

AFAP finds solutions to Army family problems

Erin O. Stattel, U.S. Army War College, Public Affairs Office

AFAP finds solutions to Army family problems

(October 28, 2009)—With frequent moves and family members away on long deployments, new issues in the Army family can form quickly and unexpectedly, but a way to find solutions is readily available in the form of a three-day workshop.

Volunteers brought issues to the table and either worked through them or sent them to be addressed by Army headquarters during the annual Army Family Action Plan workshop held Oct. 28-28 in the Letort View Community Center here.

Volunteers serving as delegates bring up topics ranging from teens using free weights in the gym to Army-wide standardized post deployment screening for post traumatic stress disorder, according to AFAP coordinator Jeff Hank.

"This year, we have about 30 people and we have broken groups down into three sections: community support/customer services, child and youth, and soldier support," Hanks said.

Hanks explained that each group is joined by subject matter experts from post organizations such as the commissary, TRICARE, housing and AAFES. The group is equipped with a recorder, a facilitator and an observer to monitor discussions.

"There are facilitators in each room to help decide if issues are appropriate for this forum," Hanks said. "Issues that are brought to AFAP have to be real issues that affect everybody in the community. Once the workgroup is done, the top three issues from each group are presented to the garrison commander and the commandant and it is then decided whether they are local issues or forwarded to the [Army's] AFAP, which is held in January."

Melanie Sullivan served as a delegate and was stationed in the soldier support workgroup.

"We spent the past three days brainstorming to come up with issues that will help the entire Army family's quality of life and understanding the problem so we could address the issues to find solutions for them," she said. "Issues that came up included improved bereavement services for military members who have lost their civilian

spouses. We also looked at housing for single soldiers as far as current requirements and worked on moving forward with the requirements to meet today's standards."

In the child and youth workgroup delegates and facilitators discussed methods of tracking data for military students' educational progress.

"By tracking testing data of military children we can monitor how they are doing educationally," explained delegate Paige Adgie.

"We could address the issue of needing to monitor how our students do academically by making testing data identifying military children as a subgroup," said fellow delegate Marlene Morschauser. "We also recommended that this be done from state to state so parents can see how students are doing across the nation."

Facilitator Elizabeth Gayton said the community support/customer service workgroup was able to quickly work through local issues with the help of the garrison commander and garrison department heads.

"We discussed the Dept. of Defense's initiative to start billing residents for excessive utility usage and worked through some recommendations," she said. "We had a wonderful mix of representation in our workgroup from active duty to retirees to a representative of National Guard families and DA civilians. Our SME's were great and if they didn't know the answer went flying out the door to find it."

Holding collaborative efforts like AFAP gives the Carlisle Barracks community the chance to have a voice, Hanks explained.

"This event gives a chance for the families to say, 'Hey, this is an issue and we need to address it,'" Hanks said. "It is also a chance for volunteers to serve the entire Army family by working through an issue for the greater good."

Each installation in the United States sends a delegate to the annual AFAP where delegates will work on the issues that were forwarded by installation AFAPs.

"From that meeting, they come up with the top three Army-wide issues and they are then taken on by the DA for review and policy change if necessary," Hanks said.

Hanks has been working the event for the past five years and he said he has seen issues like paying online for childcare registration to the need for PTSD screening Army-wide.

"The Army has been holding this workshop since 1983 and we are trying to make an impact on not just one person, but the entire Army family," he said.

Workgroups voiced their recommendations to senior leadership during the Oct. 28 out-brief and are already being taken into consideration.

"We are looking at all of the issues that were identified as local issues, particularly the new digital signs and wireless in the CYS," said Lt. Col. Janet Holliday, garrison commander. "We are also looking at the force protection concerns addressed by the residents of the Meadows. We have increased patrols in the Meadows and I have asked our DA police to stop and query all solicitors as to their intentions and reasons for being in the housing area."

"In addition, [the commanding general] and I plan to meet with the new general manager of our AAFES facility to address concerns about operating hours and clothing sales," Holliday said.

U.S. Army War College Archives - News Article - 01 November 2009