

# **The Challenges to Youth in Military Families**

(June 2007)

## **Introduction**

American Bar Association (ABA) President Karen Mathis made it a priority of her term of office to find ways that the law and the legal community can better identify and support America's at-risk youth, particularly those ages 13 through 19. To lead this initiative, she established the ABA Commission on Youth at Risk and charged it with undertaking a year-long effort to identify the challenges facing this population that greatly elevate their "risk." The Commission's goal is to enhance laws, judicial intervention strategies, policies, programs, and practices intended to prevent teenagers from becoming delinquent or engaging in criminal acts. Ms. Mathis, who was raised in an Army family, understands the stress and anxiety surrounding a parent's deployment and reunion after a period of absence, frequent relocations, and other complex issues associated with the military lifestyle. She has made identifying and responding to the extraordinary challenges facing teenagers in military families an important concern of the Commission on Youth at Risk.

## **Military Youth at Risk Roundtables**

The ABA Commission on Youth at Risk and Standing Committee on Legal Assistance for Military Personnel (LAMP) have jointly sponsored two roundtable discussions focused on the special challenges faced by teenagers in military families. The first roundtable at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas in November 2006 gathered together 21 youth service leaders from nearby military installations and surrounding communities. The second roundtable at George Washington University Law School, in Washington D.C. in March 2007 included 28 headquarters-level youth service leaders from the Armed Services and Department of Defense, federal and state youth program leaders, and civilian experts. A listing of roundtable participants is contained at Appendix A.

Family support program directors, lawyers, judges, social workers, educators, police officers, and others engaged in fruitful discussion of public policy and social issues affecting youth in military families. They exchanged information about best practices, programs, and interventions and expanded their network of professional contacts.

Topics discussed at the roundtables included:

- Finding better ways to serve juvenile "status offenders" – e.g., truants, curfew violators
- Meeting the needs of youth aging out of foster care
- Assuring meaningful participation by youth in court proceedings
- Enhancing access by youth (and their families) to services focused on prevention
- Improving how different legal and court interventions affect youth crossing over from one system to another
- Improving support for youth living in chaotic and violent homes

The roundtable discussions are meant to benefit the Armed Services but they also serve to inform the Commission on Youth at Risk and the ABA membership at large on the challenges facing youth in military families. Military youth, in addition to facing the challenges of their counterparts in civilian communities, are often adversely affected by frequent relocations and deployments of their parents to combat zones.

This report attempts to capture the highlights of the two roundtables and to reflect the commitment, expertise, and compassion that were abundantly evident during the two half-day sessions. An effort has been made to at least mention the significant ideas developed and practices and programs discussed. Six subjects of particular import that arose during the roundtables bear mention up front.

- The need for a totally integrated all-Service, Department of Defense approach to family support of the Active and Reserve forces and the National Guard.
- The need for enhanced collaborative effort in support of youth at risk between the military and civilian schools, police departments, courts, child protective services, and other public and private entities with child and family support missions. As was said at the first roundtable: “We need to tighten the holes in the safety net so that they are small enough that we don’t have any kids fall through it.”
- Diversion of juvenile offenders into community service programs under the auspices of private organizations such as the Boys and Girls Club has proven successful and should be encouraged.
- The ABA should encourage state and local bar associations to develop opportunities for their members to mentor military youth at risk and to get involved with schools in other capacities.
- The ABA should maintain collaborative relationships with the Federal Youth Coordination Council (FYCA), Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC), and the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Services (NACCRRA).
- The importance of appropriate sustained funding for military family support programs and the value of ABA support for such funding.

## **Military Demographics and Culture**

The U.S. military consists of approximately 1.4 million active duty service members and 810,000 National Guard and Selected Reserve (non-drilling Individual Ready Reserve not included). There are approximately 1.2 million children of military personnel. The Armed Services’ children and youth programs collectively are the largest employee-sponsored childcare and youth programs in the country. They serve over 400,000 children from newborn to 18 years old on a daily basis. Active duty military families live on military installations worldwide as well as in neighboring communities. National Guard and Reserve families are to be found in almost every city, town, and farm community in America.

The Armed Services work hard to help service members and their families cope with deployments and adjust to being uprooted every few years to move to a new community. Many spiritual, legal, financial, employment, family support, and other resources are available to service members, their spouses, and children.

Services provided by the Armed Forces to military members and their families include chaplains, child care, family centers, family support groups, Military Onesource, Injured Service Member Support, and legal assistance. Private services include Armed Services YMCA, Operation Homefront, Red Cross, Relief Societies, USA Cares, 4-H, and Boys and Girls Clubs of America. These and other services are described in Appendix B. Program materials from these and other family support entities are contained in digitized format in Appendix C.

