

JOINT FAMILY SUPPORT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Background:

Section 675 of the John Warner National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007 directed the Secretary of Defense to carry out a joint family support assistance program (JFSAP) for families of members of the Armed Forces. This report responds to Section 675(g), which required the Secretary to submit to the congressional defense committees a report on the program.

Description of the Program:

The purpose of the JFSAP is to provide high quality, mobile support and services to geographically dispersed military members and families to enhance their ability to cope effectively with the challenges of military lifestyle, including deployment.

During the summer of 2007, the Department launched a pilot JFSAP, using Minnesota as the model of success in providing integrated programs and services for family members through the "Beyond the Yellow Ribbon" reintegration support program. Originally, six states (Arkansas, Hawaii, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Ohio, and Oregon) were earmarked for this pilot, but the response was overwhelmingly positive and an additional nine states soon requested the JFSAP. Those nine states (Alabama, California, Colorado, Florida, Indiana, Nebraska, Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia) became part of the pilot in August 2007. In September 2008, at the request of governors and Adjutants General, the program expanded to all 50 states and 4 territories.

To comply with Congressional direction to augment existing military family programs, and to enhance program effectiveness and efficiency, the Department partnered with the National Guard Bureau (NGB) to establish the NG Joint Force Headquarters (JFHQ) in the 15 pilot states as the delivery platform for the JFSAP. The JFSAP teams were integrated with the state family programs and guidance was provided that the JFSAP teams were to serve members and families from all Military Components within the state by providing:

- Information and referrals to community services and support
- Non-medical counseling and education to individuals, families and groups
- Child and youth services, including assistance locating child care
- Financial education and counseling
- On-demand support for events such as reunion ceremonies and pre-deployment meetings
- Community capacity building to support families' access to local resources and support

The JFSAP teams focused on building communication strategies to enhance both awareness of and availability of resource networks available to National Guard and Reserve families. They met with members and families and unit family support staff to identify needs and gaps in programs and services. They provided or connected families to support services including personal life counseling, child care and youth services, financial education and counseling, and information and referral. The teams provided sponsorship of volunteers and family support professionals, and worked with military and other Federal, state, and local agencies, volunteers, and non-profit entities to improve coordination of family assistance programs, activities, and initiatives. The teams worked with military and civilian organizations to integrate services and programs into a comprehensive delivery system to enhance and sustain community capacity to respond to the needs of members and families wherever they are located, at all stages of the deployment cycle.

The American Red Cross (ARC) hired state managers in the initial 15 JFSAP pilot states and also in Pennsylvania. The state managers work closely with the JFSAP teams and the ARC chapters in their states to promote activities in support of military commands, members and families. Additionally, the ARC has identified volunteer state managers in 25 of the remaining 34 states and will continue to recruit volunteers for the remaining states. Representative activities of the ARC in the pilot states include:

- Providing outreach to disaster impacted chapters to ensure that military families are identified and provided appropriate service from family programs, including JFSAP; also, providing community disaster education to military families.
- Helping populate state resource databases to 1) bring awareness of military families to civilian organizations; and 2) help identify community resources that benefit military families.
- Working with veterans' organizations and commands to recruit and train volunteers and work with them in community activities.
- Providing meeting space for JFSAP private counseling sessions; and provide office space for JFSAP staff as needed
- Opening ARC canteens with internet access, video games, books, DVDs, beverages, and snacks to support members participating in mobilization training.

Military OneSource is a powerful tool available 24/7 that is used in conjunction with the State JFSAP teams to provide "high-tech/high touch" support to members and families. The Military OneSource website provides updates on services and programs available to military families, including TroopTube; free educational materials online, in print, on CD and/or on DVD; discussion boards for connecting

military members and families with each other; and podcasts and webcasts on military family issues. Consultants available via a toll-free number assist members and families to navigate the myriad of resources that exist and to find the one(s) best suited to their needs.

JFSAP Military OneSource consultants based in each state serve as experts on military and civilian support services available in the communities where members and their families reside. The state-based consultants identify and catalogue local resources and use the information to populate state databases and also make it available to Military OneSource researchers and consultants who respond to callers of the toll-free number.

In February 2008, the Department established and staffed the Joint Family Resource Center (JFRC) to augment and extend the resources of the local JFSAP teams. The JFRC is the central hub for providing a range of Department-funded deployment cycle support resources to members and families at events sponsored by National Guard and Reserve units. Resources include information briefs on Military OneSource and other programs available to members and families; and educational briefings, training and counseling on financial, personal life, and transition issues. The resources are provided at unit-sponsored events during phases of the deployment cycle, including pre-deployment and 30-60-90 days after deployment.

