

FAMILY WELL BEING: WHERE WE ARE AND HOW WE GOT THERE

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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by

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ABSTRACT

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The Global War on Terror has placed intense demands on Soldiers and their families. Our Army is at War, and this includes Army families. The Army has long recognized that taking care of a Soldier's family results in the improved quality of the force. However, changes in both society and in the Army mission dictate that our family readiness programs remain relevant in the 21st Century. This is a critical issue facing Army leadership and is deserving of attention. The return on the Army's investment in Family Readiness programs is a self-reliant, resilient Army family and a Soldier who can be retained for future service. The intent of this paper will be to analyze the concept of Army Well Being and assess the state of the concept in the 21st Century. Secondly, the paper will look at the historical roots of the concept and seek to determine how the concept evolved over the course of several years. In a holistic sense, this paper will simply seek to analyze existing programs and then to determine if the programs are providing the necessary resources at the most critical level: the individual soldier and his family.

FAMILY WELL BEING: WHERE WE ARE AND HOW WE GOT THERE

Army families are under an inordinate amount of stress in 2007. An extremely high operational tempo coupled with the demands of the Army's ongoing transformation efforts have directly contributed to the high amount of stressors on the 21st Century Army family. The Army has long recognized the criticality of providing a high standard of support to its families. This recognition was based on the knowledge that the quality of the force has a direct correlation to the quality of life each individual soldier is afforded.

In 1993 the United States Army Research Institute published a comprehensive report entitled *What We Know About Army Families*. The primary purpose of this report was to disseminate information obtained through research pertaining to the particular needs of Army families. The report's intent was to link the necessity of quality family support programs to retention, readiness, and basic family adaptation to the rigors of Army life.¹ Since the publication of the 1993 report, the Army has undergone a dramatic change in its Operational Tempo and missions. This change has dramatically increased the level of stress being placed on Soldiers and more importantly has also placed a level of stress on Army Families that has not been seen in the history of the United States Army.

As an Army, we have been engaged in only two conflicts of longer duration. The ongoing war has placed a heavy reliance on Soldiers and has required the deployment of nearly every active duty formation in the Army. The Army is also in the midst of an organizational restructuring that is also placing great strains on our families. Senior Army leaders have recognized these facts and more importantly have acknowledged

the fact that families are an integral part in maintaining this all-volunteer force. No longer does the old axiom hold true that if the Army had wanted you to have a wife they would have issue you one. In the words of the Honorable Pete Geren, Secretary of the Army, this idea is as “antiquated as the smoothbore musket”²

In an October 2007 speech, CSA General George Casey acknowledged that the Army must improve its Family Support systems. He acknowledges that our Soldiers are truly the centerpiece and bedrock of our strength but this strength can only be sustained through the sustenance of our families. Our Soldiers commitment is fueled in large part by the Families commitment and Well Being. This continued commitment can only be assured through the Army’s commitment to our Families³. This realization has led to increased emphasis on Family support programs and the need for these programs to adequately meet the needs of our Families.

The purpose of this paper will be to examine the current status of Army Family support programs in the context of the current fight we find ourselves in. The paper will seek to shed some light on existing programs, their usefulness and will examine ways to improve the existing systems. The paper will also seek to put forth a clear picture of the Army family in 2007 and show how the Army family of today differs from the Army family makeup of years past. Finally, this paper will address the needs of Army families in three critical and distinct stages in their lifecycle. These phases are: Preparation for deployment, Deployment, and redeployment. This paper will not cover in depth each program and initiatives being offered by the Army to its families but will instead highlight what may be considered to be the most critical programs currently in use. Thoughts on possible improvements to existing Family Support programs will also be provided.

Throughout its history the United States Army has relied on a relatively small, volunteer force to fight its wars. In recent history, only in instances of full blown conflict (e.g, World War Two, Vietnam War) did the Army move to conscription to fill its ranks. In 1973 however, the Army adjusted its mentality on manning and adapted the All-Volunteer Army concept. The core of this concept revolved on the notion that an all volunteer force equaled a highly trained, motivated professional Army able to effectively deal with the nations emergencies.⁴ This idea of an All-Volunteer force was a major paradigm shift for Army leaders.