A wealth of information is available at numerous Internet sites to military service members and their families. The Department of Defense maintains a website at <http://www.militarystudent.dod.mil> that is specifically designed for military children experiencing deployment of a parent or family relocation. The topics include: A Teen's Guide to Moving, A Teen's Guide to Deployment, A Student Sponsorship Program for Teens, and Teen Employment Services and a Teen Chat Room. The website contains a Teen Chat Room that allows military teens to share common experiences and coping strategies, and to keep in touch with old friends while making new ones.

Another example of the benefits of technology described at one of the roundtables, was the use of video teleconferencing (VTC) for a student transferring to Texas from Germany to participate in cheerleading tryouts at her new school. Changing schools, especially in high school, can be very difficult for some teenagers and anything that facilitates the transition such as youth sponsorship, efficient transfer of records, and use of the worldwide web reduces stress and anxiety for the entire family.

## **The Military Family**

Military families are resilient but are being stressed by deployments, disabilities, and deaths and the stress level has increased with the frequency of deployments as the mobility of the military lifestyle continues. An overarching theme of the roundtables was the fact that the needs of teenagers tend to be overlooked and underserved by legal and social organizations. This phenomenon was explained in part by a persistent tendency among adults to erroneously regard teenagers as “little adults” who can deal with the pressures in their lives, particularly when they are responding to adult challenges such as giving support to at-home parents and siblings while the other parent is deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. They look like little adults and we tend to treat them that way, but cognitively that is not the case. Additionally, there are four subsets of teenagers who are sometimes forgotten and require special attention: teenagers of wounded service members, teenagers with their families on overseas tours, teenagers in National Guard and Reserve families, and those for who English is a second language.

The roundtable participants preferred describing teenagers in military families as being “challenged” rather than “at risk.” They did recognize, however, that teenagers in military families face many of the same perils as their civilian counterparts that greatly elevate their risk, including: abuse, neglect, domestic and dating violence, emotional and behavioral problems, gangs, learning disabilities, emotional or behavioral problems, and poor peer group choices and relationships. Additionally, as a result of youthful exuberance and a penchant for experimentation, they do what many young people have always done, that is, they push the envelope of acceptable behavior. Everyone acknowledged that they commit the same juvenile status

offenses, such as truancy, curfew violations, and underage drinking which can lead to delinquency, criminal misconduct, and entry into the juvenile justice system. While military families might be seen as leading protected lives aboard military installations, outside influences are not stopped by walls and fences. Furthermore, two-thirds of military families live off-base, in nearby civilian communities. Several roundtable participants emphasized that the military is a microcosm of civilian society and “as goes society, so goes the military.”

### **Military Legal Assistance**

Military legal assistance attorneys worldwide routinely provide a broad range of services to military personnel and their family members, including divorces, legal separations, child custody, and guardianships. Attorney-client interaction concerning such matters often reveals domestic situations and circumstances where children are at risk and where non-legal, family support is appropriate. Critical to recognizing such situations is the attorney’s understanding of the stresses and strains on military families, resources available to them, and the multi-disciplinary nature of family support.

Often the legal problem is the source of the stress, dysfunction, or disconnection in a family. Resolution of non-support, custodial, and similar problems serves to restore a sense of stability and function in the family, creating a more supportive home life for teenagers. A holistic approach to family health is necessary – the ability of children to cope with life’s stresses is directly related to the parent’s or other caretaker’s ability to cope. As important as legal assistance is to the health of the military family and to the overall readiness of the force, it is not uniform among the services nor sufficiently far-reaching and comprehensive.

Military legal assistance and preventive programs should be enlarged and expanded so that they reach every adult in the military family – every enlisted member, officer, spouse, and dependent child. A legal assistance attorney should periodically interview every such adult in a confidential setting to determine his or her need for a will, durable power of attorney, and other legal services. The American Bar Association has taken the lead advocating amendment of 10 USC §1044 to guarantee comprehensive legal assistance for service members. With our all-volunteer, mostly married force, dependence on Reserve and National Guard units, and the ongoing war against terrorism, the need for Congressional action has never been greater. Furthermore, commanders will truly be “taking care of their own,” judge advocates will be fulfilling their mission of comprehensive legal support, and service members and their families will be better prepared for the many and varied uncertainties of military life.

### **Foster Care Issues**

Two young veterans of the foster care system spoke movingly at the Fort Sam Houston roundtable about their experiences. The younger of the two regretted the fact that the system had provided no real mentoring opportunities for him. He indicated he felt unengaged and left out because of the absence of positive influences in his life. He also noted that although he was supposed to see his child services caseworker regularly, he was only in touch with her once a year. Other roundtable participants commented that the child protective services system is so overburdened that the caseworkers tend to focus on the needs of young children because they

know teenage foster children at least can feed and clothe themselves. Teenagers were described as a low priority in the foster care system.

