaining a stable home life while supporting their servicemembers engaged in the national defense mission. As servicemembers have gone to war, so too have families and support providers.

Following Operation Desert Storm in the early 1990's, the NMFA Government Relations Department compiled a summary of lessons learned and recommendations for future family support programs and initiatives. As in its previous analysis, NMFA builds on its intimate knowledge of military family life to capture information about current military family support issues in this report. It examines issues of concern to families and the availability of family support for both the active duty and reserve components.

This report focuses on four main themes: communication, training, partnerships, and community support.

- Commitment to effective communication is the key to coordinating family support programs. This communication needs to be a continuous flow of accurate, timely information from the highest levels of the military to the individual servicemembers and families.
- Training is a continuous step in ensuring that programs are working and that services are consistent and utilized. There are many people offering wonderful programs, but the challenge lies in reaching the families who need them.
- The development and continuation of partnerships are central to ensuring an overall successful effort to help military families. These partnerships include military to military, military to community, and military to employers.
- Finally, community support has helped fill the gaps in military family support services. Military families are encouraged by and grateful for the efforts of their fellow citizens.

Selected issue discussions highlight special areas of concern and responses to those concerns. These issues—TRICARE, the need for preventive mental health services, access to affordable child care, and communication innovations through the “One Source” employee assistance program—point the way to further research and/or additional support activities.

The report also identifies some underlying themes related to transforming military family support services, expectations, and the importance of command involvement.

- The expectations of servicemembers, family members, and “the military” all need to be established and communicated. Expectations of families regarding support in general should mesh with the reality of support services and programs that can be provided. Families must maintain some sense of responsibility for their own readiness.
- The importance of command involvement in all facets of family readiness cannot be emphasized enough. This includes not just unit commanders, but also installation and headquarters command levels.
- Military families understand that the Global War on Terrorism will entail a long commitment for them and their servicemembers. As the military services are transformed to meet the unexpected and uncertain missions of this war, all aspects of family support need to be transformed as well.

As the third anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack approaches, the resiliency of military families remains strong. However, according to one military spouse, “the normal of what [we] used to know is no more.” The strength of military families serving on the home front to endure this changed environment is wearing down. In addition to dealing with routine experiences of military life, such as relocating, achieving consistency in their children's education or seeking employment opportunities

for spouses, military families face even more unique challenges due to the ongoing high OPTEMPO. As servicemembers deploy more frequently, for longer periods of time and at unpredictable intervals, it is essential that military families have a comprehensive, responsive, and flexible system of support to prepare and sustain them.

COMMUNICATION

The first essential component of a family support system is effective communication to enhance the sharing of information and outreach to military families. Families need realistic expectations about the frequency and type of communication they will have with the deployed servicemember. Communication expectations must also be established and information easily and openly exchanged between the official chain of command and families. Processes of communication should include families geographically dispersed from the servicemember's unit, as well as families of servicemembers augmented to another unit or Service. When in place, institutional means of raising family support issues can heighten the Service leadership's awareness of concerns and lead to solutions at all levels. Effective and easy to use websites should be available to all family members; volunteer efforts to provide input to these sites should be facilitated. Outreach initiatives are needed to raise awareness among all military families of available support programs and services designed to enable them to thrive during a higher pace of military operations.

Key communication recommendations

- Establish realistic expectations regarding communication both between the servicemember and family and the command and families prior to deployment.
- Ensure that command responsibility includes geographically dispersed families and families of augmented servicemembers in the unit communication process.
- Implement a Service-wide, institutional means of raising family readiness and deployment issues from the ground level up through the headquarters level and facilitate Service solutions to problems at various levels.
- Provide a far-reaching system to include extended family members in unit communications.
- Create and maintain Service, installation and unit websites that are user-friendly and contain timely and accurate information.
- Recognize the importance of and facilitate unit volunteer efforts to reach out to family members. Assign a point of contact for posting unit volunteer information on installation and/or unit websites instead of spending additional resources for off-line websites.
- Develop a Department of Defense (DoD)-wide comprehensive marketing outreach plan to make all military families aware of available support services, regardless of their Service affiliation or proximity to an installation.
- Continue efforts to educate families about TRICARE benefits and rules.
- Ensure continuity and accessibility of medical care, especially for Guard and Reserve families.

TRAINING

Standardized and continuous training throughout the military family support system is the second element in this comprehensive effort to provide families with the help they need during more frequent and lengthier deployments. Formal training will enable unit commanders, rear parties, and volunteers to work together more effectively to make the support system of true benefit to military families. Servicemembers must be trained by the command to make family readiness a priority. Required Family Care Plans should be agreeable to all involved and commanders held accountable for their implementation, as well as all other aspects of family readiness. Military family support providers must tailor programs and services to meet changing needs of families as servicemembers return and families reunite. They should adapt the location and hours of support programs and services to be accessible for the families they serve. Individuals involved with children need training to recognize and support their deployment-related needs. All individuals involved with the Guard and Reserve must know of rights, benefits and entitlements and how

to find information throughout the stages of mobilization and deployment. Families and servicemembers need information to know when to seek professional help and, when needed, preventive, confidential, and robust counseling must also be easily accessible.

Key training recommendations

- Require formalized training of unit commanders, rear party personnel and unit volunteers together so all receive the same core information, have similar expectations, and understand the role of each party.
- Train servicemembers that family readiness is part of servicemember readiness.
- Require servicemember Family Care Plans to be reasonable, workable, and agreeable to the parties named as family care providers.
- Enforce measures of command accountability to make the entire concept of family readiness work well.
- Provide robust return, reunion and reintegration programs for servicemembers and families as the nature and length of deployments continue to change.
- Ensure military family support providers are trained to adapt support service location and hours so they are most accessible to the families they serve.
- Furnish training to parents, school personnel, and child care providers about ways to help children cope, especially with longer deployments and repeated deployments. Include ways that local military entities and units at installations can assist.
- Continuously train all entities involved with the Guard and Reserve to know rights, benefits, and entitlements from mobilization through demobilization.
- Provide more robust, preventive counseling services for servicemembers and families, especially children. Train servicemembers and families to know when to seek professional help related to their circumstances. Ensure that commanders encourage participation in these services without danger to the servicemember's career.
- Expand child care services to meet the changing needs of families and to facilitate their participation in training opportunities. These may include hourly care, respite care, care for children with special needs or mild illnesses, evening care, weekend care, or continuous care under certain circumstances.

PARTNERSHIPS

Effective partnerships, the third element in a military family support system, must be replicated across the board to implement an all-encompassing and responsive effort by military and community agencies and organizations to benefit military families. Joint accessibility and consistency of programs is needed and successful working programs should be emulated to help families during deployments. Partnerships between the military, installation agencies, and civilian entities must be enhanced to ensure the acceptance of powers of attorney as families access services. By working together, military public affairs officials and local media outlets can make families aware of available programs and services. The sharing of best practices and knowledge can strengthen the essential relationships between the command, parents, school officials, and community agencies necessary to meet the changing needs of military children. More partnerships between military and community religious leaders will further sustain servicemembers and families during all phases of deployments. Robust partnerships between the military and employers must also continue to facilitate understanding and support of Guard and Reserve members and families.

Key partnership recommendations

- Create more partnerships to enhance joint accessibility to and consistency of military family support programs and services, regardless of geographic location.
- Expand upon the model provided at the DoD headquarters level through the Joint Family Readiness Working Group to implement joint groups at state and installation levels.

- Enforce the requirement for One Source to provide feedback to military family support providers and commanders on trends in services requested by family members. Ensure installations and units provide updated information on available services to One Source on a regular basis.
- Form partnerships between the military, agencies on the installation, and civilian entities to ensure powers of attorney completed by military legal authorities are accepted.
- Develop working relationships between military public affairs and local media outlets to reach the widest audience possible about services available to families, common challenges families face and how to solve issues as they arise.
- Increase partnerships between command, parents, and school officials to best serve the changing needs of military children regardless of geographic location. Encourage more military-to-school and school-to-school partnerships to share expertise and best practices.
- Continue to cultivate partnerships with local community services to support child and youth needs especially during times of high OPTEMPO.
- Encourage expanded programs between the military and community religious leaders to support all servicemembers and families during all phases of mobilization and deployment.
- Establish additional support programs to facilitate understanding of and support between employers and Guard and Reserve members and families.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The broad effort to coordinate programs and services for military families must also include harnessing community goodwill and support on a global level. A continuous process of communicating between military and community leaders will enhance programs available through military family support providers. State and local government leaders must share information on supporting military families. Community support efforts must be funneled through a consolidated channel at installations to coordinate available offers of support and needs of families and avoid duplication of efforts. Community support efforts are the final piece in the comprehensive system of reaching out and helping families.

Key community support recommendations

- Recognize the importance of community support and encourage a continued commitment between military and community leaders to provide for the changing needs of military families.
- Encourage state and local government leaders to network and share programs that benefit military families.
- Appoint installation points of contact to coordinate and market available community support.

Military families understand and are prepared for particular uncertainties. To deal with uncertainties that go beyond their frame of reference, families need additional help. A comprehensive, responsive support system will ensure the success of military families as they continue to face the unique challenges involved with the high pace of military operations.

FOLLOW-ON ANALYSIS IS NEEDED

This report provides a snapshot of military family support from September 11, 2001 to March 31, 2004. While this broad view provides many insights into the needs of families and the responses of military and civilian agencies and organizations to meet those needs, the necessity for further research in at least two distinct areas becomes apparent. Further study is required to pinpoint the needs of children during times of high OPTEMPO, to determine the tools parents need to support their children, and to help children cope in the best ways possible. More research is also needed on the return of servicemembers from deployment and the reunion and reintegration of families. This includes the long-term effects of and the best ways to assist families during these phases, especially during and after repeated deployments.

INTRODUCTION

Since September 11, 2001 military operational tempo (OPTEMPO) across the Services has increased dramatically. This increase has culminated in numerous deployments and longer work hours preparing for and supporting the Global War on Terrorism. Just as the Services have gone to war, so too have military families and support services “gone to war.”

A New Social Compact outlines the current quality of life framework for the Department of Defense (DoD). It states, “The partnership between the American people and the noble warfighters and their families is built on a tacit agreement that families as well as the service member contribute immeasurably to the readiness and strength of the American military.”¹ Servicemembers and their families have seen their support by the American people increase. The outpouring of community spirit, good will, and resources have been very encouraging, but alone they do not meet the needs of every military family.

In its firm commitment to addressing the needs of families from the uniformed services, the National Military Family Association (NMFA) assembled a Family Support Analysis Team to assess the status of military family support today. The analysis encompassed several areas. The first of these areas included the identification of issues military families have faced since September 11, 2001. The support and programs available to military families were also studied and the best practices of these programs and services examined in relation to how they met the needs families faced. In addition, the analysis investigated gaps in military family support and the role of communities and community agencies in helping to fill those holes.



