



Chapter Six: Professional Coordination, Collaboration, and Partnerships

Successful programs to meet the unique needs of EFMs and their families demand a high degree of inter-agency and inter-disciplinary coordination and a commitment to building long-term partnerships among very different program entities. The previous chapters describe the diversity of organizations, professionals, and program requirements that must come together in a coherent way to respond to special needs and keep EFMs and their families from suffering any more hardship than is absolutely necessary. This chapter covers some of the mechanisms and organizational features in place to achieve effective coordination and collaboration among program components and features a few of the innovative initiatives that are currently at work in support of military special needs families.

6.1 Interdisciplinary Installation Programs

Each of the Services and Public Law establish requirements that must be met through interdisciplinary activities at the installation. This section details ways that installation programs collaborate across disciplines on behalf of special needs families.

6.1.1 Special Needs Coordinating Committees

Installations that are committed to supporting military families with EFMs will have an effective coordinating committee. Members of a coordinating committee should include key personnel from every installation organization that has a role in helping families meet their special needs. A typical committee will be chaired by the EFMP/Special Needs coordinator or manager, and members will include representatives from medical, personnel, housing, legal, and family support activities, as well as local schools and installation programs for children and youth. An effective coordinating committee will have one or more special needs parents as members. The committee should use its time together to address special needs issues that cross disciplinary boundaries, identify barriers faced by EFMs within the military community, and plan actions and events to support their needs. Meeting minutes provided to the installation commanding officer will help to ensure ongoing community investment in EFM support.

✓ An effective coordinating committee will have one or more special needs parents as members.

6.1.2 Special Needs Resource Teams

A special needs resource team (SNRT) is a multi-disciplinary group that convenes as necessary to make decisions about the placement of a special needs child within the installation child development or youth services programs. A SNRT meeting is similar in concept to IFSP and IEP meetings (Chapter 3) in that it involves parents and professionals working together to identify a child's needs and agreeing upon a plan to meet them. In addition to parents, a SNRT team will typically include the EFMP/Special Needs coordinator/manager, the child and youth program manager, a community health nurse, and other professionals as needed including a physician, social worker, speech therapist, and physical or occupational therapist. The team will review the child's condition and needs and recommend a developmentally appropriate child care environment, group size, staff training requirement, and alterations that must be made to programs or environments. In addition to being a collaborative effort to achieve the most developmentally appropriate care for a special needs child, an effective special needs resource team serves as legal protection against possible claims that the installation failed to offer proper care or make reasonable accommodation.

6.1.3 Child Find Activities

As explained in Chapter 3, Child Find is a component of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). To meet the intent of the law, states and DoD activities are required to locate and evaluate children with disabilities who are in need of early intervention or special education. At a military installation, Child Find (or Family Find as it is sometimes called) involves screening activities, public awareness, and education for installation personnel about identification and referral. A comprehensive Child Find program is likely to involve

- EFMP/special needs coordinator/manager or Educational and Developmental Intervention Services (EDIS) staff as organizers of Child Find activities
- medical staff as screeners and evaluators (routinely or during special Child Find activities)
- Public Affairs Office staff to promote Child Find activities and ensure an ongoing public awareness campaign
- local school personnel to provide education about the requirements of IDEA and special education
- staff of all programs that serve children and families to make referrals when they suspect special needs

Additional Information and suggestions for Child Find activities, including model projects, can be found on the website: www.childfindidea.org.

6.2 Collaborative Research and Training Projects

Military families are fortunate to have a number of nonprofit organizations working on their behalf to influence policy makers, to conduct research into the impact of the military lifestyle on families, and to provide training on a wide variety of topics to family members and the professionals who serve them. Two organizations that focus on special needs issues are the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) and Specialized Training of Military Parents (STOMP). This section features projects that are being carried out in collaboration with one or more of the Military Departments or installations for the benefit of all military families with special needs.