The other foster care veteran and a 16-year old who was still in foster care were relative success stories. The first had loving and nurturing foster parents who had tutored him in his class work and help him raise his skills to an age-appropriate grade level. He is now a college student. The 16-year old is a successful member of his high school track team who credits his coach for giving him and his peers structure and support in their lives. One of the foster care veterans who felt embarrassed to talk with a counselor at school was able to speak easily with the school janitor, who had lost a college athletic scholarship because of a knee injury. He defined the janitor as a role model: “not necessarily someone you want to be when you grow up, but someone you can relate to, someone who gives you advice.”

Foster children, like children from Reserve and National Guard families in civilian communities who are experiencing deployment of a parent, do not have anyone to relate to. No one has shared their experience of being taken away from their parents, processed through the child welfare system, and placed in foster care.

Juvenile court was described as often being a clearing house for problems that should have been addressed much sooner. Many of the young defendants that appear in juvenile court have psychological or developmental challenges or diagnoses that have never been adequately addressed before they ran afoul of the law. Another concern is that even where services are available from public agencies or other community programs, a simple lack of transportation imposes formidable access barriers for many adolescents. Youth facing the threat of incarceration often fail to make appointments with probation officers or counselors because they simply lack the means to get there. A partial solution suggested was to move as many social, counseling, and other support services as possible into the schools, to improve accessibility and safety.

All agreed that discussing their achievements and showing interest in teenagers at the court hearings was very important and that kindness and respect must be evident. There was also universal agreement that teenagers, no matter how standoffish they may sometimes be, want and need to hear “I love you” and at times to be hugged. They want and need someone who cares. In-school, long-term mentoring on a regular schedule was also considered to be critically important.

Judge Macia, Vice President of the American Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges Council and a participant in the Washington, D.C. roundtable, explained that the Council is a member organization of 2,000 judges throughout the country. And, that the organization has judicial education programs, provides technical assistance to courts, and has a research arm that assists in ensuring evidence-based best practice programs throughout the country. She said that she would “take as a result of the roundtable some ideas so that we can train and teach judges . . . the kind of issues that need to be addressed in military families.” Judge Macia also emphasized that if there is a court near a military installation that has collaborative partnerships with the school system, police departments, and others, that “the military has a seat at the table.”

# Programs and Insights

## Programs

School-run youth sponsorship program – students transferring into the school are hooked up with a resident student their own age. The connection is often made before the arriving student departs his/her school.

Army Expect Respect program conducted in-school, designed to prevent dating violence and develop self-respect and respect for others.

- Bill of Rights Card – “You have the right to say no to physical closeness or any act that makes you uncomfortable; you have the right to refuse a date or end a relationship; etc.”
- Commitment Card signed by teenager – “I’m preparing for the future; I’m learning to get things done; I’m choosing real friends, etc.”

Army ParenTeen program brings parents and their teenagers together with a facilitator who assists in non-confrontational parent-child communications about issues relating to pre-deployment, deployment, and re-integration. Children with good support systems, including good communication with a parent have been shown to cope the best with the stresses of deployment.

Armed Services YMCA Adopt-a-Unit program supports the families of deployed service members through after-school programs and special events and providing community service opportunities.

Armed Services YMCA Operation Hero provides tutoring to children from military families who transfer into school districts near military installations.

Texas Young Lawyers Association, the public service arm of the Texas State Bar, programs:

- “Junior Judges Helping Kids Make Smart Choices” -- an MTV-style, interactive, program to educate elementary school children on the rule of law.
- “Crossing the Line” – a middle school program focused on the workings of the juvenile justice system and the consequences of criminal misconduct.
- “They Had a Dream Too” – lawyers teach high school students about the civil rights movement and the important role of young people just like themselves in the movement.
- Pipeline Program – lawyers form a relationship with a third or fourth grade class and stay with them through high school graduation.

San Antonio Young Lawyers Association program of educational and motivational presentations by lawyers and judges in local high schools.

Casey Family Programs, a private foundation with nine field offices in five states, provides a broad range of foster care, post-foster care, and kinship services in collaboration with Child Protective Services and other organizations.

Armed Services education, marketing and outreach programs communicate with families of reservist to ensure they are fully informed about family support and other programs available to them.

National Military Family Association Operation Purple camps offer a free week of summer fun for military kids with parents who have been, are currently, or will be deployed. More than 40 weeks of camps will be held at 34 locations in 26 states in 2007. Campers from all service branches gather together to experience a week of fun and adventure with a focus on learning coping skills to better deal with a parent's deployment.

Communities in Schools programs – Volunteers form one-on-one relationships with children deemed to be at risk. Time is spent together at the school during and after normal school hours. In a San Antonio school a retired music teacher teaches harmonica. Another individual teaches karate.

Army BOSS Program – Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers – many single service members are teenagers themselves. They often serve as team coaches and mentors for school-age youth. The Marine Corps has a similar program.