Families have always been an integral part of our Army. From the earliest days of the Army's inception, wives and children accompanied their soldiers from duty station to duty station. However, no encompassing Army regulation outlined the specific care and support for these families. The modicum of family support efforts that were in place existed only among individual units and the programs were extremely informal. By the late 20th^h Century, Army leadership had come to realize that it had an obligation to provide basic support services to Army families. Congressional reviews of Army family policy however, yielded little gain for Army families. Family support programs still gained little recognition and the Army struggled to overcome faulty assumptions and ingrained prejudices against family inclusion in its ranks.

The early 20th Century Army considered enlisted families as a burden and Army regulations discouraged marriage. Families were considered as being a distraction from, and not conducive to the execution of effective military operations. Positive change did finally begin to take hold albeit very gradually. In 1942 congress enacted Public Law 490 which enacted basic benefits for military family members. By the 1950's

embryonic Family and Soldier support programs had begun to be established. These programs signaled a positive trajectory but clearly lacked the effectiveness required for significant change. By the 1960's family members outnumbered uniformed personnel. This significant fact pushed the Army to develop a Family Support Program under the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel.

The 1960's witnessed a growing awareness of the need for viable, effective Family Support Programs. This trend continued into the 1970's, with the first Quality of Life Program being established in 1979. This growth coincided with the birth of the all-volunteer force in 1973. The subsequent growth and maintenance of this all volunteer force however forced Army leadership to acknowledge the necessity to provide improved benefits to both Soldiers and their families. For the first time, senior Army leadership recognized clearly the inherent link between a quality force and Family support.

Quality family support programs were intimately linked to a host of other issues including readiness, retention, and recruiting. The 1980's witnessed the first family symposiums, dedicated to addressing Family Support issues. The true high-water mark occurred in 1983 when CSA General John Wickham published *The Army Family White Paper*⁵. General Wickham recognized the absolute necessity for the Army to clearly articulate a philosophy identifying how the Army would take care of its families. He felt strongly that the Army as an institution had an institutional obligation to ensure that this support was provided. This philosophy would be all encompassing and would utilize a structured approach to identifying needs, deciding on courses of action and implementing those courses of action.

At the heart of Wickham's philosophy was an acknowledgement that the Army had utilized an "ad-hoc", piecemeal approach to taking care of its families and needed a framework based on logical, consistent rationale.⁶ Wickham envisioned a true partnership between the Army and its families. He recognized that this partnership was affected by several variables to include the uniqueness of the Army missions, evolving concepts of service and lifestyle, and changing demographics of the force. Army leadership recognized that the culture of 1983 was significantly different from earlier American cultures and the leadership inherently realized that Soldiers reflected a microcosm of this new societal norm.

The definition of the traditional family had changed dramatically from the first half of the 20th Century to the latter half. Single parent families, couples without any children and rising divorce rates all signaled that a change was needed in how the Army focused its family support efforts.⁷ In addition, a greater number of younger soldiers of lower rank were married than ever before in the Army's history. The increased number of families with children led to an increased demand for quality child care, programs for educational programs for youth, and structured youth activities. Improved economic conditions resulted in an increasing number of soldiers owning their own homes and living off post vice living within the confines of the installation.

Army wives increasingly began to seek employment outside of the traditional "stay at home" mothering traditions. This led to increasing requests for career development opportunities for the spouses of Army Soldiers. While this is a seemingly simple issue, it posed a different type of challenge for Army leaders at all levels. Now, spousal

employment considerations had to be considered in any calculus involving assignment and duty performance of the soldier.

Lastly, but perhaps most importantly, the Army began to see a trend in which Army spouses became much more vocal and active in the form of self-advocacy groups. Spouses began to demand to meet with unit leaders in order to discuss issues and seek solutions to those issues. Never before in the Army's history had this phenomenon occurred and it forced leaders at all levels to broaden their traditional view of with what an Army leader needs to be concerned.

A meeting of wives with unit leaders was first held at VII Corps headquarters in Munich, Germany in August 1979 to discuss issues and concerns. In 1980 the Officers Wives Club of the Greater Washington Area sponsored the first Army wide Family Symposium with the assistance of the Association of the United States Army. This was followed in 1981 and 1982 with subsequent world wide Family Action Committee meetings which were held in Washington, DC.⁸ All of these events foretold a fundamental mental change in our force and most importantly dictated that our leadership develop a plan to cope with this radical shift.