Assessment of the Effectiveness of the Program:

The JFSAP is considered a success by all stakeholders, including state and federal civilian and military leadership, community organizations, and commanders, members and families from all Military Components. During the spring of 2008, Department staff visited the 15 JFSAP pilots to identify issues, lessons learned, and promising practices and found that:

- Each state is a unique culture with lessons learned and "promising practices." JFSAP states work together and have created great systems, programs and products. They also provide outreach and services to command, members and families from all military Components within their state.
- Under the leadership of the NG State Family Program Directors, JFSAP staff in each state integrated with existing state family program teams, to effectively augment and expand their resource capacities.
- The JFSAP, together with state teams and community resources, is making a positive difference for many. The clinical expertise of the Military Family Life consultants and the resource expertise of the Military OneSource consultants are highly valued by commands, members and families, volunteers, and other family program team members.

From November 2007 to April 30, 2009, JFSAP teams provided services to 705,093 service members and their families at more than 25,823 events sponsored by units from all Military Components, states and territories.

A centralized call center and online request form were established in July 2008, to facilitate the process by which units request resources, including counseling for financial, personal and family life issues; Military OneSource resources; and assistance for those transitioning to civilian status.

JFSAP staff conducted 28,727 outreach visits to Active Duty installations, Reserve Component family programs, and state, local, and non-profit organizations to collaborate and integrate community-based resources and expand support capacity on behalf of military members and families.

While the JFSAP outcome data are impressive, even more so is the feedback from commanders, members, and families. While the numbers and activities listed in this report give a glimpse of the day-to-day activities of the JFSAP, they do not fully capture the impact the program is having on military families. For that, we can only listen to the stories of those whose lives have been touched by the JFSAP teams.

“A young soldier lost his life in a tragic accident and left behind a pregnant wife and a pre-school aged child. The family was geographically and technologically separated from military resources. The spouse called the JFSAP consultant overwhelmed with grief and extremely worried about her young child who continued to ask about his dad, cry for him, talk about giving hugs/kisses when he returned, and carry his picture at all times. The consultant provided support to the mom and helped her develop an age-appropriate strategy for explaining the situation to the child and helping him grieve. At one point, the mother said, “I’m so glad I found out about the JFSAP. I had so many questions about helping my child that I didn’t know where to turn. I’ve never been through anything like this before. Now, I feel like I have some tools to help my family. Thank you so much for being here for us.”

Following are notes from a deployed Soldier and his spouse who requested help from JFSAP after learning that their 15-month-old child had a serious and rare medical condition that was likely to also affect their 4-week-old infant. The family wanted to have their child assessed by a medical expert in their child’s condition who was located in a distant state. JFSAP worked with TRICARE and community agencies to provide case management and support to the family.

“Thank you all for your help, I am deep in Afghanistan taking care of our soldiers, Afghan nationals, coalition soldiers and it makes me feel better to know that,

special people have come into our life and helped with our family's problems. Because of you all I can do my job and not worry about my child's health. May GOD bless you all." Military member

"Dear friends, A Tricare manager called me tonight with great news promising that we would be reimbursed for our travel and hotel stay. He said he would personally walk me through the paperwork to ensure that everything will be handled as easily as possible. With that said, I wanted to thank each and every one of you for your support on getting this issue handled because if Tricare did not cover the expense I had several backup plans that were willing to help our family during this difficult time. I am just amazed at the overwhelming support you have given to our family and cannot thank you enough for your research and determination in finding resources for our family on such short notice." Spouse

Conclusion

Today's Total Force is comprised of members of all Military Components, with unprecedented use of members of the Reserve Components, who are geographically dispersed throughout the United States and its territories. As the Services and their Reserve Components expand their deployment support and re-integration programs, the JFSAP is collaborating with them, other Federal, State, and local agencies, and volunteer organizations to provide a robust set of services and support. In addition to providing direct services to members and families, the JFSAP delivers services in local communities where members and families live, through collaboration with community organizations. The JFSAP is a support service multiplier by broadening the network of resources beyond those that exist on military installations. The JFSAP is considered a success by DoD and the Services' military and civilian leadership, by the Adjutants General, military members and families and commanders.