Operation: Military Kids (OMK) is the 4-H and U.S. Army's collaborative effort with America's communities to support the children and youth of National Guard and Army Reserve Soldiers impacted by the Global War on Terrorism. The program began in 2004 and is now active in 34 states.

Marine Corps Warrior Transition Program facilitates transition from combat to a home environment. Support at home begins with the parents who must adjust to the changes in their lives and in turn help their children with their transition to more normal circumstances.

### **Insights**

- The children of migrant workers were identified as a category of at-risk youth. They experience frequent relocations, changes of schools, language barriers, and culture shock – for example, moving from the Rio Grande valley to Ohio.
- Juvenile court is often a back door for children to receive mental health services for such common conditions as ADHD, bipolar disorder, and depression. Early medical intervention, often in elementary school, when they first started acting out, would, in many cases have kept them out of the juvenile justice system.

- Juvenile Review Boards, such as the one at Fort Sam Houston, deal with youthful misconduct aboard military installations. Parents, local commands, and the children work together to avoid the need to resort to the juvenile justice system.
- Urban nomadic children who, because of evictions and domestic problems, live in different locations and with relatives, in homeless shelters, and on the streets, are seriously at-risk.
- “Teenagers are the hardest nut to crack.” To get them to events it takes perseverance and lots of resources. You must emphasize the fun, not the education
- Direct communication and long-term mentorship create connections and are vitally important. The goal is to create a stable, connected environment in which young people can thrive.
- All educators and family support program directors who participated in the roundtables agreed that at-risk signs appear before age 12 and need to be addressed. Prevention through education, appropriate intervention, and proactive support programs is the key to keeping young people out of the juvenile justice system. The priority must be on prevention, then on diversion.
- More than 14,000 elementary, tweens, and teens have parents returning from Afghanistan and Iraq with traumatic injuries. These youth caregivers are at risk because they are at home dealing with adult-age crisis.
- Teenagers have demonstrated a willingness and ability to take the lead in helping one another and the community at large. They enthusiastically embrace community service, volunteer as student sponsors, participate in web site and program development, and mentor younger children. They must be part of the solution.
- Youth gangs attract a broad range of kids from all socio-economic backgrounds. Many young people, including some military family members, join gangs just for something to do and someone to associate with. Roundtable participants acknowledged that the Armed Services are microcosms of the society from which they recruit their members. Gang activity is not perceived as a problem aboard military installations but gangs influence is real and of concern in some locations.
- All participants agreed that keeping kids in school was vitally important and keeping them there was one of the greatest challenges of school systems. The school superintendent at the Fort Sam Houston roundtable was critical of the practice of suspending students from school for bad behavior, which he said only encourages students to stay out. He said: “You shouldn’t suspend children – that compounds the problem – you need to *talk* to the children.”

## Conclusion

The two military youth at risk roundtables had participants from all of the Armed Services, military bases, Department of Defense, and from local, state, and national levels. The roundtables included representatives from the Boys' and Girls' Clubs of America, Court Appointed Special Advocates, 4-H Clubs, Armed Services YMCA, Casey Family Programs, North Carolina-National Guard Family Readiness Program, and other organizations that support military youth. All of the participants are "child advocates" -- teachers, counselors, and administrators from the public schools; military and civilian police and lawyers; juvenile court judges; military family support program managers; academics; and social workers.

This report and the transcripts of the roundtable discussions are replete with insights and information about the elaborate, but not yet perfect, safety net of people and social programs that shield and shelter the children of military families. The message is clear from the roundtable discussions:

- The Armed Services and Department of Defense must integrate their approach to family support of the Active and Reserve forces and the National Guard in order to take advantage of joint effort, cross-fertilization, and leveraging of resources.
- The Armed Forces and Department of Defense also must collaborate more effectively with the civilian community to ensure the safety and well being of military families.
- Civilian schools, police departments, courts, child protective services, and other public and private entities with child and family support missions must also work more closely and effectively together.
- America's lawyers have an important role to play in our schools in support of the rule of law and the war effort.
- The ABA can help military children at risk by supporting adequate funding for military family support programs and actively engaging with NACCRA, FYCA, and MCEC.



David C. Hague  
Brigadier General  
U.S. Marine Corps, Retired  
Commissioner  
ABA Commission on Youth at Risk

Appendix A: List of participants in the two military-focused roundtables

Appendix B: Military, government, and private family support services and resources available to service members and their families

Appendix C: A CD containing some of program materials provided by roundtable participants has been provided to the Commission on Youth at Risk

## **Appendix A**

### **Participants in American Bar Association Youth at Risk Roundtable held at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, TX on November 16, 2006**