The family symposiums of the early 1980's all indicated that Army families were concerned with several core issues. Families wanted increased standards of support for child support services to include, improved youth activities, child care and standardized educational criteria in schools. Families wanted improved health care systems and improved housing. Families wanted support programs centralized. Increasing spousal employment and education required that the Army develop a sensitivity to and recognize the spouses as an integral, individual part of the Army

team.⁹ All of these trends drove the Army to reevaluate its approach to dealing with its families and led to General Wickham's Army Family Philosophy.

Wickham's philosophy acknowledged the uniqueness of the Army as an institution. While recognizing this uniqueness, it also recognized that the Army is composed of individuals, to include family members who share common concerns and needs with civilian counterparts. All efforts must be made to afford Army members the same privileges and level of support as is afforded to civilian members of our society. General Wickham first used the term wellness to describe the process of growing families and units of excellence. Wickham clearly and correctly linked this idea of wellness to an all encompassing sense of commitment by Army Soldiers and their families. He termed the concept "reciprocity of commitment". A Soldier's sense of commitment to the institution directly corresponded to the amount of commitment the institution provided to the Soldier and his family. At its core was the principle of common beliefs and a shared purpose in a unique organization with no comparison in the civilian sector. This reciprocity resulted in a desired linkage between Army leaders and Army families. Wickham acknowledged that this linkage could be a source of friction and would require that Army leaders frequently meet and hear family concerns and issues.

Wickham recognized the diversity of the Army and realized that certain concerns and issues would not lend themselves to "cookie-cutter" solutions. His Family Action Plan, as it became known, acknowledged that not every issue would be solved due to budget considerations and other competing demands. The 1983 Family Philosophy further recognized that each installation and Army community has its own unique set of issues and because of this General Wickham stressed the importance of management

tiers focused on solving issues at the lowest possible level. It was then incumbent on Army leadership at all levels to conduct analysis and develop policies to solve/mitigate those issues. The fundamental bottom line of Wickham's 1983 Army Family White paper was that it gave much needed clarity and direction to Army Family programs and signified a monumental break with the ways in which the programs had been viewed prior to 1983. It provided the framework for the Army to begin a comprehensive review of existing programs and most importantly provided a clearly defined way ahead for Army leadership to develop viable family support programs for future years¹⁰.

Twenty years passed as the Army grappled with the evolving concept of improving its support to families and soldiers and building on General Wickham's vision. In General Shinseki's intent statement of June 1999, he recognized that Army readiness was inextricably linked to the well being of the Soldiers in the force-to include families. In January 2001, General John Keane, the VCSA, published guidance for the Well Being Strategic Plan¹¹. This guidance was based on the result of a comprehensive study of the concept and status of Well Being throughout the Army. The USAWC played a significant part in obtaining useful data for the study.

Relooking Army support processes, to include personnel, was driven in large part by the changes the Army began undergoing at the outset of the 21st Century. In 2001 the Army was undergoing significant transformation in terms of equipment, doctrine, training and organization. Army leadership inherently recognized the fundamental changes the Army would experience due to this transformation and the stresses this change would place on the human dimension of the force. The Well-Being plan as envisioned by senior Army leadership would provide a firm foundation on which the

Army could rely during this tumultuous period. LTG Kevin Byrnes realized the impact transformation would have on Army personnel when he stated that “transformation has been talked about in terms of organizational and material changes, but it’s far, far more than that. It’s a cultural, intellectual, and physical change—a complete alteration of the Army as we know it today”¹²

Perhaps the most significant concept put forward in the 2001 Well Being plan was the development and nurturing of self-reliant Army families through the Army’s commitment to individual basic needs. This was the continued maturation of General Wickham’s concept of a partnership between the Army and its Soldiers, including its families. It speaks to the issue of reciprocity between an Army community and the Army as an institution. Keane’s document acknowledges the intangible components of well being, again hearkening to Wickham’s understanding that the linkage between Army leaders at all levels and families was fraught with friction and would require well-honed, aggressive Army leadership skills. Maintained properly, this linkage “cements the bond between the Army and its members.”¹³ While seemingly a simple concept at face value, this signified a major paradigm shift in Army thinking and more importantly what Army leaders are required to do.

