

Soldiers, Families, Senior Leaders improve Army quality of life

By Rob McIlvaine, FMWRC Public Affairs

ALEXANDRIA, Va. - Arriving from garrisons as far away as Korea, 117 delegates came together last week to discuss issues, listen to subject matter experts provide background information on new and old issues, and ultimately make the Army a better place for Families to call home through a process called the Army Family Action Plan.

The U.S. Army has been celebrating the 25th anniversary of the creation of AFAP since August 15. On that date in 1983, the U.S. Army Chief of Staff, General John A. Wickham, wrote a ground-breaking white paper titled "The Army Family" which identified the need for the Army to increase support to its Families.

Gen. Wickham and his staff asserted that a healthy Family environment allows Soldiers to concentrate more fully on their mission.

In 1983, the Army was transforming from an organization of conscripted and short-term enlistees comprised of mostly unmarried military members (with a 10 percent re-enlistment rate) to an all-volunteer, professional force consisting of more than 50 percent married personnel.

"We've come a long way from a time when the Army said, 'If you're married, you can't join. If you get married while in the Army, you can't re-enlist'," said Secretary of the Army Pete Geren to the AFAP delegates made up of Soldiers, Family members, wounded warriors, retirees and delegates representing Army Families.

"The all-volunteer force required us to think very differently about many aspects of the Army and certainly Family support," Geren said.

At the first AFAP symposium, the attendees identified 65 issues. Over the past 25 years, AFAP has dealt with a total of 633 issues.



Col. Jimmie Keenan, Chief of Staff, Army Medical Action Plan, Army Medical Department, Office of the Surgeon General, listens as Captain Fayette Frahm, former company commander of a hospital in Iraq, speaks about areas of concern for warriors in transition.

The work groups deliberated on issues last week under the headings of Benefits and Entitlements, Facilities and Housing, Employment, Force Support, Family Support, and Medical and Dental. The Family Support, Medical and Dental work groups were divided into two work groups each because of the volume of issues they were discussing.

Over 90 percent of AFAP issues are resolved at the local level, with more than 61 percent of the active issues impacting all sister services. Since 1983, AFAP has resulted in 107 changes to national legislation, 154 revised Department of Defense or Army regulations and policies, and 173 improvements to programs and services.

Currently, according to Tricia Brooks, the HQDA AFAP Issue Manager, there are 435 issues completed, with 118 unattainable, 75 still active, and five issues combined.

"Leaders trust and support AFAP because the members provide real-time information that enables commanders to respond more rapidly

to resolve problems, implement good ideas and guide policy formation," said Brooks.



Lt. Gen. Robert Wilson, Assistant Chief of Staff for Installation Management, Col. Stephen D. Hunte, the Installation Management Command Surgeon, and M.A. Lucas, Director of Child Youth and School Services at the Family and MWR Command discuss respite care issues during a break in the AFAP conference.

"The average length to resolve an issue is three years," Brooks said. "Last week, eight workshops discussed 64 new issues and two were picked at each workshop after deliberation. This means 16 new issues will enter into the Department of Army AFAP process and will be assigned to members of Army staff, who will develop an Action Plan and ultimately resolve the issue."

"The top five are just a sub-section of the 16 that were brought into the AFAP by delegate prioritization," said Brooks. "They are just like the other 11 entered into AFAP, the only difference is that the top five will be on the June 2009 AFAP GOSC (General Officer Steering Committee) agenda to identify the actions and plans to resolve them."

On Tuesday, the General Officer Steering Committee (GOSC) took 23 of the 75 of the active issues (GOSC meets two times a year with twenty-five of the issues reviewed each time) to decide the status for each issue: Completed, Unattainable, or Active.

Attendees at the meeting included senior officials from the Department of Defense, Department of the Army, and representatives from Army Staff and Army commands.

The GOSC closed nine (7 were completed and two were unattainable) and concurred with entering two OCONUS issues into the AFAP.

On January 30, following the conclusion of the conference, the Army's Vice Chief of Staff will post a summary of the meeting at Army OneSource, on the AFAP page.

At the conference opening session, Geren thanked the delegates for "...bringing these issues up as you have over the last 25 years (and) making sure your voices are heard. I thank you for making the greatest contribution to the cause of freedom. Our nation owes you a great debt," Geren said.

"The Army of today doesn't look like the Army of 1973 in so many ways. You have helped to make the Army work for Families."

If you'd like to get involved in improving the quality of life for Soldiers and Families, contact your local Family Programs or Army Community Service (ACS) office to learn how to participate in AFAP.