Photo courtesy of US Navy

**“We are not disgruntled.
This is our duty,
but it’s hard on the family.”**
—Interview with a military spouse

Since January 2004, the NMFA analysis team:

- Conducted an online survey generating input from over 2,500 respondents.
- Facilitated fourteen active and reserve component focus group discussions with military families across the United States and in Germany. Discussions were held with four Army, two Navy, two Air Force, two Marine Corps, two Coast Guard and two joint family groups.
- Personally interviewed or gained questionnaire feedback from more than one hundred Service headquarters level personnel and installation family support staff.
- Documented thousands of pages of anecdotal information from periodical resources.
- Cataloged information from Congressional testimony, military briefings, and websites.

The NMFA analysis captured the renegotiation of expectations and needs of military families and military family support providers in relation to the sustained higher military OPTEMPO. The combined research provided NMFA with a comprehensive picture of the issues military families have faced and are facing, the programs and services that have helped families solve challenges and what might be needed for the future.

In drawing conclusions regarding military family support, it is important to understand the demographic profile of the military on the whole, as well as the demographics of the specific military families involved in the research process. According to 2002 data, the number of military personnel totals 2,638,616. Of this number:

- 61.4% are active duty members and 38.6% are members of the Selected Reserve.
- 78.8% of active duty servicemembers and 58.4% of the Selected Reserve are 35 years old or younger.

¹ Assistant Secretary of Defense (Military Community and Family Policy), *A New Social Compact: A Reciprocal Partnership Between the Department of Defense, Service Members and Families*. July 2002, p. 6.

- More than half (51.7%) of both active duty and Selected Reserve servicemembers are married.
- Spouses under the age of 30 comprise 48.4% of active duty spouses while 44.5% of Selected Reserve spouses are under the age of 35.²

NMFA conducted its online Survey of Support for Military Families from February 1, 2004 through March 31, 2004. Demographic data from the combined 2,654 survey and focus group participants provides a fair representation of military families in relation to the demographic profile of military families on the whole. NMFA survey and focus group demographic results are included in graphs 1 through 9 on the following page.

NMFA survey and focus group research shows that many programs and services are in place to help military families. These programs and services, however, are inconsistent in meeting families' needs. Where support programs are working, they do so for several reasons:

- **A total commitment to communication is embraced as the key to coordinating family support programs.** Communication must be a continuous flow of accurate, timely information between all parties involved in military family support, from the highest levels of the military to the individual families. Marketing efforts should reach out to families wherever they are located.
- **The training of all individuals involved with military family support is a continuous step in ensuring programs are working and services are consistent and utilized.** The command institutionalizes the priority for family support and then instills that priority in all other links in the official chain of communication. Training military family support providers to tailor their programs to meet the needs of families occurs parallel to the training of commanders to personify this ideal. Servicemembers must also be trained to understand the importance

of family readiness. Training all of these entities to work together will provide military families the support they need when they need it the most.

- **Strong partnerships help military families face unique issues that arise due to deployments.** As the military Services look within themselves and cooperate to seek out collaborative opportunities in the community and with employers, the benefit to military families grows exponentially.
- **The outpouring of community spirit, goodwill, and resources fills critical gaps for family support needs during times of deployment.** Despite the best intentions of military family support services, it is not possible for them to anticipate every unique situation and meet all of the needs of every family. Communities fill in the gaps for family support needs.

All these factors must work in harmony for the benefit of military families. The effectiveness of this comprehensive coordination of efforts will dictate the ability of military families to navigate and overcome challenges as they continue to face new levels of uncertainty.

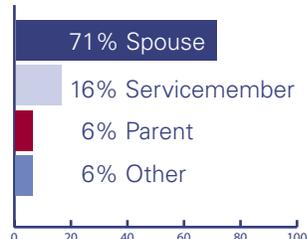
Several overarching themes and trends can consistently be seen throughout the NMFA analysis. These themes include:

- Expectations of all family members regarding support in general must mesh with the reality of support services and programs that can be provided. Families must maintain some sense of responsibility for their own readiness.
- Command involvement at all levels and in all facets of family readiness is key to ensuring the entire system is of maximum benefit to military families.
- As the military continues to transform to meet unexpected and uncertain missions, the components of military family support must also change to meet the evolving needs of families.

² Military Family Resource Center, *2002 Demographics Profile of the Military Community*. Arlington, VA, 2003, pp. 2, 20, 37, 68, 72, 87.

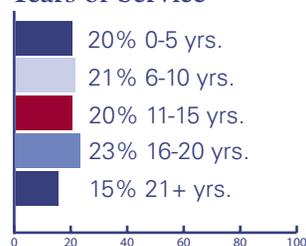
NMFA Survey Demographics

Affiliation to the Military



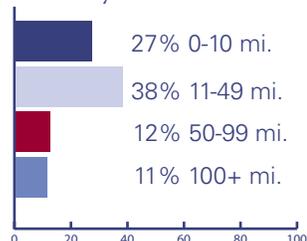
71% of the respondents were military spouses.

Years of Service



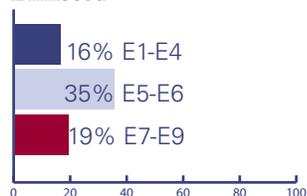
41% of respondents have 10 years or less in service.

Distance from Nearest Military Installation

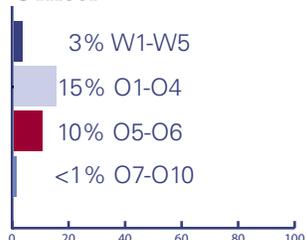


78% of respondents DO NOT live on an installation.

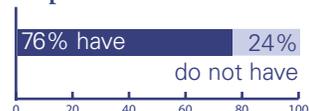
Servicemember's Rank: Enlisted



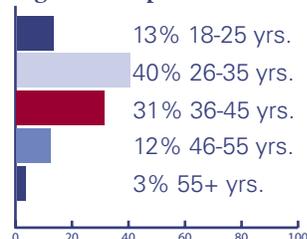
Servicemember's Rank: Officer



Dependent Children

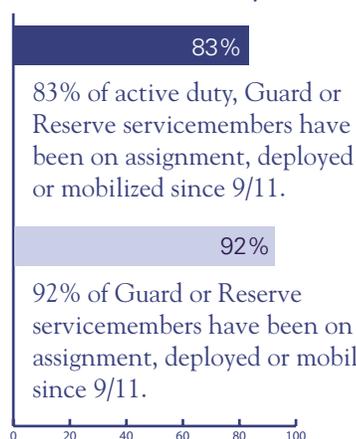


Age of Respondents

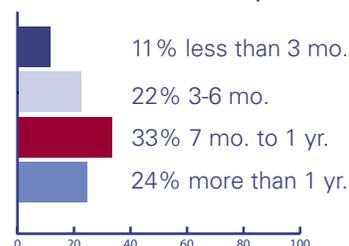


53% of respondents are 35 years of age or younger.

Has the servicemember been on assignment, deployed or mobilized at least once since 9/11? *



Total Time Servicemember has been on assignment, deployed or mobilized since 9/11 *



57% of respondents stated servicemember has been mobilized or deployed for more than 7 months.

*Source: Combined demographics from the NMFA online Family Support Survey only.

Source: Combined demographics from the NMFA online Family Support Survey and Focus Groups conducted Feb-Mar 2004.



COMMUNICATION

In ensuring military families can meet challenges during servicemembers' frequent and lengthy deployments, an unwavering commitment to communication is essential.

This commitment goes beyond simply facilitating communication between the servicemember and family or sharing information between the command and families. It also includes outreach to families and the marketing of available support services. For the servicemembers down range, being able to stay in touch with family and friends at home can make or break their day. So too the expectations about the form and frequency of communications, the interaction between all parties, and the level of outreach from the command and family support providers can make or break the experience for the military family on the home front.

Critical elements of essential communication include:

- Establishing realistic expectations of the type and frequency of communication between the deployed servicemember and the family.
- Establishing communications expectations between military families and military family support providers.
- Developing and maintaining an open flow of information between all parties involved in military family support.
- Shifting marketing efforts to reach military families where they are located and through the information avenues families are most inclined to use.

Establishing realistic communication expectations

Establishing realistic expectations regarding communication can be crucial for military families, especially during a mobilization and/or deployment.

In a time of high OPTEMPO, the entire military family support system benefits when families know how, why and with what frequency the command, command representative (rear party), unit volunteer networks (Army Family Readiness Groups, the Marine Corps Key Volunteer Network, the Air Force Key Spouse Program and Coast Guard and Navy Ombudsman programs) and, especially, their servicemembers will communicate.

3 out of 4 families would have difficulty coping with a deployment that was overseas for an undetermined length of time.

—US Army Community and Family Support Center, *Survey of Army Families IV*, spring 2001.

While all of the Service unit volunteers are appointed by the command and are required to be sources of official information and referrals, most go beyond their duties as outlined by policy. These “above and beyond” efforts sometimes take shape in the way unit volunteers maintain contact with families aside from passing along official information or serving as a source of support for family members experiencing a casualty situation. Families, however, need to understand the basic purpose of unit volunteers is to relay information from the command. It is equally important for families to know what to expect about how, why, and how often unit volunteers will communicate with them. To gain a realistic picture of the total communication process, both unit volunteers and families must understand the roles of all involved entities in ensuring effective communication.

Not only do families need to know from whom they will be hearing and under what circumstances, they also need to know where they can turn first for answers in the official chain of communication. The command, rear party and unit volunteer networks must operate under a certain

Unit Volunteer Networks—
Army Family Readiness Groups
the Marine Corps Key Volunteer Network
the Air Force Key Spouse Program
and the Coast Guard and Navy Ombudsman Programs

open door policy and be prepared when family members seek information or assistance. Just as it is essential for families to establish realistic perceptions about communications, it is equally important for these official links in the communication chain to expect that families will have questions and concerns and be prepared to address issues as they arise.

For Guard and Reserve families, or active duty family members who are new to the military or unfamiliar with deployments, establishing realistic expectations regarding communication can be especially challenging. Experienced military families know there is often a difference between how communications should work and how they actually do work during military operations. Because they are only starting their overwhelming education process on the military lifestyle, family members new to the military have not yet gained the perspective that provides insight about this difference. In general, these families have to work even harder to know what they do not know before gaining a frame of reference regarding communications.

A mismatch of expectations and reality regarding communications between servicemembers and families was the cause of much unease during deployments for Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). Some military spouses accustomed to instant communication with their deployed servicemembers through email, cell phones and instant messaging found the reality of unpredictable contact caused much heart-wrenching concern.