The 2001 definition of Well Being was defined as the “...personal-physical, material, mental, and spiritual- state of soldiers....and their families that contributes to their preparedness to perform and support the Army’s mission”¹⁴ The term Soldiers incorporated active, reserve, guard, retirees and veterans and further specified that Army families are an integral, vital part of the Army team. The concept of Army Well Being in the 21st Century recognized the fact that Soldiers are recruited and families are

retained.¹⁵ Well Being initially was viewed as a condition resulting from a system of individual programs but is now viewed as a synchronized effort among all existing Army agencies. The Army developed a framework to guide its strategic approach to manage Well Being efforts and its implementation throughout the force.

Well-Being was built on the fundamental foundation of service to the nation. It is important to note that Well-Being never supersedes this fundamental precept and acknowledges that individual needs are always subordinate to the needs of the Army and the nation. Each individual in the Army fulfilled three types of roles on top of the fundamental concept of service to the nation. The role of provider was to meet the basic need to thrive. This role is based on an individual Soldiers aspiration to earn a living and provide for his or her family. These programs were designed to provide the essentials (housing, health care, pay) to enable Soldiers to live comfortably and increase the quality of life. Army programs which enable this function were considered essential to Well-Being.

The role of Army team member centers on the need to connect with members of your team. This concept is based on the Army as a team and the necessity to increase an individual's sense of belonging to an organization larger than themselves thereby strengthening the organization as whole. This building block concept of team speaks to the notion of the Army as a community with unique needs, personnel, and systems. This again is closely tied to General Wickham's vision of shared purpose between Army members and their families¹⁶. The individuality of Soldiers and their family is addressed in the need to grow as individuals. This speaks to an individual's desire to grow and increase productivity on a personal level. It is important to note that this building block

touches upon the criticality of providing avenues and support for spouses to grow as well as service members.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, throughout the Well-Being Framework there are a host of intangibles that must be mitigated through solid, engaged leadership. These intangibles include command climate and Operational Tempo among others¹⁷. The desired end state for the Well Being program as envisioned in 2001 was an integrated, holistic system of programs designed to meet the institutional needs of the Army by meeting the personnel needs of its members and families. The program would be resourced and designed to take into account the changing operational conditions the Army would find itself involved in during the 21st Century as well as acknowledging the changing societal norms our Soldiers and Army finds itself in. Doing this would result in envisioned productive outcomes in terms of recruiting, retention, and readiness and would enable the Army to accomplish its full spectrum missions¹⁸. Five strategic goals were designed to facilitate the Army reaching its desired end state.

The first goal of the Well Being Concept was to develop an all encompassing comprehensive strategy that integrates well being initiatives, programs, and resources to meet the needs of the Army. The second goal was to provide a competitive standard of living for soldiers and their families. The third goal was to provide a sense of culture and community thereby engendering a strong sense of pride and belonging among Soldiers, civilians and family members. The fourth goal was to create and foster an environment which enabled Soldiers and their family members to grow as valued individuals. The fifth and final strategic goal was for the Army to grow leaders who are savvy to the criticality and importance of Well Being¹⁹.

General Shinseki published *The Army Family: A White Paper* in 2003 which built upon the 1983 Army Family paper written by General Wickham. Although the Army of 2003 was different in many ways from the Army of 1983, considerable similarities existed in the demographic makeup of the Army. The force was 53% married as opposed to 50% of the force being married in 1983. Clearly, the nurturing of Army families had to remain an institutional priority²⁰. There were, however, some rather significant changes within Army Family demographics of 2003 which differed from the demographics of 1983. The percentage of females on Active Duty almost doubled from 1983 demographics. The active duty force in 1983 consisted of 9% female soldiers as opposed to 15% in 2003²¹. This significant increase elevated the issue of joint-domicile parenting and family care in the event of both parents deploying. This clearly had implications for the need of improved child care infrastructure in the Army as well as increasing leader awareness of the issue.

Perhaps the most critical offshoot of the 1983 Army Family paper was the emphasis that began to be placed on obtaining scientific data through surveys of Army families. These surveys resulted in precise demographic databases and a large body of scientific studies for use by Army leadership. These surveys brought to light several encompassing problem areas and areas of concern as voiced by the force:

- Spouses wanted to share in achieving financial security and desired that parenting be shared.
- The desire to be married and have children remained high.
- Separations due to deployments and relocation were identified as major factors of stress on families.

- Strong family readiness programs and deployment to mitigate these stressors was considered vital.
- Families desired continuous leadership support vice a surge in support only during times of deployments.
- Closely tied to the issue of relocation and Permanent Change of Station issues was educational concerns for children. Parents strongly desired the establishment of minimum educational standards to mitigate the educational disruptions of required moves.
- The perception that family support programs were available when and where Soldiers needed them was linked to Soldier satisfaction.
- Finally, the criticality of quality and effective leader involvement was shown to dramatically improve family readiness programs²².