Moderator: David C. Hague, Brigadier General, U.S. Marine Corps, Retired

B.L. “Bull” Barnes, Branch Head, Marine Family Services, U.S. Marine Corps (MRR)  
Paul Britton, Armed Services YMCA, Killeen, Texas (home of Fort Hood, the military installation with the highest numbers of deployments in the country)  
Sylvia Cardona, Attorney, San Antonio Young Lawyers  
Lionel Collins, Associate Director, Armed Services YMCA, Killeen, Texas  
Karin Renee Crump, Attorney, President, Texas Young Lawyers (the public service branch of the State Bar of Texas)  
Natalie Dains, Detective, Provost Marshall Office, Fort Sam Houston  
Paul Haskins, Staff Counsel, ABA Standing Committee on Legal Assistance for Military Personnel  
Elizondo Hernandez, Assistant Principal, Cole Junior-Senior High School  
Angela J. Huebner, Professor, Human Development Department, Virginia Tech University, and co-author of a seminal study on the effects on adolescents of military deployment during current conflicts, completed in 2005  
Janet Ketcham, Executive Director, Child Advocates San Antonio, Inc. (CASA)  
Captain Tina Letcher, U.S. Army Trial Counsel and Special Assistant U.S. Attorney  
Colonel Jackie Little, Chief of Legal Assistance Policy, U.S. Army  
The Honorable Laura Parker, Judge, 368th District Court, Juvenile Court, San Antonio  
Sandi Primous, Educator/Trainer, Army Community Service Family Advocacy Program, Fort Hood  
Henry Salguero – veteran (aged out) of the foster care system in San Antonio  
Jeremy Thomas – veteran (aged out) of the foster care system in San Antonio  
Sheronda Tillman, Youth Specialist, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services  
Keith Toney, Fort Sam Houston School Liaison and local school board president  
Jim Watson, Colonel, USAF (Ret.), Executive Director, Boys and Girls Clubs of San Antonio  
Gary Urdiales, Supervisor, Casey Family Programs  
Dylan Ybarra -- a 16-year-old youth who had been through the juvenile justice system

### **Participants in American Bar Association Youth at Risk Roundtable held at George Washington Law School, Washington, D.C. on March 8, 2007**

Moderator: David C. Hague, Brigadier General, U.S. Marine Corps, Retired

Jim Almond, Executive Director, Boys and Girls Club of Greater Washington, D.C.  
B.L. “Bull” Barnes, Branch Head, Marine Family Services, U.S. Marine Corps (MRR)  
Mary Balocki, School Liaison, Fort Belvoir Child and Youth Services  
Diana Buchanan, law student and child advocate, Hofstra Law School  
Nancy Campbell, Outreach Services for Youth and Youth Programs, U.S. Army, Family and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Command, Alexandria, VA

Captain May Chiranand, U.S. Air Force Reserves  
Lieutenant Command Ted Cook, Deputy Chief of Legal Assistance, U.S. Navy  
Howard Davidson, Director, ABA Center on Children and the Law, and Co-staff Director of the  
ABA Commission on Youth at Risk  
Sheleen Dumas, Administrator, Children, Youth and Team Program, Henderson Hall, U.S.  
Marine Corps, Arlington, VA  
Kathy Facon, Head of Children, Youth and Team Programs, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps  
Virginia Figgins, Flight Chief, Bolling Air Force Base Airman and Family Readiness Program  
Keita Franklin, Social Worker, Family Advocacy Program, Fort Belvoir, VA  
Amy Freeman, Program Analyst, Fleet and Family Support, Command Naval Installation  
Support  
Frank Gallo, Rear Admiral, U.S. Navy (Ret.), National Executive Director, Armed Services  
YMCA  
Paul Haskins, Staff Counsel, ABA Standing Committee on Legal Assistance for Military  
Personnel  
Angela J. Huebner, Professor, Human Development Department, Virginia Tech University, and  
co-author of a seminal study on the effects on adolescents of military deployment during  
current conflicts, completed in 2005  
Lil Ingram, North Carolina National Guard Family Support Program  
Colonel Jackie Little, Chief of Legal Assistance Policy, U.S. Army  
Lieutenant Colonel Steve Lyons, Deputy Chief of Legal Assistance, U.S. Marine Corps  
The Honorable Patricia Macias, Judge in El Paso, TX and Vice-President, National Council of  
Juvenile and Family Court Judges  
Karen Morgan, Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Military Community and  
Family Policy) Office of Children and Youth  
Helen Roadarmel, Chief of Outreach Services for Youth and Youth Programs, U.S. Army,  
Family and Morale, Welfare, and Recreation Command, Alexandria, VA  
Larrie Ann Rodriguez, Navy Installations Command  
Dr. Joe Soo-Tho, Clinical Psychologist Consultant, Fairfax County, VA Police Department  
Detective Jim Sparks, Major Crimes Bureau, Fairfax County, VA, Police and Juvenile Services  
Unit  
Dale Thompson, Children Program Specialist, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps  
Jane Wilson, Principal, Fort Belvoir Elementary School  
Sherri Wright, U.S. Department of Agriculture (4-H)

## **Appendix B**

### **Military family support services and other resources available to military personnel and their families.**

#### **Chaplains**

Military chaplains are clergy, endorsed by national religious groups, who are qualified to serve as officers on active duty.