Even as communication capabilities improved overseas, many families still held unrealistic expectations regarding communication with the servicemember. One spouse, for example, noted that after she began hearing from her servicemember every few days she became sick with worry and started wondering about the casualty notification process whenever lines of communication were down. Teaching families to expect the unexpected regarding communication with the

servicemember can help reduce or eliminate high levels of anxiety while the servicemember is away.

Similarly, family members often experience greater levels of anxiety because of the instant access to information through the 24-hour-a-day media coverage of military missions. Seeing an embedded reporter talk to someone from the servicemember's unit half a world away in real time creates expectations among family

members that communication from the command, rear party or unit volunteer network will also be instantaneous. Military family members in the NMFA survey and focus groups expressed a

high level of frustration about hearing particular information on the location, length of mobilization or deployment of a specific unit, ship, or group through media reports and then having to wait hours, sometimes longer than a day, to hear the same information through the official chain of communication. Commanders, family support providers, and unit volunteers can greatly reduce levels of stress and help families achieve a framework for normalcy if, from the beginning, they clarify expectations by explaining that the media has a story to sell, that families can and should inquire about the information being presented in the media, and that the command will communicate as quickly and accurately as possible.

One unanticipated issue regarding communication expectations involved extended family members of servicemembers. Parents, siblings, and others close to servicemembers often do not know where they can get answers and information about the servicemember.

Once pointed toward the command or installation, they expect to access the answers they seek. During Operation Iraqi Freedom, commands, rear parties, and unit volunteer networks did not necessarily expect to include other family members in communications normally available to spouses. However, extended family member inquiries at times overwhelmed the chain of official communication. As Service leadership implemented ad hoc systems to accommodate communication with

“Media parked themselves
outside of family homes and
waited for them to come out to
say ‘Did you hear...?’”

—Interview with a military spouse

“Email is a double edged sword,
when it works it is great
but when it doesn't work it
causes stress.”

—Interview with a military spouse

extended family members, they sometimes greatly taxed unit volunteer networks.

Recognizing the expectation among some extended family members that they should be included in unit communications, the 1st Marine Division went beyond the simple posting of websites and unit toll free numbers by implementing an Extended Family Member Program. As Marines returned to Iraq in early 2004, they received information cards to send to as many extended family members as they wished with the website address for their unit, unit hotline telephone numbers and contact information for the rear party. This response to the expectation that extended family members will want information about the servicemember is an example of a broad-based solution to an unanticipated communication expectation issue. It also recognizes that, ultimately, it is the servicemember's responsibility to ensure that the family members he or she wants to be included in unit communications are provided with the information to do so.

Communication between all levels

Communication connections between all levels of family support providers, servicemembers, and family members must be clear and open. Just as DoD must communicate policy information, so must families be able to communicate whether policies and programs work and how they can work better. Ensuring communication channels between all levels are open and operational will help families successfully navigate challenges.

A clear example of communication working between all levels to benefit families can be seen in the annual Army Family Action Plan (AFAP). AFAP has been instrumental in pinpointing and monitoring the issues of well-being for the Army community for more than twenty years. It institutionalizes a complete circle of information between active duty and reserve component servicemembers, families, retirees, Army civilian employees, and Army leadership. This information, in part, is

used to ensure quality of life programs and policies are in place and meeting the needs of servicemembers and families. The Army Family Action Plan allows for issues to be brought up annually at the local installation level and raised to the appropriate level for resolution. Since the program started in 1983 no less than 82 changes have been made to legislation, 130 revisions made to policy and regulations, and 140 programs or services im-

proved, partially as a result of the Army Family Action Plan.³

The November 2003 Army-wide AFAP Conference followed the format of previous conferences by tasking its work groups with sifting through issues raised from the various Army commands, identifying the most important, and making recommen-

dations for change. The conference departed from its traditional format, however, when the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army asked delegates to provide input on specific deployment-related issues. Delegates raised concerns that rear detachment personnel were not family-friendly, were apathetic, or did not know of available services and programs. They reported that units lacked accurate redeployment schedules and that family member participation in pre-deployment and preparedness processes was inadequate. Some Soldiers who made permanent change of station moves deployed before their families were settled. Guard and Reserve delegates reported that many reserve component members experienced pay problems upon activation. By adding the inquiry regarding deployment challenges, the institutional structure of AFAP adapted to facilitate communication of the needs of Army families to Army leadership in a timely manner. With a vehicle such as AFAP in place to communicate between all levels, the Army has the mechanism to adjust policies and programs to meet the changing needs of families.

Broad-based communication connections are especially critical to the support of families of servicemembers who deploy individually as augmentees to

“We find ourselves in the AFAP 20th year, supporting an Army at war. At no time in my recent memory has a program like AFAP been more important to the overall success of our Army.”

—General George W. Casey, Vice Chief of Staff, USA, *The 2003 AFAP Conference Report*

³ *The 2003 Army Family Action Plan (AFAP) Conference Report.*

other units or Services, with a headquarters staff, or in another support function. Service policies may outline the complicated process in determining the commanding authority over the servicemember attached to a different unit or Service, but do not always make clear who is responsible for communicating with families. This process is complicated even at the highest levels; focus group discussions reveal that unit communication with families of unit augmentees often falls apart or does not exist. Command and larger unit headquarters-level families, although sometimes involved in advising unit volunteer networks, are not necessarily included in the formal communication structure. These families are left floundering for information, including predeployment and return and reunion information, and end up struggling to seek out links of official communications for themselves. Ensuring communication processes are in place at all levels, with all parties understanding their responsibilities, will go a long way in alleviating challenges these particular military families face during deployments.

Communication as outreach

The easy and open exchange of information between all levels works in conjunction with successful practices to reach out to families and include them in available support services. Of the NMFA survey respondents who indicated they used family support services, 72% responded favorably to their experiences. Despite the availability and effectiveness of these programs to families who use them, too many programs are not used to the degree they should be because not enough families know about them or recognize their value. Consequently, military family support providers must expand their efforts to direct awareness about available support services to where military families actually reside and where they turn to get their information.

“The families who tend to be involved, come to meetings, KNOW what is going on, what is out there. It is really difficult to get to the families who don’t want to be involved or don’t know how to be involved.”

—Interview with a military spouse

One disconnect in matching military families’ needs with successful programs is that military family support providers’ outreach efforts are reaching a very limited audience. Among the NMFA survey respondents and focus group participants, 78% do not live on a military installation. Furthermore, 26% live 50 miles or more from any military installation. Support providers at many installations have achieved incredible marketing success for families living there. By advertising on installation TV channels, providing military support program information for installation publications, direct mailing to housing areas, and posting information in locations such as commissaries, exchanges and child development centers, support providers capture the attention of military families who frequent those venues. The issue, however, lies in making the connection with the majority of families who do not use or have regular access to these resources.

One successful way this obstacle has been overcome is through the use of web technology. Because so many active duty families do not live on an installation—and many Guard and Reserve families live even farther from any installation or unit support networks—web technology is essential at the Service, installation, and unit levels, not only to communicate important information to families, but also to give families an idea of the support programs and services available to them and, possibly, contact information for specific services in their area.

An illustration of web technology achieving success in raising awareness of available support services and providing support to families at the Service level can be seen in the Navy “Quality of Life Service Delivery System.” The LIFELines Services Network captures the capability of internet technologies to support sailors, Marines and their

families especially through deployment. Regardless of families' proximity to an installation, Navy LIFELines provides a portal through which families can find an assortment of information on the military lifestyle. Deployment-specific information helps families know how to stay informed through their official chain of command, where to go for assistance with a multitude of issues including legal and financial matters and understanding the emotional cycles of deployment. Other installation and unit level websites are of great benefit to military families. Because web resources are not limited to families living inside the installation fence, they can increase Service-wide outreach to families, helping them face challenges revolving around the deployment of the servicemember.



Photo courtesy of US Army

Because outreach involves both making families aware of available services and enticing them to participate in those programs, the most successful program managers have sought creative ways of extending support to military families and letting them know of available services. The Combat Care program is one such initiative, implemented throughout United States Air Force Europe (USAFE). The program is a combined community effort that helps all family members, including children, cope with deployments, and the special stresses they bring. One part of the program, Combat Care Dinners, is an especially effective means of outreach. The dinners provide a monthly opportunity for the Family

Service Center to show appreciation for families of deployed servicemembers, offer them a relaxing outlet to reduce stress, as well as an informal chance to share information. Invited families savor a family-friendly meal served by Family Service Center staff who volunteer their time at the event. At the March 2004 Combat Care Dinner at Ramstein Air Force Base, 92 families enjoyed dinner while having the opportunity to visit with the Readiness Non-Commissioned Officer, legal office staff, and a chaplain, who spent the evening circulating throughout the room. These key family readiness servicemembers talked with families about the Combat Care program, powers of attorney, taxes, and other family issues.

This program is a model of outreach to all military families to make them aware of the services and support available to them.

Military family support providers need to continue to think outside the box and reach outside the installation gate to support families. While support providers often have programs in place to effectively help military families, new ways to deliver the message that these programs are available for all families are essential to actually helping them. One tool that is achieving this delivery is the use of web technologies to reach all families. Other outreach efforts also need to be developed to let military families know of available services and pull families into the military family support system to help in the challenges they face related to deployments.

Because web resources are not limited to families living inside the installation fence, they can increase Service-wide outreach to families.

KEY COMMUNICATION RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish communication expectations prior to deployments and ensure regular communication flows between the command and families.
- Ensure command responsibility for including geographically dispersed families and families of augmented servicemembers in the unit communication process.
- Implement a Service-wide, institutional means of raising family readiness and deployment issues from the ground level up through the headquarters level and facilitate Service solutions to problems at various levels.
- Provide a far-reaching system for including extended family members in unit communications.
- Create and maintain Service, installation and unit websites that are user-friendly and contain timely and accurate information needed by families.
- Recognize the importance of and facilitate unit volunteer efforts to reach out to family members. Assign points of contact for posting unit volunteer information on installation and/or unit websites instead of spending additional resources for off-line websites.
- Develop a DoD-wide comprehensive marketing outreach plan to make all military families aware of available support services regardless of their Service affiliation or proximity to an installation.
- Continue efforts to educate families about TRICARE benefits and rules.
- Ensure continuity and accessibility of medical care, especially for Guard and Reserve families.

SELECTED ISSUE DISCUSSION: TRICARE CHALLENGES

With the many challenges brought on by deployments and high operational tempo following September 11, 2001, military families needed assurance that they could access their military health care benefit provided through TRICARE when needed. Families faced three major issues in dealing with TRICARE:

- Understanding the benefit, changes in the benefit and how to access care.
- Ensuring continuity of care, especially for families of mobilized Guard and Reserve members.
- Accessing care in a timely manner, whether from providers in military treatment facilities (MTFs) or from civilian providers willing to accept TRICARE patients.