6.2.1 MCEC Special Education Leaders Institute (S.E.L.I.)©

The Military Child Education Coalition’s Special Education Leaders Institute is a series of two institutes developed to promote awareness and increase the availability of professional educators who understand the challenges associated with mobile military-connected students with special needs as they transition from school to school.



The purpose of S.E.L.I. is to support the military-connected student with special needs through understanding, accommodation, processes/procedures and protocols, networking, technologies, and communication. At S.E.L.I., educators from around the world share “promising practices” through networking, and they collaborate on developing more effective tools and processes. Through S.E.L.I., professionals are achieving MCEC’s goal of improving the lives of the military family. S.E.L.I. is held annually in conjunction with the MCEC national conference and throughout the year at the request of a school district and/or military installation.

6.2.2 MCEC Interactive Counseling Center (ICC)©

The MCEC has developed an Interactive Counseling Center initiative, which is a private web-based video conferencing system. This controlled system allows students, families, and educational professionals to exchange information in “real time” between sending and receiving schools with safety and confidence. The possibilities for students with special education needs are monumental. MCEC has installed over 85 ICCs in schools, trained the staffs, and has now connected schools that are serving military communities all over the world.

The ICC is designed on the Windows XP operating system, and the hardware includes a computer system with custom programmed software, LCD flat panel monitor, video camera, speakers, microphone, document scanner, and color printer. It utilizes plug-and-play technology with a streamlined interface that is not only user friendly but also secure. The ICC accomplishes the following objectives:

- Allow schools and parents to connect to each other through a point-to-point video conference using a standard internet connection
- Allow the scanning and exchange of student records and other documents and the saving for later review of those scanned documents on the system’s internal hard drive
- Provide a chat system that permits users to type messages or talk dynamically back and forth
- Include a whiteboard program that gives users on each side of the video conference the ability to highlight portions of scanned documents for review and write, chart, diagram or draw on the whiteboard while the other side watches (whiteboard input can then be saved for later reference or printing)
- Provide a web browser that is active during conferencing for each counselor to review the school’s website for curriculum and other school information

For additional information about S.E.L.I. and ICCs, visit the MCEC website www.militarychild.org or contact

Military Child Education Coalition
Special Education Leaders Institute
P.O. Box 2519 Harker Heights, TX 76548
(254) 953-1923

6.2.3 STOMP Parent Professionals Team Workshop (PPTW)

STOMP (Specialized Training of Military Parents) is a federally funded Parent Training and Information (PTI) Center established to assist military families who have children with special education or health needs located throughout the United States and overseas.



Funding for this project began in 1985. The STOMP project utilized a combination of individual assistance, group workshops, and technology-oriented sources to provide a multifaceted approach to addressing the needs of these families. The combination of on-site presentations at installations in coordination with the PTI in the state where the installation is located, one-to-one assistance by phone and in person, and the use of technology have enabled the project staff and volunteers to provide requested services in a timely and cost-efficient way.

One of the most successful efforts STOMP has established is the Parent Professionals Team Workshop (PPTW). The PPTW brings together teams that include a military parent, military professional, and community professional (i.e. PTI representative or other community based group) to gain knowledge and support that can then be taken back to their installations and implemented there. This workshop is a 4.5 day event with specific targets to be accomplished. Workshop outcomes include

- more trained and knowledgeable persons to assist families
- better skills and awareness of team members to address unique situations
- improved support from parent education and self-help groups on installations
- increased awareness of resources and networking skills
- expanded ability of team members to stay current on issues and strategies
- increased availability of support persons to assist military families on an individual basis within their own installations

Follow up surveys with PPTW participants regarding the training they received in their role as volunteers revealed that

- 89% of those surveyed were holding parent meetings on their installations. Seventy five percent of those were linking families with existing parent groups within the civilian community or were also serving the civilian community.
- 95% of those surveyed identified that they were more aware of current issues and resources because of their attendance at PPTW and support received from STOMP subsequent to PPTW.