Chaplains can perform the same services as civilian ministers – baptisms, weddings, bar mitzvahs – but they also often deploy with the troops. They conduct religious services, offer instruction and counseling, and minister to those of other faiths as well.

As senior members of the commander's staff, chaplains influence nonspiritual matters affecting morale and welfare, morals, ethics, and quality of life. They are obligated to hold in confidence any disclosures service members and their families make in counseling.

#### **Child Care & Youth Programs**

The Department of Defense Child Development Program is the largest employer-sponsored child care program in the country, serving some 400,000 children. It includes child development centers, family child care homes, and school-age care programs on and off installations.

The Defense Department and services are working to expand existing facilities at locations with long waiting lists and high deployment rates.

In support of the war effort, the services have extended hours of operation and, in some cases, paid for extra child care for members who work extended hours, have shift changes, or have child care emergencies.

The military's program of care for children is so highly praised for its quality and affordability that it's a model for the entire country. This year the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA) rated the Department of Defense child care system number one in the nation -- higher than any individual state -- for standards and oversight.

#### **Child development centers**

Centers generally are open 6:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Many offer hourly care for medical appointments and other needs, but space is limited and reservations are usually required

Each center must meet standards for curriculum, safety, and health.

Fees are calculated on a sliding scale based on total family income. The Defense Department sets a minimum and maximum fee range, and individual installations can set their fees anywhere within those ranges.

For the 2007 school year, families in the lowest annual income category, up to \$28,000 pay \$43 to \$62 a week, regardless of the child's age. The highest range, for those with total family income of \$70,001 or more, is \$107 to \$129 a week.

## **In-home care**

Spouses can become licensed to provide child care in their homes. In-home providers set their own fees. In some cases, installation commanders subsidize in-home providers so military families pay fees in line with those charged in centers. Most, but not all, providers live on base.

## **School-age care**

These programs for children ages 6 to 12 are held before and/or after school, during holidays, and over summer breaks in youth centers, child-development centers, and in-home child care. The Defense Department sets fee guidelines for this care.

## **Youth programs**

The military offers youth programs that focus on alternative activities during out-of-school hours. More than 350 programs exist worldwide, many in partnership with the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, 4-H, and other organizations.

## **Injured Service Member Support**

The 24-hour-a-day Military Severely Injured Center provides personalized assistance for all service members severely injured in Operation Iraqi Freedom or Operation Enduring Freedom to ensure they are prepared either to return to duty or successfully reintegrate into their hometowns.

The center works with each of the military services' support programs for the severely injured: the Army Wounded Warrior Program, the Marine for Life Program, the Navy's Safe Harbor Program, and the Air Force Palace HART Program.

These programs, and the Defense Department's Military Severely Injured Center, can help with issues such as financial assistance, employment and training; non-medical personal, couples, and family counseling; child care; government assistance; transportation; and personal or equipment needs. Services are free. Regional counselor-advocates also are available at select military treatment facilities and VA hospitals.

## **Family Centers**

Family Centers act as one-stop places for service members and their families to find information, education, and assistance to help them manage the challenges and enjoy the benefits of military life.

Outreach is available for those in remote or isolated areas. The centers also serve mobilized National Guard and Reserve members, Department of Defense civilians, and military retirees.

Centers typically provide services at no charge.

The National Guard sets up family assistance centers as needed to help families of all components; about 400 are currently operating. The Guard also has permanent family assistance coordinators.

Each service calls its family centers something different: Army Community Service Centers; Marine and Family Service Centers; Fleet and Family Support Centers; Airmen and Family Readiness Centers; and Coast Guard Work-Life Centers.

Types of assistance include:

- Counseling by licensed therapists for coping with the stresses of military life.
- Crisis assistance for immediate, short-term help in a critical situation.
- Deployment and mobilization support services.
- Financial management education – investing, debt liquidation, budgeting, saving and retirement planning – via classes and individual consultations.
- Employment assistance to help service members and families find jobs and map out career strategies.
- Information and referrals to services and resources in the community.
- Outreach programs for families that are isolated, new to the military, or geographically separated.
- Life skills education in parenting, stress management, and other issues.
- Relocation assistance to help families move and adapt to a new location.

Depending on service, the following programs may be provided at family centers.

- Family advocacy programs aimed at preventing spouse and child abuse and treating the victims of such abuse.
- New parent-support programs offering home visits by nurses or other health experts who can answer questions about infant care.
- Special-needs family member assistance programs that offer information and support to family members who have requirements for medical, educational, or mental health services.