Understanding the benefit and the rules inherent in the military medical system were most difficult for families of Guard and Reserve members called to active duty. The varieties of Guard or Reserve

orders, the complexities of the TRICARE system, and the geographic dispersion of a unit's members and families combined to make communication about the benefit and access to assistance when a problem emerged very difficult. TRICARE contractors and representatives of the TRICARE region Lead Agents routinely conducted TRICARE briefings for members of units about to mobilize; unfortunately, in most cases, family members—the people who actually had to deal with the system once the servicemember deployed—were not in attendance.

Almost immediately after mobilizations began in late 2001, DoD eased the transition of Guard and Reserve families into TRICARE by creating a demonstration program to help patients maintain the continuity of care and continue seeing the family's civilian doctor at minimal cost under TRICARE Standard. The DoD TRICARE Management Activity, working with the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs,

developed an extensive communication plan to inform Guard and Reserve servicemembers and families of the demonstration and their TRICARE options. Because Guard and Reserve families needed more information tailored for their needs, Congress included a provision in the FY 2004 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) mandating the appointment of reserve component Beneficiary Counseling and Assistance Coordinators to serve as Guard and Reserve contacts in regional lead agent offices. These positions, when filled, will help coordinate the flow of TRICARE information to Guard and Reserve members and their families and resolve claims and other concerns.

As Guard and Reserve members, their families, and the personnel who supported their medical needs became more familiar with issues that emerged in the transition from civilian employer-sponsored insurance to TRICARE, the transition for many families into TRICARE improved. Families having the most problems seemed to be those dealing with more complicated medical issues, such as having a family member with special needs or in the middle of treatment for a chronic condition. Many of the problems facing Guard and Reserve beneficiaries were related to their providers' reluctance to accept TRICARE patients because of unfamiliarity with TRICARE or belief that TRICARE rates were too low. Stories from Guard and Reserve families about their local providers' reluctance to participate in TRICARE were similar to those told by Coast Guard and other active duty families and military retirees located in areas with no military medical facilities. In the FY 2004 NDAA, Congress included provisions aimed at gathering information about providers' willingness to accept TRICARE patients and providing additional support to TRICARE Standard beneficiaries. Congressional interest in ensuring the

medical readiness of Guard and Reserve members and in easing continuity of care for their families also contributed to the inclusion of several demonstration provisions in the NDAA designed to extend servicemembers' and families' eligibility for TRICARE benefits. While most Congressional efforts to support Guard and Reserve health care have focused on expanding eligibility to the TRICARE benefit, other proposals currently before Congress would ease continuity of care by providing the means for family members to remain with the servicemember's employer-sponsored insurance plan after the servicemember's activation.

Beneficiaries served by military hospitals experienced different types of access issues than those affecting Coast Guard, National Guard and Reserve families who live away from military installations. At several installations, active duty families reported that the deployment of military medical personnel, demands on medical staffs to support the mobilization and de-mobilization of Guard and Reserve members, and the need to care for wounded servicemembers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan caused their MTFs to disregard the promised access standards for beneficiaries enrolled in TRICARE Prime. In many cases, MTFs appealed to the "patriotism" of active duty families, survivors, retirees and their families by telling them appointments were not currently available and asking them to wait, rather than sending them to the TRICARE civilian networks for care. In a few well-publicized incidents, active duty servicemembers were also told care was not available and they would have to wait. As the military Services continue to deploy medical personnel to support overseas missions and take on greater missions at home, the military health system must be properly resourced and organized to maintain beneficiary access to care. ■

TRAINING

The importance of helping family members face challenges related to deployment must be embraced at all levels. Standardized and continuous training will reinforce the message that the system of support must be a priority for all parties. If this is not the case, families will not get the support they need and will have a greater struggle facing deployment-related challenges.

Critical elements of training include:

- Training the command to embrace military family support as a priority and ensure all in the chain of command are accountable for that support.
- Training military family support providers to tailor their programs and services to meet the needs of families.
- Training all involved parties to support the specific needs of military children.
- Training all involved parties to help Guard and Reserve families face their unique challenges.



Photo courtesy of Fort Lee Public Affairs

Command training

There are several ways training can immediately benefit the people who need it the most. For families to be informed and able to thrive during times of high OPTEMPO, the command must first be aware of available support programs and services. Therefore, the first step is to train the command to participate at all levels of family support. This comprehensive training must provide the command with the tools to wrap its arms around the family support system. The command's responsibility in establishing this priority also lies in the oversight of instruction for the rear party. Supervising and participating in the formal volunteer training process also falls under the responsibility of the command because volunteers

are the front line of family support. All links in the chain between the command and families should also be trained to work together as a team to build a seamless support system for families. This solid system will help ensure that families do not flounder in overcoming challenges or fall through unexpected cracks. When the command makes family readiness a priority, it also establishes expectations and boundaries for volunteers that can help prevent burnout and rapid turnover.

The Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard have policies in place that outline how the unit team is required to communicate with and support families. The implementation of these policies, however, is often much different from the policy intent. Unit rear parties experiencing constant turnover create inconsistencies. The lack of required coordinated training of all parties involved with unit family support often results in indifference, misinformation, or chaos. Consistent team-oriented training would allow rear parties to know issues families might face during deployments, the resources available within

the Service and the programs available in the community to help families. Unit volunteer networks in the Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard are required to receive formal training prior to taking on their role in the official chain of communication. The Army provides a Family Readiness Group Guide to acquaint family volunteers, servicemembers, and families with deployment-related situations and available resources. Even when the training is required, commands must still ensure volunteers obtain training in a timely manner. The importance of this training lies in unit volunteers' knowledge of how the communication process works, knowing where to turn for answers in helping families, and understanding the parameters of the volunteer position they are holding.

“No one is responsible for taking care of me and my family, but it would be nice to know that someone cared.”

—Interview with a military spouse

This process reinforces the principle that command training is a first step in establishing family readiness as a priority in military readiness. Just as the command works with other support elements to make family readiness a priority, it is only natural that the command also communicates to the servicemember that family readiness is important. Because of the ongoing nature of the Global War on Terrorism, readiness must be constantly maintained. As the servicemember understands the crucial need for his or her family to be prepared and makes sure the family is in an ongoing state of preparedness, the servicemember also contributes to his or her own readiness requirements. The command must make time to ensure each servicemember understands the importance of family readiness, thus establishing the connection that the family knows how to use available support services to meet challenges faced in the servicemember's absence.

There is an undeniable trickle down effect of training the command to make family readiness a priority. By embodying that ideal and through oversight of the command representative and volunteer network, the command will work with this team to provide support in the best possible way. By encouraging and setting the example for servicemembers to make family support a priority, all members of the family support team will be able to help families face issues and solve problems as military operations continue at a high pace.

The importance of the command not only being responsible, but also accountable, for a working family readiness system can be seen in the handling of Family Care Plans. Under DoD policy, Family Care Plans are required of all servicemembers who are single parents, dual military couples with dependents, or sole caregivers of those with disabilities. The plans provide instruction for care in the event of short and long term absences of the servicemember. This policy also clearly states

that commanders or supervisors are accountable for making sure these plans are in place. Some commanders failed to meet this objective during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Other commanders met the objective of having 100% Family Care Plans in place for those who needed them, but the plans failed as they were executed. Rear parties and servicemembers were left scrambling to make appropriate arrangements to take care of family members. This experience highlights the need for the command to embrace family support as a priority and be accountable for ensuring the system works to the utmost advantage of servicemembers and families.

Training support providers

The training of military family support providers to tailor their programs and services to meet the changing needs of families as OPTEMPO remains high is also necessary. Since the Persian Gulf War, most Services recognized the need for on-going programs to prepare the entire military family for the military experience. "Military 101" programs specific to almost every Service have been implemented to provide spouses with

a foundation of information as they adapt to their circumstances. The Navy Compass program, Army Family Team Building, the Air Force Heart Link program, and the Marine Corps LINKS program are all designed to introduce spouses to the military lifestyle. These voluntary participation programs have successfully met the need to educate spouses, build awareness, explain deployments, develop self-reliance, and help families prepare for deployments. Originally started by family members, these programs have been recognized as necessities by military family support providers

to help families meet their own needs. As a result, management of these programs is provided by military family support providers and is indicative of the success being achieved in training providers to ensure they meet the needs of families.

"A single parent or dual-military family has to give serious thought to their Family Care plan. There has got to be an agreement between the caregiver and the children involved. If either party feels uncomfortable with the situation, it could be a very bad situation," said SGM

Charles Steele.

—Denver Baeulieu-Hains, "Family care plans essential for dual-military couples, single parents," *Herald Union*, 284th BSB, Friedberg, Giessen, February 4, 2003, p.14.

Innovative responses to new challenges must be promulgated across the Services as servicemembers return and families are reunited. As servicemembers return from combat-oriented deployments, or after a series of multiple deployments, their transitional needs, and those of their families, are not necessarily the same as they face following traditional or non-combat deployments. In the NMFA analysis survey, 83% of respondents indicated their servicemember had deployed since September 11, 2001. Many expressed their concern over back-to-back deployments, little family time between deployments and uncharacteristically high amounts of time deployed within a two-year time period. Even the official DoD press service highlighted the readjustment concerns of a servicemember and his wife. This couple endured two long deployments that seemed to strengthen their marriage, but Operation Iraqi Freedom put a strain on their family that found them still adjusting months after the servicemember returned.⁴ As the return and reunion process continues to unfold, military family support providers need to be sensitive to those returning from combat and multiple deployments and be trained to meet these differing needs in the short and long term. It is clear that the nature of OPTEMPO has changed and created different needs for servicemembers and families; military family support providers need to be taught to recognize these needs and address them accordingly.

The importance of training military family support providers to tailor their programs and services to meet the needs of families can be seen in issues raised about access to family support. While it is convenient for military family support providers to work traditional hours and be in a central location, this does not always meet the needs of families, especially during deployment. During Operation Iraqi Freedom, the focus of many military family support providers seemed to be on letting families know programs were “safe” and that they would remain intact during deployments. Focus group

discussions among family members, however, revealed that the location and hours of military family support centers are more critical factors in determining whether family members will use programs and services. Because two thirds of families assigned to MacDill Air Force Base, Florida, live 40 miles away in Brandon, a MacDill Family Resource Center is located there.⁵ Families of the active duty and Guard and Reserve members living off the installation can easily access resources as they are needed.

One servicemember and his wife endured two long deployments that seemed to strengthen their marriage, but Operation Iraqi Freedom put a strain on their family that found them still adjusting months after the servicemember returned.