- 96% of those surveyed identified that they are actively assisting families on their installations in acquiring necessary services and supports.

Here are some comments from the PPTW 2004 evaluations.

“The information presented has really helped me come alive again and really have the desire to jump back in and get busy.”

“Even though I was overwhelmed by the information, I now feel comfortable giving information about all the services available.”

“After attending the PPTW workshop my comfort level regarding the provision of services and support to military families has greatly increased. I didn’t have a clue as to what is available to us. I now won’t be so “frightened” to ask questions or request services anymore.”

“This is a great workshop. I feel that I am better equipped with knowledge and knowing how to help.”

“Attending this workshop has provided me with extensive information for me to take home plus the network of teams we can rely on for all branches of service that has greatly increased my capacity to support military families.”

“Attending the PPTW has inspired me to advocate for all military families, not just my own.”

“I have the resources I need at my fingertips as well as the comfort level to call anyone in this network with what I may view as a “stupid” question because of what I learned at PPTW.”

There are currently 93 members in the PPTW Network. They include teams in every branch of service, and team members are located overseas as well as in the United States. Because of the effectiveness of the training-of-trainers model, participants are able to extend their personal networks beyond those established through PPTW. Thus the training benefits not only the participants, but also many others as they move from place to place and reach out.

Contact STOMP to learn more about PPTW.

6316 So. 12th St.
Tacoma, WA 98465
(253) 565-2266 (v/tty)
1-800-5-PARENT (v/tty)
Fax: (253) 566-8052
www.stompproject.org/

6.3 Model Partnership Initiatives

Installation programs within each Service have long traditions of working together in support of special needs families and developing innovative programs at the grass-roots level to make maximum use of the resources available to them. This section features a few of the creative installation initiatives currently working in support of special needs families.

6.3.1 Hampton Roads Joint Services EFM/Special Needs Awareness Forum

In 1993, representatives from TRICARE and the local Information & Referral Coordinators Committee formed the Joint Services Exceptional Family Member Committee to include all branches of the Uniformed Services. Committee members liked the idea of sponsoring a conference, similar to the disability conference previously held by the Army, and began planning the first Joint Services Exceptional Family/Member Special Needs Awareness Forum. The first forum was held in 1994 with the participation of the Army, Air Force, Coast Guard, Navy, Marine Corps and the TRICARE Lead Agent Office.



The annual conference has an average attendance between 200 and 250 service providers and family members. The TRICARE Mid-Atlantic Region's Lead Agent Office was dissolved in 2004 but the Joint Services Exceptional Family Member Committee continues to function without a formal charter.

The Services take turns hosting the event. The conference is open to special needs families, program coordinators, command points-of-contact, medical staff, school personnel, and other professionals in the field. Participants gain knowledge about EFMP programs, as well as new approaches and perspectives that families, professionals and organizations bring to maximize long-term success of programs and families.

Conference workshop topics have included

- EFMP Overview
- Supplemental Security Income
- Occupational/Speech/ Physical Therapy
- The Nuts and Bolts of Autism
- ADDD/ADHD
- Rights of the Disabled
- Self-Advocacy
- Coming Full Circle: Hospice Care
- Challenges for Youth with Disabilities in Court
- TRICARE Program For Persons With Disabilities
- Genetic Syndrome
- Healthy Living: Nutritional Considerations Across the Life Cycle
- Parenting the Special Needs Child
- Schools Responsibilities in Special Education
- Behavioral Healthcare Services and You
- Understanding Diabetes
- The ABC's of Asthma
- Stress Management

