



Photo by Staff Sgt. Jeff Lowry, Indiana National Guard

Army Rolls Out New Service and Support Mechanism for Soldiers, Families

By Margaret McKenzie

FMWRC Public Affairs

The Army is transforming the way it provides services and support to the entire Army Family.

The Army Integrated Family Support Network establishes a comprehensive multi-component approach for soldier and family support and services. It meets the diverse needs of active Army, Army National Guard, Army Reserve soldiers, Accessions Command families, employers, and the community.

The program integrates baseline services and resources traditionally found on installations into a network that supports soldiers and families no matter where they live. Services include childcare and youth and family program information and referrals, online resources, assistance with school transitions, mobilization and deployment, information about soldier programs, recreation and fitness programs, club systems, money management, and much more.

"The Army intends to capitalize on the existing resources and integrate our programs across components," said Jean Mills, AIFSN program manager at the Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation Command (FMWRC), in Alexandria, Va. "The goals are to ensure families from all three components receive the same quality of service; provide better coordination and syn-

chronization of support by the components to reduce redundancy; and ensure soldiers have access to the same baseline services no matter where they live in relation to a military garrison."

Family Programs and Child and Youth Services Directorates at FMWRC started the process by providing access to their services through a single access portal, www.MyArmyLifeToo.com. Through an ongoing process with the Reserve and Guard headquarters, they are working to establish baseline standards. The goal is to establish memorandums of agreement and other means to provide soldiers with those baseline services, no matter what component they are or where they live.

The two directorates brought together representatives from all three components to conduct training on how to provide standardized baseline services. The training also provided networking opportunities for staff members within state and region boundaries and components.

"Since Oregon doesn't have any active component base or post, it's important for me to attend training like this and meet all the different state and local agencies located around me that offer support services," said Dianne Gooding, director of Family Programs for the Oregon National Guard. "Now I can link up

with them and potentially help any active component or reserve folks here in Oregon.”

“We really try to work together through the Inter-Service Family Assistance Committee and it was really important to come here and meet these folks face to face,” Gooding continued. “This training really opens up the networking opportunities for us. We have many programs in place and we have made partnerships within our local communities. The active component and the Reserve can only benefit from what we have to offer them. We can only get stronger with everyone in partnership.”

The course provided 134 representatives from all components an overview of what AIFSN is about and how it will impact all the components and the customers they serve.

This AIFSN Basic Institute Course demonstrates the Army Family Covenant’s commitment to provide soldiers and families a quality of life that is commensurate with their service, according to Brig. Gen. John (JD) Johnson, Deputy Commander at FMWRC.

“This conference is designed to help family programs and soldier programs help the people who need it the most,” Johnson said.

“Soldiering is about heart. The Covenant is a reflection of that heart,” he continued. “It is a contract with the leadership, soldiers and their families that says we understand what you need and we are signing up to provide standardized, predictable service to you at a high quality.”

When fully implemented, the global network should make that goal a reality. Many military members and families don’t live close to a National Guard assistance center, an Army Reserve readiness center or an installation. This system should enable them access to the same benefits and services they’d receive on a garrison through online services or referrals to local and state community agencies where they can receive equivalent services and support.

“It’s all about readiness,” Johnson said. “It’s all about making sure soldiers and families are ready. Because the one thing we cannot control is when they are going to be called on to go forth and do what they sign up to so. That’s a piece we don’t control.

“We want soldiers and families to know the Army cares. We want families and loved ones to know we can take care of them and do it in such a way that they feel they are in control of what is going on in their lives,” he said.

Soldiers and families will be linked through AIFSN to local community services and programs in their geographical areas, not just those on the nearest installation.

“The whole idea behind this program is to develop and use all the various systems to come together so that anyone can enter the network to find out where they can get help, no matter where they live,” Johnson said. “They can take advantage of all the great things that are being offered out there – whether in the government, private sector, or public sector – by accessing the network.”

Currently, each component functions independently and access to services is dependent upon unit resources. For a Reserve unit with three or four personnel in the rear detachment, hundreds of miles from an active component garrison, providing support is as difficult as it is critical. Local community support is the key to making AIFSN work, and AIFSN will level the field as much as possible.

“We are working on things we can change,” said Kathy Classe-Friend, Child and Youth Service coordinator for both the National Guard and Reserve components at a Combat Support Training Center in California.

“I think the training gives a general overview of how the National Guard operates and I think it is up to us to merge our services and address the needs. For me the National Guard is our community, so we have been working with the community for a long time. I believe it will be a newer process for the active duty component because their community has always been inside the fence and everything they need is right there. The National Guard members live out in the community and have always used the community resources. That is our life.”

“As AIFSN rolls out,” Mills said, “we will make every effort to make sure families know they can go to the Web, the phone, or to a brick and mortar facility closest to where they live and receive the same baseline services.” **R&NG**



Staff Sgt. Jasion Keirn, B Company, 297th Support Battalion, Alaska Army National Guard, holds daughters Adia, 5, and Elsa, 13-months, at the Alaska National Guard Armory after returning from a six-month long deployment to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Photo by Sgt. Karima Turner.



Spc. Thomas Grafstrom, B Company, 297th Support Battalion, Alaska Army National Guard, is welcomed home by wife Heidi, April 24 at the Alaska National Guard Armory at Fort Richardson. Grafstrom was deployed to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom for six-months. The couple is expecting a baby in July. Photo by Sgt. Karima Turner.