The Washington National Guard Family Program Center alters its hours to accommodate families who cannot necessarily take advantage of services offered during traditional hours. The Washington National Guard, like many other states, has opened Family Assistance Centers in armories throughout the state and divided the state into regions. A Family Assistance Center is located

in each region, therefore bringing services closer to the families who need them. Similarly, Army Community Service (ACS) at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, has instituted a standing program of having one main ACS office on the installation and five satellite offices throughout major command units and in one of the most remote family housing areas. These efforts bring the support services closer to the servicemembers and families so they can be more easily accessed. Military family support providers must be trained to coordinate programs and services with the needs of families and their geographic locations.

Training to support military children

Standardized and continuous training can make an immediate difference for military families throughout deployment in two particular areas. One of these areas is with military children. Of the NMFA survey respondents and focus group participants, 76% have children. According to the Educational Opportunities Directorate within the Office of the Secretary of Defense, military families include 1.2 million school-aged children. Just as the servicemember carries out his or her duties, children also

⁴ Donna Miles, “Fort Campbell Families Adjusting to Newfound Togetherness,” *American Forces Press Service*, March 25, 2004.

⁵ Shannon Colavecchio-Van Sickler, “Helping Military Families,” *St. Petersburg (FL) Times*, February 24, 2003, sec. 1, p.3.

serve. School is the child's job. Comprehensive training of all persons involved in military children's lives needs to be available in areas not only near military installations but especially throughout civilian communities where Guard and Reserve families live.

With the increase in OPTEMPO, the needs of military children at all developmental stages tend to change during deployments. Parents, educators, care givers, and mentors need to be trained to recognize and address children's unique deployment-related needs.

In training all parties to recognize what children need to be able to cope, it is also critical that care givers understand normal behavior as well as how and when to pursue professional help. All who are part of children's lives need also to be trained not to assume that, if children are busy or distracted, their special needs and thoughts of the absent servicemember go away. Resounding trends seen in survey and focus group responses show parents reporting high levels of stress in their children, especially in relation to Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Parents also indicated a need for resources to guide them in helping their children cope with what they are experiencing and feeling. This was especially needed by parents of teenagers, who stated programs and activities are lacking even to distract the teens, let alone help them deal with their emotions.

Training to support the needs of military children should be ongoing and not just provided as a band-aid during wartime situations. As OPTEMPO remains high and families endure continuous cycles of mobilization, predeployment, deployment, and reintegration, the needs of children also continue to follow these cycles. Stand Hand in Hand is a model for programs to help military families, particularly children, during the cycles of deployment. The Train the Trainer program of Stand Hand in Hand serves families in the Navy Region Northwest and was created by family members of the



Photo courtesy of DoD

USS Carl Vinson. It focuses on the unique lifestyle of military families and helps provide the tools to support children, especially during deployments.

This training program presented in Bremerton, Washington, is sponsored by the Fleet and Family Support Center and is conducted by a children's counselor, servicemember, and military family support staff. The presenters discuss the roles of educators, parents and children in helping children navigate the military lifestyle. This training helps all parties understand the military culture, the operational and emotional cycles of deployment and their impact on children, and how support groups for children can be of benefit.

The Department of Defense Dependents Schools (DoDDS) Europe Action Plan For Deployment Interventions also illustrates the vital nature and success of a proactive training approach in making a difference in the lives of military children. The plan strives to pull together military family support services and community resources for the benefit of students and parents and looks to incorporate communication between students and deployed servicemembers through the schools. It encourages school personnel to become part of the support system for families of deployed servicemembers and recognizes the importance of training school officials to identify deployment-related needs in children and help them deal with those needs. The plan spells out components of integrating military family support services and school programs, developing and implementing crisis intervention, helping personnel be sensitive to parents and students who are dealing with a deployment of the servicemember, and seeking out other ways to support communities of deployed servicemembers. Personnel roles are defined in the plan to provide further guidance and perspective for working as individuals and as a team to be of the greatest benefit to students and parents.

Training to support Guard and Reserve families

Another area in which training can make an immediate difference for military families is in helping Guard and Reserve members and families understand their rights, benefits, and entitlements. The continuous training of all entities involved with the Guard and Reserve—military family support providers, the command, rear party, volunteer networks, servicemembers and their families—can allow for a proactive approach to challenges families experience from mobilization through demobilization.

For many of these families, several stumbling blocks occur especially when the servicemember is rapidly mobilized and subsequently deployed for extended periods of time.

Legal, financial, employment and health care issues are areas of training needed to ensure as smooth a transition as possible to the military lifestyle for servicemembers and their families. A clear understanding of how Guard and Reserve members will receive pay, when the servicemember is eligible for special pays, what those special pays mean and how pay changes through mobilization, deployment and demobilization can allow all parties to anticipate and resolve problems families may face. The same runs true in training all involved to understand the protections included in the Servicemembers' Civil Relief Act and the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Relief Act. In conjunction with training families to understand these rights, benefits and entitlements, it is just as important to train them to know how to access information and help when issues arise.

The area of overwhelming need for training with the Guard and Reserve is in helping families make the transition to TRICARE. The transition process, eligibility requirements, enrollment procedures, benefits, options for care, and disenrollment can be daunting. The education of all entities

involved with helping families can aid in making a more manageable, less confusing, and smoother hand off into and out of the military health care system. One success story of military family support providers adapting their services to meet the needs of families is that of the 310th Air Wing, an Air Force Reserve unit. As mobilizations and deployments began out of the Youngstown, Ohio, Air Reserve Base, the 310th family support providers saw a need to help families deal with health care transition issues. In order to enroll families in TRICARE, reenroll families when they changed regions, and answer questions families had about TRICARE, military family support providers initiated and completed the TRICARE training necessary to become Health Benefits Advisors, a position usually limited to Military Treatment Facility staff. As Health Benefits Advisors, the military

Often the change from a civilian way of life to a military way of life catches Guard and Reserve families operating under the natural idea that the servicemember is active duty but the family is still Guard or Reserve.

family support staff could help Air Force Reserve families understand their benefits, distribute Primary Care Manager lists, and work with the regional TRICARE office to confirm policy and procedures regarding specific problems. These proactive efforts saved reservists and families from having to drive one or two hours to a TRICARE office to learn about benefits and

solve problems. By taking on the responsibility to become the “unofficial” experts and the link to the official experts on TRICARE for mobilized reservists and families, this particular military family support staff exemplified the true nature of adapting services to meet family needs.

Often the change from a civilian way of life to a military way of life catches Guard and Reserve families operating under the natural idea that the servicemember is active duty but the family is still Guard or Reserve. By training all individuals involved regarding the rights, benefits and entitlements, families can make the connection that, for a time, their lives will be different and they can be better prepared to handle the challenges inherent with that different lifestyle.

KEY TRAINING RECOMMENDATIONS

- Require formalized training of unit commanders, rear party personnel and unit volunteers together so all receive the same core information, have similar expectations, and understand the role of each party.
- Train servicemembers that family readiness is part of servicemember readiness.
- Require servicemember Family Care Plans to be reasonable, workable and agreeable to the parties named as family care providers.
- Enforce measures of command accountability to make the entire concept of family readiness work well.
- Provide robust return, reunion and reintegration programs for servicemembers and families as the nature and length of deployments continue to change.
- Ensure military family support providers are trained to adapt support service locations and hours so they are most accessible to the families they serve.
- Furnish training to parents, school personnel, and child care providers about how to help children cope, especially with longer deployments and repeated deployments. Include ways that local military entities at installations and within units can assist.
- Continuously train all entities involved with the Guard and Reserve to know rights, benefits, and entitlements throughout the process of mobilization to demobilization.
- Provide more robust, preventive counseling services for servicemembers and families, especially children. Train servicemembers and families to know when to seek professional help related to their circumstances. Ensure that commanders encourage participation in these services without danger to the servicemember's career.
- Expand child care services to meet the changing needs of families and to facilitate their participation in training opportunities. These may include hourly care, respite care, care for children with special needs or mild illnesses, evening care, weekend care, or continuous care under certain circumstances.

SELECTED ISSUE DISCUSSION: MENTAL HEALTH

As servicemembers and families experience numerous, lengthy, and dangerous deployments, the need for confidential, preventive mental health services has dramatically increased. To deal with the increased stress and uncertainty related to deployments, some families seek out these services for emotional support, an outlet to vent, and a validation that their feelings are normal. Mental health services needed throughout the different phases of deployment include individual counseling for servicemembers, spouses, children, and sometimes for the family as a whole.

As the number and frequency of deployments have increased, so has the need for mental health services for servicemembers and families. A few short months after Marines began leaving Camp Pendleton, California, for Operation Iraqi Freedom in early 2003, the Naval Hospital's Mental Health Department noted an increase of 100 appointments per month.⁶ According to the commander of the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany, of the 12,000 soldiers from the war on terror (mostly from Iraq) treated there, between 8 and 10 % had psychiatric or behavioral health issues.⁷ In addition, 5% of the Army's 3rd Infantry Division based out of Fort Stewart, Georgia, sought counseling for combat stress or redeployment issues.⁸ In early 2003, the Marine Corps stated it anticipated 15% of its personnel would have readjustment problems and that it was preparing to coordinate with community resources to meet those needs.⁹ According to a family readiness coordinator at an

Army installation heavily impacted by deployments in the past several years, more Soldiers and families than ever before were turning to free and confidential counseling provided by the military to deal with readjustment issues.

Great strides can be made to ensure servicemembers and families receive the help they need wherever they are. While TRICARE provides robust benefits to a servicemember or family member diagnosed with a mental illness, preventive care is nonexistent and information to beneficiaries on how to access mental health services is sorely lacking. Because of these gaps families are steered toward other resources such as Service employee assistance-type programs, chaplains, and school counseling groups if they are available. Steps must also be taken to help families understand what emotions are normal and what means of coping are available throughout cycles of deployment. Families need to know what behavior of the returned servicemember or the child who misses the deployed servicemember is not normal, when to seek professional help, and where that confidential help can be found.

The need for mental health services will continue to rise as cycles of deployment remain almost constant. The military Services must balance the demand for mental health personnel in theater and at home to help servicemembers and families deal with unique emotional challenges and stresses related to the nature and duration of continued deployments. ■

⁶ Brian La May, *Marine Corps News*, May 8, 2003.

⁷ *United Press International*, "10% At Hospital Had Mental Health Problems," February 19, 2004.

⁸ Steven Lee Myers, "Returning From Iraq War Not So Simple for Soldiers," *New York Times*, September 13, 2003.

⁹ Marine Corps Update, Joint DoD Family Readiness Working Group meeting, April 29, 2003.