As the Army began to prosecute the Global War on Terror, efforts began to be made to determine the impact of deployments on families and retention of service members. Data indicated that family support to extended deployments does not dwindle provided that quality family support is provided. The type of treatment families received during a spouse's deployment was deemed far more important than the number of days spent away from home.

Army leadership in 2003 recognized that 21st Century would bring great stress to Army families-perhaps more stress than at any other time in our history. As a result, the Army began to look at ways to deal with the emerging challenges to Army families. General Shinseki correctly surmised that the possibility existed for lengthy deployments and extended U.S. presence in Central Asia and the Middle East²³. In summation,

Army leadership in the 21st Century envisioned its Well Being program as being executed in an integrated, holistic fashion. Furthermore, the Army envisioned implementation of the Well being process as being a strategy relying on bottom up input and a top down/leadership driven strategy based on the needs of service members and their families.

Army leadership of 2001 must be given recognition for identifying the critical need to formalize and streamline our efforts in improving basic soldier support. It is because of their efforts that the Army has been able to sustain itself during the Global War on Terror. They must also be given credit for realizing the value to Army Families of the 1983 Wickham paper. Wickham's paper on Army Families was the genesis of current Well Being programs in the Army and recognized the changing world wide environment our military would find in as the 21st Century began. What remains to be seen and will be discussed during the next section of this paper is the progress and status of Well Being in Army families in 2007. It is clear that the Army has made significant progress in many areas but it is also clear that attention must continue to be paid to the critical enabler of Well Being as it relates to the readiness of our force. The next portion of this paper will discuss the defining characteristics of the Army family in 2007.

The Army family of 2007 differs little in terms of demographics from the Army family construct used by General Shinseki in 2003. General Shinseki's prediction of extended deployments has come to fruition, however, and has impacted Army families in ways that are perhaps even more demanding than he envisioned. As stated earlier, the Army of 2007 finds itself in largely uncharted waters in terms of the sheer amount of time we have been at war.

Much like it has been throughout the Army's recent history, family members significantly outnumber service personnel. Since the early 1990's through FY 22005 the percentage of family members has hovered between 57 to 59%. The Army is the largest of the four services so it logically has the most family members. Based on the most current demographic data however, the Army's 1.47 family members per individual soldier is also higher than any other branch of the service²⁴. Forty seven percent of Army personnel have children which is also higher than other branches of the military.

The bulk of Active Duty soldiers are under the age of 29. A critical second order effect of this age demographic is that more than half of Army spouses (53%) are under 30 years of age²⁵. Twenty-Six percent of Army spouses are married to junior enlisted personnel (E1-E4). This fact is telling in that it speaks to the significant number of younger spouses unfamiliar with the demands of the Army. This inexperience, coupled with lengthy combat deployments serves to exacerbate the difficulties inherent in Army life.

The Army has in its ranks more than 450,000 dependant children and it also is a young population. Of all Army children, 51% are under the age of seven which creates a huge need for quality, effective child care. The critical need for effective childcare increases during deployments²⁶.

Army family support systems rely heavily on the volunteerism of other Army spouses. These volunteers perform critical functions in the execution of Family support programs. In a survey of Army families, data indicates that 31% of those family members volunteer in both military and/or in civilian organizations. The need for experienced, qualified volunteers increases in importance during extended

deployments. It is important to note that research suggests the workloads and demands on these volunteers has steadily increased due the Global War on Terror. This is yet another facet of the friction being caused by the lengthy duration of the Long War²⁷.

Army volunteers must be given some effective support themselves to enable them to perform their crucial duties to Army families. Access to support is also a critical factor that must be considered. Data obtained from active duty spouses surveyed in 1999 indicate that one third of all families live on military installations, another third live in civilian homes outside of an installation²⁸. The single biggest challenge in terms of access is for USAR and ARNG personnel and their families who typically reside in civilian communities far from active duty military installations.