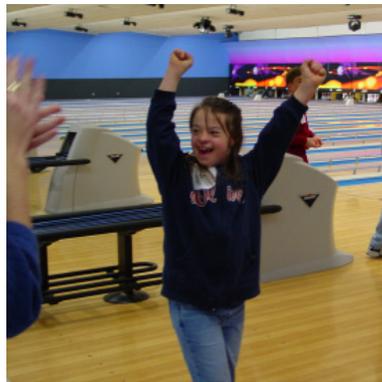
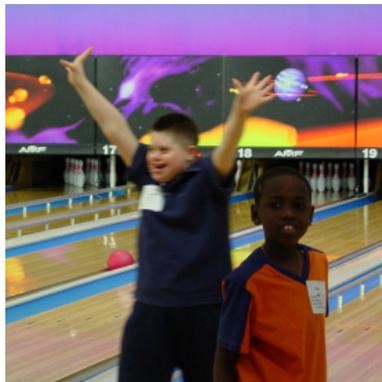
6.3.2 Annual Special Triathlon (Kitzingen, Germany)

The 417th Base Support Battalion, 98th Area Support Group, at Kitzingen, Germany, first organized the Special Triathlon in 2004 for school age children with moderate to severe developmental disabilities. Every March, April, and May, children throughout the Würzburg area have the opportunity to participate in a day of bowling, a library event, and a day of track and field activities.

This Special Olympics-type event was first discussed in an Exceptional Family Member Program Installation Committee Meeting. A planning committee consisting of representatives from Child and Youth Services (CYS), Army Community Service (ACS) and Community Recreation programs was formed, and members agreed to support a three-month series of events with an activity occurring during each of the three months. The Base Support Battalion commander signed memos directing support from throughout the community and requesting DoDDS (Bavarian School District) approve the release of participants from school for the library and track & field events.

For each Special Triathlon, Community Recreation Services provides free bowling for several hours on a Saturday. The Community Library hosts library activities (interactive stories, scavenger hunt, etc.) during the school day. The Special Triathlon culminates with track and field events at Würzburg High School sports fields (or community gym in case of rain), followed by an awards ceremony. Soldiers from the community provide manpower and refreshments for the track and field events. CYS supports the Special Triathlon by helping to supervise the children during all the events and by hosting meals and the award ceremony in the Teen Center.

For more information about the Special Triathlon, contact Sherry Renz, EFMP Program Manager by email (sherry.renz@cmtymail.98asg.army.mil) or phone (011-49-0931-889-7103).



Photos courtesy of 417th Base Support Battalion and by permission of children's parents

6.3.3 Camp Special Time (Camp Lejeune, NC)

The Exceptional Family Member Program at Camp Lejeune coordinates Camp Special Time (CST) four times a year for up to 25



children each time. CST provides respite care for families and an overnight, fun-filled camping weekend for children whose conditions range from medically fragile to fully ambulatory but requiring supervision. Most of the campers have never been away from their parents or siblings.

CST is a groundbreaking collaboration among Marine Corps Community Services; nurses from New Hanover Medical Center who provide skilled nursing care; professors and students from Cape Fear Community College Occupational Therapy Assistance program; students from the University of North Carolina Recreational Therapy program and School of Nursing; and Camp Lejeune Dependent Schools occupational therapist, special education teachers and physical therapist.

One of the unique features of CST is that it provides field work opportunities with children in a less traditional setting for nursing, OT and RT students. Working under the supervision of professionals in their fields, these students plan and execute activities for the camp and receive credit for field work from their academic departments. In addition to forming memorable bonds with the children, students learn techniques such as how to safely transfer people in wheelchairs, how to tube feed a child, and how to deal with behavior issues or communication challenges. It does not take them long to realize that special needs children, like all children, just want to have fun.

Camp Special Time started as an initiative to give Marine Corps parents of special needs children an opportunity for respite care. It has evolved into a model for developmental recreational programming for significantly disabled children and an example of successful partnering between the military and academic communities.

For more information about Camp Special Time, contact David Reintjes, Camp Lejeune EFMP Coordinator at reintjesdj@usmc-mccs.org or 910-451-9372.