SELECTED ISSUE DISCUSSION: CHILD CARE

Child care is an essential component of family readiness, especially in the training environment necessitated by high OPTEMPO and deployments. Of the NMFA survey and focus group participants, 76% had dependent children. Among Guard and Reserve respondents, 72.4% had children. More than 6% of servicemembers are single parents; the number of spouses employed outside the home remains more than 60%.¹⁰

At the end of 2002, the military Services were providing child care through 900 Child Development Centers at 300 locations and in more than 9,000 family child care homes. These resources met a combined 65% of child care needs of active duty servicemembers, not including mobilized Guard and Reserve members.¹¹ Even when OPTEMPO is not high, finding child care can be a cause of stress for military families. It becomes even more critical as servicemembers continue to deploy and work longer hours at their duty station. As one parent seeks to balance all of the responsibilities at home when the servicemember is unavailable, the need for more hourly child care becomes imperative. Increases in the need for hourly child care are paralleled by increased need for child care for children with special needs and respite child care when a parent simply needs a break. Because of the importance of family member participation in activities promoting and ensuring family readiness, child care must be available for these activities.

Certain military families experience unique child care circumstances. Often Guard and Reserve families do not live near enough to installations to take advantage of Child Development Centers and family child care homes. Military families who live on or near an installation of a different Service may find access to child care at that installation,

but sometimes at a lower priority than families belonging to the installation's parent Service.

Some programs have emerged to meet the child care needs of families as the pace of military operations remains high. The Air Force's Extended Duty Child Care program helps in numerous locations to provide waived-cost emergency child care, aid in covering evening and weekend child care, and child care for children with mild illnesses. The Air Force has also piloted a Home Community Program to provide family child care homes in communities with a more concentrated Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard presence.¹² The Navy has piloted highly successful programs in two different geographic locations offering round the clock child care and group homes for a limited number of children needing up to 72 hours of continuous care.¹³ At 85 installations, the Army offers extended hours for children in Child Development Centers and family child care homes, with some of these homes providing child care for up to 60 days, if needed.¹⁴ Some Marine Corps installations ensure families are not turned away from Child Development Centers for hourly and respite care under any circumstances and provide child care for activities contributing and related to family readiness. Programs at installations across the Services offer regular respite child care opportunities, as well, so that parents can take advantage of much-needed time for themselves.

As military families continue to balance demands of work and home life, plentiful and accommodating child care services can make all the difference in reducing the constant stressors incurred as mobilization, deployments and longer work hours remain the norm. ■

¹⁰ U.S. House Committee on Armed Services, Total Force Subcommittee, Joint Statement of The Military Coalition, 108th Cong., 1st sess., March 12, 2003.

¹¹ U.S. House Committee on Armed Services, Total Force Subcommittee, Statement of the Honorable David S. Chu, Undersecretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness), 108th Cong., 1st sess., March 13, 2003.

¹² Judy Pearson, "Air Force Introduces Expanded Child-Care Options in Conjunction with Woman-Owned Small Business," INTECS International, Inc., www.dcmilitary.com/airforce (accessed December 12, 2003).

¹³ Patricia Klime, "Double Duty," *Navy Times*, November 11, 2002, p.14.

¹⁴ U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, Personnel Subcommittee and U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, Child and Youth Subcommittee, Statement of M.A. Lucas, Director, Army Child and Youth Services, U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center, 108th Cong., 1st sess., June 24, 2003.

PARTNERSHIPS

Opportunities exist to build and sustain partnerships within the military Services, between the Services, and with other entities to benefit military families greatly as they face deployments and a continued high OPTEMPO. By pulling together widespread resources, proactive steps can be in place to prevent issues involved with deployments from reaching emergency levels and can help families know how to best solve problems as they arise.

Critical partnership issues include:

- Building and maintaining partnerships within and between Services to achieve maximum joint accessibility, availability and benefit for military families.
- Developing and sustaining partnerships between the military and civilian communities to augment support services provided by the military.
- Expanding partnerships between the military and employers to promote mutual support and understanding regarding the Guard and Reserves.

Partnerships within and between services

All military families experiencing separations from the servicemember have common needs. In order to match those needs with available support, partnership opportunities to help families exist within military family support services. As Guard and Reserve members are relied upon more and more to carry out military missions, the need to build collaborative efforts to ensure access to and availability of military family support services regardless of Service affiliation is crucial.

One of the best examples of a successful military family support partnership can be seen in the Pentagon Family Assistance Center. In response to the September 11, 2001 attack on the Pentagon,

the first joint military family assistance center was created for families to get accurate and timely information and make use of a wide range of support services. The Pentagon Family Assistance Center ended up overseeing more than 45 support entities and served as the main location for information, crisis assistance, casualty coordination, and safe haven for the families of victims. This incredible partnership serves as an ultimate example of the level of support that can be achieved for families.



Photo courtesy of DoD

In light of this achievement, some installations prepared comprehensive support partnerships modeled after the Pentagon Family Assistance Center in order to take a proactive approach to potential crises in their communities.

The shared success of the Pentagon Family Assistance Center allowed for the creation of an innovative joint Service collaborative opportunity, the Joint Family Readiness Working Group. Created by the Office of Military Community and Family Policy in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), the working group pulled together OSD and headquarters family support staff from each Service, including the reserve components. It also invited associations such as the American Red Cross and NMFA to participate. The group's charge was to look at the needs of and support for all servicemembers and their families. Its meetings provided avenues for sharing information and best practices, as well as recognizing gaps in support between the components of all Services. In particular, the working group helped identify and address specific family support issues related to Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Some of these issues included: identifying families at high risk and not likely to tap into available support services, promoting the use of technology to share information with families and help them communicate with deployed servicemembers, strengthening unit volunteer efforts, and ensuring all military families would be able to access services regardless of geographic location or branch

of Service. Regular communication among group members continues to facilitate the improvement, development, and implementation of military family support services that are needed most.

Partnerships at the installation level within Services can also be of incredible value to military families as they deal with deployment-related challenges. As military Services and installations use more and more contractors to provide necessary services to military families, a working relationship needs to be in place to make sure services are easily obtainable from the contractors.

One overwhelming and unanticipated issue that must be dealt with by many entities working in concert concerns the acceptance of powers of attorney. The military Services promote and provide powers of attorney as a vital resource for families while the servicemember is deployed. Military Services also endorse the use of powers of attorney as an acceptable document for spouses or parents to use in obtaining needed services or to manage financial affairs in the servicemember's absence. However, powers of attorney are not consistently being accepted by agencies on installations, to include credit unions, banks, finance offices and relief agencies, even though the documents are written by legal services on the same installation. In one instance, an installation finance office would not allow a spouse to obtain the deployed servicemember's Leave and Earnings Statement despite having a fourteen page power of attorney. Such inconsistencies do not help families in times of their greatest need. When installation legal offices have to take on the responsibility of calling agencies on a monthly basis to check power of attorney acceptance policies, the good intention of this service is undermined.

Problems with powers of attorney were even more frustrating for Guard and Reserve families. These families faced unique circumstances when powers of attorney were drawn up to be valid for a particular time period and their servicemember's absence extended beyond that time. Furthermore, powers of attorney were sometimes not honored as an acceptable document in resolving pay issues and

were flat-out rejected by some civilian agencies to include banks. Situations such as these drain the time and energies of families who must focus on other, often more pressing, issues.

Successful partnership opportunities at the installation level can serve as models for solving problems such as the acceptance of powers of attorney. One long-standing installation-based partnership is that of the Air Force Reserve's 94th Airlift Wing at Dobbins Air Reserve Base, Georgia. In 1993, it established an Inter-Service Family Assistance Committee coordinating military family support services from every installation and Service in the state of Georgia. This proactive networking and partnership opportunity successfully pulls together the best support for all military families wherever

they are in the state. The effort has helped and continues to help families during numerous mobilizations and deployments for the Global War on Terrorism. Other Inter-Service Family Assistance Committees are working throughout the United States. Providing multiservice opportunities for training and

assistance in an effort to ensure total force family readiness, they should be replicated in more locations.

Partnerships between the military and communities

Military partnerships must not only be built and nourished within and between military Service offices and agencies, but also between the military and civilian communities. Partnerships between the military and civilian community augment military family support services especially because the majority of military families do not live on an installation. In partnering, these entities recognize the connection George Washington made in saying "When we assumed the Soldier we did not lay aside the Citizen." Military families are a vital part of the community and the community is vital to the military. In general, civilian communities support the military and want to help servicemembers and families. Through shared partnerships communities gain a direction for effectively helping military families especially during deployment.

"Unfortunately, for the system, sweet talking and making phone calls was much more effective than anything on paper."

—Interview with a military spouse

One partnership between the military and civilian sector that can be of greater benefit for military families as OPTEMPO remains high is with the local media. In light of the influence the media has had on families during Operation Iraqi Freedom, and because many Guard and Reserve families view the media as their main source of information, military partnerships with local media can help promote an awareness of support programs and services in their area. Local military interest stories about programs and services and local media websites highlighting information specifically for military families help them know what assistance is available. An example of this working relationship can be seen in the local media of Richmond, Virginia. The Central Virginia Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Committee and the Richmond Chapter of the American Red Cross paired up with a local television news station for an on-air call in session. The 90-minute event enabled members of the National Guard and Reserve and their employers to call in and have their questions answered regarding the mobilization of forces as well as military leave procedures. This partnership provided an open and proactive venue for reserve component members, families, and employers to acquire the unique knowledge they needed.

Along the same lines, the *Virginian-Pilot*, one of the Hampton Roads, Virginia, area newspapers, in cooperation with the Fleet and Family Support Center prominently displays military-oriented information on its website. In addition to general military information, the site features local installation information, such as: ship finders, updated military news, talk-net boards, a newcomer's guide, and a deployment guide. Further information includes tips for homecomings, finances, relocating, and communicating with deployed servicemembers. Military partnerships with the civilian local media can be of great benefit to military families as they search for ways to handle deployment-related issues. These partnerships can provide tools for families living away from installations to get information on available support services.

Many Guard and Reserve families view the media as their main source of information.

One particular area where partnerships between communities and the military can be of the utmost benefit for military families is in schools. With more than 1.2 million active duty and Guard and Reserve school-aged children, it is essential to establish working relationships with the military and schools to assist children coping with deployments and war. Schools are the institutions where children spend most of their time outside of their homes. Partnerships between the military and schools facilitate on-going communications to ensure a safe, caring, and effectively nurturing environment for children. They can create opportunities to make sure all involved in the lives of children have a comprehensive understanding of the military culture and deployment issues. These working relationships can help provide children with the skills they need to cope, help parents and educators understand how military experiences can affect children and help these parties know when to seek professional assistance. Furthermore, military and school partnerships can help identify children who are experiencing changes related to the servicemember's military situation and build support groups for children and teens to discuss their feelings in a safe environment. These partnerships are especially necessary in the Guard and Reserve communities that may not have instant access to the same resources found at military installations. Schools can also be a source of information and support for care givers.