Army families have always been characterized by the severe demands placed on them which are not traditional for our civilian counterparts. The essence of military unit cohesion revolves around the notion that commitment to Unit, its mission and its members retain primacy over an individual's commitment to family. In the book *The Military Family: A Practice Guide for Human Service Providers*, the concept of "unlimited commitment" is discussed. This concept is deeply rooted in the military psyche and speaks to fact that service members may be required to sacrifice their lives in service to the nation and in pursuit of mission accomplishment. The authors of the book posit that this concept is not objectionable to military members and their families but instead is accepted. What is objected to is the perception of ineffective and uncaring leadership which does not stress the importance and value of family and the maintenance of the correct balance²⁹.

The risk of injury and/or death in the context of Iraq and Afghanistan may be subtly different than in previous wars. Casualty data from Iraq and Afghanistan indicates the indiscriminate nature of many of the casualties. In previous wars the casualties came from largely combat arms personnel but in Iraq and Afghanistan, many of the casualties are service support and combat support personnel suggesting all soldiers are much more vulnerable³⁰. General Wickham's accurate assessment that leaders in the Army must be developed who are able to deal with the friction implicit in the nurturing of healthy families is even more relevant in the context of Iraq and Afghanistan now that all Soldiers and families are effected with the threat of death or serious wounds. The concept of balance between family and mission has never been more relevant in the Army's history.

Deployment cycles are often unpredictable both in terms of actual deployment dates as well as re-deployment dates. Another piece of important data for Soldiers and families who have experienced deployments to Afghanistan of Iraq is the fact that the actual act of deploying does not begin the actual time of separation. A fact that is often overlooked is the demands placed on Soldiers and their families in the trainup/preparation time for a deployment. In many cases this trainup period often begins many months prior to the actual deployment of the unit. The trainup period results in extraordinary demands on a Soldiers time and results in less time spent with his or her family.

The pre-deployment phase can in many ways be more demanding on families than the act of actual deployment. Once a Unit actually deploys to Iraq there is a tremendous sense of beginning the long road to redeployment which is a families true

start point. The months of pre-deployment trainup coupled with numerous changes in the actual deployment date only served to increase family strain and is psychologically draining.

Permanent Changes of Station and frequent moves have long been a reality of military life. Educational concerns for children, availability of housing, and job opportunities for spouses are all voiced as concerns by military families dealing with the upheavals of frequent moves.

It is blindingly obvious that military families are very different from civilian families. Military families have different characteristics and needs and Soldiers have unique and important missions in service to the Nation. The above mentioned conditions have all been present to some degree in our Army since its inception but have come increasingly to the forefront in the 21st Century with the demands and stresses placed on the force by the Global War on Terror.

While the demands placed on military families in 2007 are extremely high, research continues to indicate that Army families will adapt, are resilient and can thrive given a realistic set of expectations. With realistic expectations Army families will adapt, become self-reliant and lead satisfying lives. It is critical that the expectations are realistic however. Absolutely essential to this is the necessity of leader involvement at all levels and all phases of an Army family's life. There is convincing evidence that Army leadership is committed to developing healthy families and is making great strides in improving existing systems as well as developing newer more effective systems. The next portion of this paper will identify recommendations for a 21st Century model of support for Army Families.

The Army has long recognized the absolute necessity of providing timely, effective, support to its Soldiers and their families. The Army in 2008 recognizes that the sustainment of Soldiers and their Families is a strategic imperative which is vital to our success in the War on Terror. The Army unveiled the Family Covenant on 8 Oct 2007 at the AUSA conference which clearly articulated Army leadership's commitment to and support of Army families. Following in the footsteps of past Chiefs of Staff, General Casey has reaffirmed the Army's commitment to Families in the 21st Century. The covenant builds upon the foundational principles established by Generals Wickham and Shinseki and demonstrates that Army leadership is listening and cognizant of Army Family needs. The document acknowledges sacrifices of Army families, and expresses an appreciation for those sacrifices. Most importantly, it acknowledges that Army leadership is in a partnership with it Families.

In *What We Know About Army Families: 2007 Update*, Segal and Bell suggest that the Army strategy for 21 Century family support be grounded on a set of core principles which will serve to guide Army leadership on policy direction and the implementation of family support programs and services. These core concepts are valid and are useful in serving as a roadmap for the sustainment or improvement in Family Support Programs for the 21st Century and are embedded in the intent of the Army Family Covenant.