### **Family Support Groups**

Family support groups, also called family readiness groups, are made up of spouses, parents, and siblings of service members. They are generally organized through a unit before a deployment. Group leaders serve as a link between families and service members' chains of command. Groups operate according to each unit's needs.

The Army also has rolled out a Virtual Family Readiness Group Web system, linking deployed soldiers, their families, the family readiness group leader, unit commander, rear detachment, and other family readiness personnel. The portal helps provide a sense of community for family members who are far apart.

### **Ombudsmen**

The ombudsman program, unique to the Navy and Coast Guard, is an information link between a unit's commanding officer and its members' families. A similar program, called Key Volunteers, operates in the Marine Corps.

Ombudsmen are volunteer spouses chosen by unit commanding officers. They are trained in effective listening and stress management, and their job is to refer those in need to the right help.

## **Legal Assistance**

Service members can get free legal advice and other assistance for a variety of civil legal needs including tax preparation, contract and lease review, estate planning, adoptions, guardianships, divorces, paternity matters, name changes, child custody and visitation, child and spousal support, landlord-tenant disputes on behalf of the tenants, consumer advocacy cases involving alleged breaches of rights under the Servicemembers' Civil Relief Act (SCRA), and cases arising under the Uniform Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA).

## **Military OneSource**

The Defense Department has a toll-free phone number and a website to augment installation family support centers.

Military OneSource provides immediate help to service members and their families in managing the everyday issues of military life, such as child care, relocating to new communities, or finding an English-speaking plumber in a foreign country. They also have access to licensed counselors for marital issues, deployment stress management, and parent-child communications.

Military OneSource phones are staffed 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Translation services are available in more than 130 languages. Referral and customized information are available for each service or family member.

## **Worldwide Web Access**

The Defense Department's [www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil](http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil) is a gateway to information on quality-of-life programs and services. Active-duty families coping with injuries resulting from duty in Afghanistan and Iraq that need more help can find it on [www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/troops/injuredsupport](http://www.militaryhomefront.dod.mil/troops/injuredsupport). Each of the services has its own website.

Other websites available to service members and their families include websites for those:

- seeking information on Federal and private-sector employment, education, and relocation;
- wishing to place classified ads and seeking referrals and resume writing assistance; and
- seeking information about children's education, tailored to different age groups.

USA4MilitaryFamilies.org, at [www.usa4militaryfamilies.dod.mil](http://www.usa4militaryfamilies.dod.mil), is a continuing effort to engage and educate state policy makers, business leaders, not-for-profit organizations, and other leaders about the needs of the military community. Examples of priority issues include

in-state tuition, payday lending, military children in transition, spouse employment, and issues affecting the National Guard and Reserve, such as child care.

The Defense Department's America Supports You Website, [www.americasupportsyou.mil](http://www.americasupportsyou.mil), links deployed troops and their families to private organizations offering a wide variety of support.

Separating service members can view a range of transition services, to include VA benefits and job opportunities, to help ease their move back into the civilian sector at [www.DodTransPortal.org](http://www.DodTransPortal.org).

## **Private and government family support services and other resources available to military personnel and their families.**

### **4-H Clubs**

4-H is a large U.S. Department of Agriculture youth development organization located in all areas of the country, in the cities, suburbs, rural areas, serving about 7,000,000 children between the ages of 5 to 19. 4-H has partnerships with the Army and Air Force and is exploring similar arrangement with the Marines and Navy.

### **Armed Services YMCA (ASYMCA)**

The Armed Services YMCA is a social services agency with branches and affiliates at many major installations in the U.S. It has provided support services to military service members and their families for more than 140 years, particularly focused on junior-enlisted men and women. Most services are offered free or for a nominal fee with a valid military identification card.

Recreational, educational, social, and religious programs include child care, mentoring, computer learning centers for children, single service members' centers, hospital assistance, transportation, adult classes, aerobics, and classes in English as a second language.

The Armed Forces YMCA emphasizes community service and finds that teenagers enjoy feeding the homeless, delivering Meals on Wheels, and giving back to their communities in other ways. Young people want to volunteer – they just have to be asked.

### **Boys & Girls Clubs of America**

Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) are located in more than 350 military Youth Centers worldwide. Children and families find the same guidance, stability and dynamic programs provided by traditional BGCAs. From teen leadership groups to fine arts contests, BGCA-affiliated Youth Centers give members a positive place to learn and grow. BGCAs also conduct special programs such as Major League Baseball-sponsored clinics at some overseas bases.

BGCA's partnership with the military began during the Persian Gulf crisis. As parents in the Reserves and National Guard were deployed overseas, BGCA asked local Clubs to reach out

to children in need, providing memberships and special programming to some 17,000 youth. Working with the Department of Defense, BGCA went on to develop formal partnerships with each branch of the Armed Forces. BGCA recognized that military Youth Centers have a long tradition of excellent service to youth. The BGCA partnership complements that tradition, offering Youth Center members consistent programming and stable support.