The NMFA analysis team found several examples illustrating the benefits of the military and schools working in tandem to help military children deal with challenges related to deployments and war. The overwhelming success of a military and school partnership making a difference in the lives of military children can be seen in the video teleconferencing broadcast of high school graduation in Wiesbaden, Germany to servicemember parents in Iraq in the spring of 2003.¹⁵ Military and school entities at Camp Pendleton, California, cooperated to facilitate the use of web cameras in some classrooms to provide deployed Marines and sailors a chance to be a part of their children's

Virginian-Pilot — www.hamptonroads.com/military/deployments

¹⁵ Jessica Inigo, "Modern technology allowing deployed parents to attend DoDDS commencement," *Stars and Stripes*, European ed., June 6, 2003.

daily routine, if they had access to technology in theater. A DoDDS elementary school in Aviano, Italy also developed a supportive environment for children dealing with the deployment of a family servicemember. Aviano Elementary School allows any student with a deployed parent or loved one to receive a membership card to the “Clubhouse.” Students are eligible to join this program as soon as the servicemember knows he or she is being deployed and can remain a member until after the servicemember returns. The “Clubhouse” program gives students an opportunity to be with others who are experiencing a similar situation and participate in grade level appropriate activities. Teachers can assist students in dealing with the stress of deployments and can watch for signs of distress as well.

Working hand in hand with military and school partnerships for the benefit of military children are partnerships between the military and youth programs. Through military partnerships with community youth programs, children are provided an outlet for energies and a distractive stress management tool as they cope with the absence of the servicemember. Initiatives such as the Youth and Development Specialist for the Washington State National Guard participating in a network of state youth service providers can be of incredible benefit for military youth and teens. It helps to coordinate services, let families know of programs in local areas across the state, and prevents local communities and units from reinventing the wheel.

Other working partnerships illustrate how successful coordination of youth programs makes a difference in the lives of military children experiencing the deployment of a parent. The Boys and Girls Clubs of America and 4-H have opened their hearts and doors to military children, especially to children in Guard and Reserve families who often do not live anywhere near an installation.¹⁶ Military children can participate in these programs for a small cost or even at no cost. The Boys and Girls



Photo courtesy of “OnGuard”

Clubs of America alone generously provided \$5.8 million in grants, gifts, marketing and scholarships for military children in one year. While more than 400 youth centers serve military children on and near installations, partnerships between the military and community youth programs remain especially significant and valuable for all military children during times of deployment.¹⁷

As families experience lengthy, frequent, and uncertain deployments, they find stability and comfort through religious programs and in the presence of religious leaders. Of NMFA survey respondents identifying religious programs as a means of support during recent high OPTEMPO, 81% replied favorably to the quality and availability of these services. This statistic validates the need for the military to build strong and inclusive relationships with community religious leaders. Military chaplains are often seen as a back-up to military family support services, especially in crisis situations. Because the majority of military families do not live on an installation, it is important for community religious leaders to also know the military culture and be an extension of this back up to military family support services.

At Fort Lee, Virginia, one such working partnership between military and community religious programs supports the numerous Guard and Reserve units from several states that mobilized through and deployed from the installation. As servicemembers prepared to return from deployments through Fort Lee, Army religious program staff saw a need to involve religious leaders from the local community and other states to participate in reunion and reintegration training. Community religious leaders from as far away as Ohio were taught by military chaplains about typical behavior for returning servicemembers, participated in practical exercises and were even welcome to attend “decompression” briefings from which they could carry away information and resources. This partnership between the military and community

¹⁶ U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, Personnel Subcommittee and U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, Child and Youth Subcommittee, Statement of Ms. M.A. Lucas, Director, Army Child and Youth Services, U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center, 108th Cong., 1st sess., June 24, 2003.

¹⁷ U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, Personnel Subcommittee and U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, Child and Youth Subcommittee, Statement of John M. Molino, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Military Community and Family Policy), 108th Cong., 1st sess., June 24, 2003.

religious programs provides a proactive approach as servicemembers are reintegrated into their communities and with their families. Continued and expanded partnerships between the military and community religious leaders can be of extensive benefit to military families during all phases of deployment, but especially as servicemembers continue to return from traditional, frequent, dangerous, or lengthy deployments.

Partnerships between the military and employers

As its commitments around the world increase, the U.S. military has relied more and more on National Guard and Reserve members. As of December 31, 2003, a total of 319,193 Guard and Reserve members had been called upon to serve in the Global War on Terrorism. Just as these Guard and Reserve members must make a full transition into the military lifestyle, civilian employers must also make adjustments. Continued and expanded partnerships must exist between the military and employers to help servicemembers and employers navigate their obligation and commitment to one another. These partnerships can foster a sense of stability for Guard and Reserve families as they face numerous other unknowns surrounding the mobilization and deployment of the servicemember.

An expansive partnership between the military and employers currently exists through the National Committee on Employer Support for Guard and Reserve (ESGR). This agency falls within the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs, with a volunteer chair appointed by the President and reporting to the Secretary of Defense. The ESGR acts as a liaison between the military and employers and helps support employers affected by mobilizations of Guard and Reserve members.

Through numerous programs and outreach initiatives, the ESGR focuses on ensuring public and private employer support for and commitment to the military service of employees. These programs include signed statements of support from employers and recognition of employers who go above and beyond the legal requirements to support employees who are a part of the Guard and Reserve. The “Briefings with the Boss” program brings together employers, military commanders and other community leaders to discuss and mutually understand the importance and role of the Guard and Reserve and issues surrounding Guard and Reserve members’ relationships with employers. Additionally, the “Bosslift” program actually takes Guard and Reserve employers to military training sites to help employers better understand the military lifestyle and facilitate discussions on employee military service and employer support.¹⁸

“A survey released in May by the Society for Human Resource Management found that 44% of its members had employees called to active duty, yet 38% of the respondents did not understand their obligations to employees on military leave or how others in the workplace are effected. 88% said their companies were supportive of activated employees.”

—Joan Fleischer Tamen, “Welcome Back, Soldier,” Fort Lauderdale *Sun-Sentinel*, June 30, 2003.

In the past several years, many large corporations have worked with the ESGR to go beyond the requirements of the law for mobilized Guard and Reserve employees. Some have offered support by providing specific periods of continued or differential pay, medical benefits, and retirement benefits to their mobilized Guard and Reserve employees. Smaller businesses employing Guard and Reserve members have faced particularly difficult challenges as mobilizations occurred. There are, however, numerous examples of smaller employers and local government entities making sacrifices to show support of their mobilized Guard and Reserve employees in the same way as larger businesses.

The partnership through the ESGR between the military and employers allows for systems to be in place to establish a firm connection between employers and Guard and Reserve members and quickly resolve issues as they arise. These partner-

¹⁸ www.esgr.com

ships can alleviate concerns Guard and Reserve servicemembers and families have about their financial situations, medical coverage, and job security as they face numerous other uncertainties involved with the mobilization, deployment, and demobilization of the servicemember. Additionally, these partnerships provide a means of recognizing the sacrifice of Guard and Reserve members and families that can help sustain them as they draw on the support of the community.

On a smaller scale, the Air National Guard fosters successful partnerships with employers through its “Your Guardians of Freedom” program. The program was initially designed to thank employers of Air National Guard members who were called to active duty following September 11, 2001. This program to reach out to employers enjoyed such

large success that it was recently unveiled as an outreach program—to also include spouses, families, and parents—for use throughout the entire Air Force. The employer aspect of the expanded program extends direct appreciation from Air Force senior leadership to reserve component employers. Since the extended program was launched in the fall of 2002, more than 59,000 letters of appreciation and E-pins (pins recognizing employer support of the Guard and Reserve) have been sent to employers across the country. Letters and pins are also available for parents of Air Force members. This program stands as a model of continued success to not only reach out to employers working with the Air Force, but also to help inform and recognize all involved supporting the efforts of all airmen.¹⁹

KEY PARTNERSHIP RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create more partnerships to enhance joint accessibility to and consistency of military family support programs and services regardless of geographic location.
- Expand upon the model provided at the DoD headquarters level through the Joint Family Readiness Working Group to implement joint groups at state and local levels.
- Enforce the requirement for One Source to provide feedback to military family support providers and commanders on trends in services requested by family members. Ensure installations and units provide updated information on available services to One Source on a regular basis.
- Form partnerships between the military, agencies on the installation, and civilian entities to ensure powers of attorney drawn up by military legal authorities are accepted.
- Develop working relationships between military public affairs and local media outlets to reach the widest audience possible about services available to families, common challenges families face, and how to solve issues as they arise.
- Increase partnerships between commands, parents, and school officials to serve the changing needs of military children, regardless of geographic location. Encourage more military-to-school and school-to-school partnerships to share expertise and best practices.
- Continue to cultivate partnerships with local community services to support child and youth needs especially during times of high OPTEMPO.
- Encourage expanded programs between military and community religious leaders to support all servicemembers and families during all phases of mobilizations and deployments.
- Establish additional support programs to facilitate understanding of and support between employers and Guard and Reserve servicemembers and families.

¹⁹ www.yourguardiansoffreedom.com



Photo courtesy of DoD

“With the increasing need for Guard and Reserve troops, America’s Employers are inextricably linked to the nation’s defense by sharing their most precious assets, their employees.”

—Bob Hollingsworth, Executive Director, National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve. “ESGR announces 2004 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award Recipients.”



Photo courtesy of NMFA

SELECTED ISSUE DISCUSSION: ONE SOURCE

There is one potential area where partnerships within each Service and between military Services working jointly can ensure families have access to and availability of information. Each individual Service within DoD has contracted with the same private company to provide a round-the-clock employee assistance information and referral service. All active duty, National Guard and Reserve families have been able to use and benefit from One Source, a one-stop resource accessed through toll free telephone numbers and websites. The Marine Corps was the first to launch One Source Service-wide in January 2003 just as Marines began deploying in large numbers. By July of that year more than 22,000 calls and emails had been received. The answers to these inquiries helped families deal with deployment-related challenges and particularly aided Marine reservists and their families acclimate to unfamiliar requirements and procedures. One Source also provides basic life skill information, as well, helping to reduce some of the burdens on already stressed out families.

While the One Source program is newer to some Services than to others and each Service currently “owns” its own One Source, this tool has the potential to become the perfect opportunity to provide joint family support services. This opportunity

is anticipated to become reality in the summer of 2004 as the resource will begin operating under a universal “Military One Source” for all service-members and families regardless of Service affiliation. The achievement of a joint One Source, while incorporating Service-specific information as needed, will eliminate the duplication of efforts and recognize the fair amount of common challenges all military families face.