The first core concept is the recognition that support mechanisms rely on *both formal* and informal processes. Informal social support stems from the type of support an individual or family receives from other family members, spouses, other unit members and neighbors. Formal support structures involve the use of installation and Army wide support mechanisms designed to bolster well-being and offer necessary

help. Segal and Bell indicate that one of the most critical functions of Army formal support mechanisms is to provide and facilitate Army families in developing a robust, healthy informal support network.³¹

Family Readiness Groups (FRG) are perhaps the best example of the nexus between the formal and informal support structures. FRG's foster the development of critical informal relationships at the Unit level while combining the availability and usefulness of formal support mechanisms. FRG's reflect the core Army belief that effective leadership is paramount to quality family support efforts. The strongest and most effective FRGs are reflective of strong leadership and emphasis on the program³². The Army has recognized the vital importance of Unit FRGs and in FY 2007 increased the number of Family Readiness Support Assistants by providing the assistants down to battalion level formations and spending over seven million dollars implementing the effort.³³

The second core concept is that consistency and predictability are highly valued by all Army families. Segal and Bell define consistent support as a standardized baseline level of support for Soldiers and their families. The type and level of support must not vary from installation to installation. Families must be offered the same level of support at Fort Hood as they are offered at Fort Benning. This must also be applied to the Reserve and National Guard component of the Army as well.

The third concept is that deployment is an ongoing cycle. As mentioned earlier in the paper we are truly an expeditionary Army and it is expected that deployments will continue for several more years at the least. Deployments must continue to be viewed

in a holistic sense and must include support mechanisms for pre-deployment and post deployment phases of the process.

Arguably, the most important phase of the deployment cycle is the pre-deployment phase in which conditions are established to allow families to sustain themselves while their Soldier is deployed. Too often, spouses do not get “plugged” into a support system until it is too late and the spouse has deployed. This issue rests solely on Army leadership to solve. Spouses must make a concerted effort to obtain the necessary support and demonstrate Wickham’s “reciprocity of commitment”.

Partnerships enhance the Army’s support capabilities. The Army must continue to dialogue with civilian organizations designed to enhance support for Army Families. More importantly, the Army must make every effort to ensure that the capabilities and efforts of these organizations are being publicized to Army spouses. Good examples of fruitful partnerships include Military Impacted Schools Association (MISA) and Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) who focus on the educational needs of military children. Information from any support organization the Army partners with must be made available to Army Families at the lowest level, beginning with its Family Readiness Groups.

Technology is a critical support multiplier. Nearly every family in America today has at least one personal computer in the home. Army families of the 21st Century are no different. The Army must continue to make use of the internet and the posting of as much information as possible on Unit/organizational websites. Easily accessible information, obtained conveniently through the internet increases aids predictability for spouses. Training schedules, deployment information and other bits of useful

information can be obtained quickly and accurately. The information must be tailored to the audience and provide information that is easy to access, substantive, and interest grabbing. An area of emphasis that must continue to be developed is websites that focus on Army children. It is important to remember that the Army has the most dependant children of any branch of the service. Children in the 21st Century are extremely computer savvy and websites must continue to be developed which are focused on children of Soldiers.

Finally, command emphasis will continue to be the most critical aspect of any Family support program in the Army. The Army must continue to emphasize the importance of Family Well Being to its leaders and continue to educate its leaders on key aspects of Family support. Family Readiness Group assistants must continue to develop effective working relationships with commanders and must continue to play an important role in the Units health and well being. Commanders must be encouraged to include “experts” in family support in their decision making. This interaction must be continuous through all phases of the deployment and it must be proactive vice reactive in order to be effective.³⁴

In conclusion, the Army has for many years been cognizant of the fact that Army families play a critical role in the effectiveness of our force. General Wickham’s White paper on Army families in 1983 has been built upon by successive Chiefs of Staff who have continued to improve the level of support given to Army families. The Army recognizes the changing demographics of our Army as well as the demands which are being placed upon Army families in the 21st Century. Recognition of the extraordinary

demands on Army Families will continue to drive Army leadership towards better, more effective Family support programs.

Endnotes

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²³ Ibid., 19-20.

²⁴ Booth, 12.

²⁵ Ibid.,13.

²⁶ Ibid., 19-20.

²⁷ Ibid., 22-23.

²⁸ Ibid., 23-24.

²⁹ Martin, 15-16.

³⁰ Booth., 25.

³¹ Ibid., 108-109.

³² Ibid., 120-121.

³³ DA slides "Army Improvements in Soldier and Family Readiness" n.d

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