No matter where families are transferred, children in any military community will find the same quality services and programs. In addition to increasing those programs, the clubs based in the U.S. are trying to reach out to military children in their area, especially National Guard and Reserve members who live far from military bases.

## **Federal Youth Coordination Council**

The Tom Osborne Federal Youth Coordination Act (FYCA)- Public Law 109-365 establishes the Federal Youth Development Council on which there will be military representation. The functions of the FYCA are:

- Ensure communication among federal agencies serving youth.
- Assess the needs of youth and those who work with youth; and the quantity and quality of federal programs offering services, support and opportunities to help meet these needs.
- Recommend objectives and quantifiable goals for federal youth programs and recommend allocation of resources to support the goals.
- Identify overlap or duplication and recommend ways to better facilitate coordination, improve efficiency and effectiveness of such programs.
- Identify target populations of youth and focus additional resources or develop demonstration projects and model programs to target those groups.
- Conduct research and evaluation, identify and replicate model programs and promising practices, provide technical assistance relating to the needs of youth, and coordinate the collection and dissemination of youth-services related data and research.
- Provide technical assistance to states to support state-funded youth coordinating councils.

Membership of the FYCA:

- Eleven federal department secretaries and heads of agencies
- Representatives from youth-serving nonprofits, foundations, and faith-based organizations
- Youth

Report requirement:

- Interim report no later than one year after first meeting, and final report to Congress providing an assessment of the needs of youth and those who serve them.
- Recommendations for better integration and coordination of federal, state, and local policies affecting youth.
- A report on the Council's work to facilitate interagency collaboration and the results of the collaboration.

## **Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC)**

MCEC is an educational, non-profit organization dedicated to forming partnerships and providing for networking of military installations and their supporting school districts to address transition and other educational issues relating to the military child. Among its many activities, the Coalition recently partnered with Sesame Street and Wal Mart to produce *Talk, Listen, Connect*, a DVD to help families during military deployment.

## **National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA)**

NACCRRA claims to be the nation's leading voice for child care. The organization works with more than 800 state and local child care resource and referral agencies to ensure that families in every community have access to high-quality, affordable child care. The organization leads projects that increase the quality and availability of child care, offer comprehensive training to child care professionals, undertake research, and advocate child care policies that positively impact children and families.

NACCRRA and the Department of Defense have partnered to provide families of severely injured military members with assistance to find and pay for safe, licensed child care services for a period of six months during their period of recuperation. (Extensions beyond the six-month period are considered based upon physician reassessment.) The program is available nationwide wherever the injured member is receiving either in-patient or out-patient medical care.

NACCRRA coordinates with state and local Child Care Resource and Referral agencies to help military families locate child care in the civilian community when a military program is unavailable. This will allow the spouse and older children to be at bedside or to help with outpatient medical appointments. NACCRRA and the Department of Defense will provide an offset to the civilian child care fees during the recovery period.

## **North Carolina**

North Carolina, with its numerous military installations and large military population, is a leader among the states in supporting military families. A new initiative to help children of military parents who are deployed on active duty includes training institutes to help educators to better understand the challenges faced by children of deployed parents and a new web site to help educators identify and assist these students. The state recognizes that for military children, teachers may be one of their few sources of stability and attending school every day may be one of the few "normal" routines for those whose lives are disrupted when military parents deploy.

## **Operation Homefront**

This network, with 26 chapters nationwide, offers help with day-to-day issues for families of deployed service members. Services include food needs; critical car, home, and appliance repair; refurbishing computers; moving and transportation; and furniture needs.

## **Red Cross**

Armed Forces Emergency Services of the American Red Cross provides a vital link to home for those serving in remote areas. Emergency messages can be initiated by service members or their families for a quick reply by the Red Cross to almost any community or military installation, even to ships at sea. Some local Red Cross chapters may be able to provide links to assistance for families, including parents of service members, and others who may not live near a military installation.

## **Relief Societies**

Private military relief societies can help service members solve emergency financial problems.

There are four private, non-profit societies: Army Emergency Relief, Air Force Aid Society, Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society, and Coast Guard Mutual Assistance. Each has local representatives on military installations, usually in family centers, and operates under different policies and procedures.

They offer education assistance programs for spouses and children and can help service members and families with debt management.

The societies rely solely on donations for their support and do not charge for their services.

Emergency aid is most often provided to service members and their families in the form of interest free loans but sometimes through direct grants.

## **USA Cares**

This citizen group, formed in 2003, helps families with various problems that arise during deployments and mobilizations, with a focus on helping families through short-term financial crunches. They have a program, for example, that can help families avoid losing their homes because of financial difficulties related to deployment.

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Sources: Worldwide Web, materials provided by roundtable participants, and "Handbook for Military Life -- Benefits '07" Military Times Media Group