As the One Source program moves to be a joint resource, this partnership must also be extended to include continuous communication at the installation level in order to serve families more effectively. A loop is needed to facilitate the capturing of general information from One Source shared not only with the headquarters level, but also with installations. In this way, military family support providers can be aware of the needs of families in a timely manner so programs and services can be adjusted to meet those needs. Likewise, this loop must also include the sharing of up to date and accurate information about local programs and services between installation military family support providers and the One Source contractor. This will further enhance outreach to families and will allow those using One Source to learn of the best resources available on the local level. ■

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

One of the greatest sources of support for all military families during deployment can be found through community efforts.

Military families do not often seek out special support or acknowledgement for the sacrifices they make and challenges they face. As communities across the country have poured out their support, however, servicemembers and families have been bolstered and touched by these efforts. This support has enabled many families and servicemembers to sustain themselves through greater than expected challenges. Thus, the vital role of and need for community efforts must be recognized.

During deployments, state and local community efforts have reached out to military families, determined their needs, and filled in gaps families may sometimes have been hard-pressed to fill for themselves. Several states, seeing the needs of some Guard and Reserve families struggling to make ends meet, enacted legislation enabling families to access emergency funds. These programs also provide a way for individual citizens to donate money to assist Guard and Reserve families. A forerunner of these programs is the Illinois Military Family Relief Fund. The fund provides grants to families of Illinois Guard and Reserve members who have been called to active duty.²⁰ Any Guard or Reserve family with need is able to receive \$500 for help in paying rent, utility bills, and day care. Guard and Reserve members deployed for at least 30 days are eligible to receive an extra \$500-\$2,000 annually. More than one half million dollars—donated by Illinois residents either directly or through a check-off box on their tax returns—have been distributed from the fund for Guard and Reserve families.

“No matter how big or small the problem, help is available.”

—First Lady Mary Pawlenty, Minnesota. Senior Airman Cheryl Hackley, “Families ‘guarded’ while loved ones deploy for their country,” *The OnGuard*, January 2004, p.4.

The First Lady of Minnesota helped to establish a program to connect volunteer services with the needs of military families across the state. The Military Care Initiative allows community organizations to register the types of volunteer services they can provide military families. The matching of these services with requests for assistance from military families lets families know they are being cared for by their community.

While levels of community support in local areas can vary, members of many communities go above and beyond to make sure military families are recognized and appreciated. In response to a planned anti-war protest in Tacoma, Washington, a group of well-wishers and supporters decorated and continue to man an area bridge to show their support and appreciation for the military, servicemembers, and families. For military families living in locations where they sometimes feel the need to hide their affiliation to the military, these acts of acknowledgement and thanks remind them that their sacrifices are deeply appreciated.



Photo courtesy of NMFA

Learning that their servicemember has been wounded can be an incredibly scary time for military families. Thanks in part to Congressman Dutch Ruppersberger (D-MD, 2nd) travelers are able to donate frequent flyer miles to “Operation Hero Miles.” Originally started as a means to provide free transportation within the United States for troops on Rest and Recuperation leave from Iraq and Afghanistan, the program has been expanded to help military families and wounded servicemembers. Servicemembers may use the donated miles to take leave or pass from military hospitals and visit families; families may use donated miles to visit the wounded servicemember at his or her bedside.

²⁰ “Christmas accentuates National Guard families’ dilemma,” *The Illinois Leader*, December 18, 2003.

More than 540 million miles have been donated to the Department of Defense and the Fisher House Foundation to assist families in these worrisome circumstances.²¹

One organization, the Community Connection for Military Families (CCMF), combines an outreach program of the Associated Ministries of Tacoma-Pierce County, Washington, with programs to enhance the lives of military families who live in the local community. One of the programs includes volunteers who make blankets to give to preschool-aged children of deployed servicemembers. As children receive the gift they are told that the blanket is for them to keep their favorite toy warm and safe, just as their mommy or daddy is keeping them safe while they are away. The children are also told that there are many people in their town who are thinking about them and someone special made the blanket just for them. These tokens of love for children can help maintain a connection with the deployed servicemember and let them know they are safe during confusing and anxious times.²² They assure the entire military family that people in their community care about their well-being.

“I want the boys to have all the messages written from all these people. I can say, ‘Your daddy’s a hero,’ but I’m just a momI want to be able to show them that other people feel that way too.”

—Melissa Givens, widow of PFC Jesse Givens. Li Fellers, “Fallen soldiers win final salute online,” *Chicago Tribune*, December 27, 2003, p.1.

Other simple acts of support by individuals can provide military families comfort in their greatest hour of need. One man created an internet memorial dedicated to those who have lost their lives for our country during recent military missions. The site allows visitors to post messages of remembrance and thanks for these servicemembers. The memorial site serves as a source of comfort and allows grieving families to know the memories of their loved ones remain alive.

All military families, regardless of geographic location, are part of the communities in which they live. The overwhelming instances of community support for military families are too innumerable to name. However, these highlighted examples illustrate the expansive nature of community efforts to acknowledge and aid military families. The volume of community support for servicemembers and families since September 11, 2001 has had a considerable impact on helping military families face challenges in times of great uncertainty.

KEY COMMUNITY SUPPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recognize the importance of community support and encourage a continued commitment between military and community leaders to provide for the changing needs of military families.
- Encourage state and local government leaders to network and share programs that benefit military families.
- Appoint installation points of contact to coordinate and market available community support.

²¹ <http://www.heromiles.org>.

²² <http://www.militaryfamilies.org>

CONCLUSION

As the third anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack approaches, the resiliency of military families remains strong. According to one military spouse, “the normal of what [we] used to know is no more.” The strength of military families serving on the home front to endure this changed environment is wearing down. In addition to dealing with routine experiences of military life such as relocating, achieving consistency in their children’s education or seeking employment opportunities for spouses, military families face even more unique challenges due to the ongoing high OPTEMPO. As servicemembers deploy more frequently, for longer periods of time and at unpredictable intervals, it is essential for military families to have a comprehensive, responsive, and flexible system of support to prepare and sustain them.

The first essential component of a family support system is effective communication to enhance the sharing of information and outreach to military families. Communication expectations must be established and information easily and openly exchanged between the official chain of command and families. Processes of communication should include families geographically dispersed from the servicemember’s unit, as well as families of servicemembers augmented to another unit or Service. Institutional means of raising family support issues are needed to facilitate Service leadership awareness of concerns and to solve problems at all levels. Effective and easy to use websites must be available to all family members; volunteer contributions and input to the sites should be encouraged and facilitated. Outreach initiatives can raise awareness among all military families of available support programs and services designed to enable them to thrive during a higher pace of military operations. Standardized and continuous training throughout the military family support system is the second

element in this comprehensive effort to provide families with the help they need as deployments remain frequent and for longer periods of time. A process of formal training will enable unit commanders, rear parties, and volunteers to work together to make the support system a true benefit to military families. Servicemembers must be trained by the command to make family readiness a priority. Required Family Care Plans should be agreeable to all involved and commanders held accountable for their implementation, as well as all aspects of family readiness. Military family support providers must tailor programs and services to meet changing needs of families as servicemembers return and families reunite. They should adapt

the location and hours of support programs and services to be accessible for the families they serve. Individuals involved with children must be trained to recognize and support their deployment-related needs. All individuals involved with the Guard and Reserve must know of rights, benefits and entitlements and how to find information throughout the stages of mobilization and deployment. Families and servicemembers must have the information they need to know regarding when to seek professional help, with easily accessible preventive, confidential, and robust counseling available when needed.

Effective partnerships, the third element in a military family support system, must be replicated across the board to implement an all-encompassing and responsive effort by military and community agencies and organizations to benefit military families. Joint accessibility and consistency of programs are needed and successful programs must be emulated to help families during deployments. Partnerships between the military, installation agencies, and civilian entities should be enhanced to ensure the acceptance of powers of attorney as families access services. By working together, military public affairs officials and local media outlets can make families aware of available programs and services. The sharing of best practices and knowledge can



Photo courtesy of US Coast Guard

strengthen the essential relationships between the command, parents and school officials and community agencies necessary to meet the changing needs of military children. More partnerships between military and community religious leaders will further help servicemembers and families during all phases of deployments. Robust partnerships between the military and employers must also continue to facilitate understanding and support of Guard and Reserve members and families.

The broad effort to coordinate programs and services for military families must also include harnessing community goodwill and support on a global level. A continuous process of communicating between military and community leaders will enhance programs available



Photo courtesy of DoD

through military family support providers. State and local government leaders must share information on supporting military families. Community support efforts must be funneled through a consolidated channel at installations to coordinate available offers of support with needs of families and avoid duplication of efforts. Community support efforts are the final piece in the comprehensive system of reaching out and helping families.

Military families understand and are prepared for particular uncertainties. To deal with uncertainties that go beyond this frame of reference families need additional help. A comprehensive, responsive support system will ensure the success of military families as they continue to face the unique challenges involved with the high pace of military operations.

“There is much we do not know about reunion and readjustment... In general, we know little about the process of readjustment within families over time and how different approaches to intervention stack up.”

—U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, Children of Families Subcommittee, Personnel Subcommittee of the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, Statement of Shelley M. MacDermid, Ph.D., Co-Director, Military Family Research Institute, 108th Cong., 1st sess., June 24, 2003.

This report provides a snapshot of military family support from September 11, 2001 through March 31, 2004. While this broad view provides considerable insights into the needs of families and the responses of military and civilian agencies and organizations to meet those needs, the necessity for further research in two distinct areas becomes apparent. Further study is required to pinpoint the needs of children during times of high OPTEMPO and determine the tools parents need to support their children and to help them cope in the best ways possible. More research is also needed on the return of servicemembers from deployment and the reunion and reintegration of families. This includes the long-term effects of and the best ways to assist families during these phases, especially during and after repeated deployments.



Serving the Families of Those Who Serve

The National Military Family Association is the only national organization dedicated to identifying and resolving issues of concern to military families. Our mission is to serve the families of the seven uniformed services through education, information, and advocacy.



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Sears, Roebuck and Co. Through the Sears American Dream Campaign, Sears provided \$2 million to NMFA for programs benefiting military families. In addition to this report, part of the funding was used to sponsor "Operation Purple," a summer camp program that allows children from all branches of the military services to interact with and learn from each other in an effort to help deal with deployment-related stress. Separately, NMFA and Sears recently published a unique keepsake book, *A Tribute to Military Families: Letters of Thanks from Our Nation's Children*, with inspiring essays from children on the importance of military families.

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