

Department of Defense

Annual Report to the Congressional Defense Committees on the Department of Defense Military Family Readiness Council



Fiscal Year 2011

Preparation of this report/study cost the
Department of Defense a total of
approximately \$4,030 in Fiscal Years 2011 -
2012.

Generated on 2012Jan05 1453 RefID: 6-6FB01BE

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**Report of the Department of Defense Military Family Readiness
Council**

**Annual Report to the Congressional Defense Committees
Pursuant to Section 1781a of Title 10, United States Code**

FISCAL YEAR 2011

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
TABLE OF CONTENTS	i
LIST OF TABLES	i
LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS	ii
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. FY 2011 ASSESSMENT EFFORTS	3
2-1. Inter-Agency Collaborations	4
2-2. The Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness	5
2-3. Military REACH Project	8
2-4. Military Family Life Project Surveys in 2010 and 2011	9
2-5. Autism Review: I and II	9
2-6. Community Capacity Building Study	10
3. COUNCIL ACTIVITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS	10
3-1. The Forthcoming Changes of Council Membership	10
3-2. Council Recommendations	12
4. CONCLUSIONS	13

LIST OF TABLES

	<u>Page</u>
Table 1. List of FY 2011 Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness Projects	7

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

BOG	Boots on the Ground
CMFR	The Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness
CONUS	The Continental United States
DMDC	Defense Manpower Data Center
DoD	Department of Defense
EFMP	Exceptional Family Member Program
FY	Fiscal Year
MFLP	Military Family Life Project
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
NIFA	National Institute of Food and Agriculture
NYSFP	Navy Youth Sports and Fitness Program
OCONUS	Outside the Continental United States
OSD	Office of Secretary of Defense
ODASD (MC&FP)	Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy
OPRE/ACF	The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation of the Administration for Children and Families, the Department of Health and Human Services
SOFS-A	Status of Force Survey of Active Duty Members
U.S.C.	United States Code
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture
YRRP	Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is pursuant to section 1781a of title 10, U.S.C., which requires the Department of Defense (DoD) Military Family Readiness Council (hereafter called “the Council”) to submit a report which provides recommendations and assessments of the adequacy and effectiveness pertaining to military family readiness programs and activities.

Since October 2001, more than 2.2 million U.S. Service members have deployed in support of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. In December 2011, the U.S. Government officially ended the military operation in Iraq after nearly nine years. Simultaneously, a series of large-scale drawdowns of U.S. forces from Afghanistan has been taking place. These unprecedented transitions could significantly alter the deployment pattern of both Active and Reserve Component personnel in the coming years, which could require major shifts in the needs of military families and support systems.

Due to the inability to obtain a quorum of the Council members, the Council was not able to convene twice in fiscal year (FY) 2011 as required by law. As a result, the Council did not have an opportunity to review results of the existing DoD-sponsored assessment studies. These results will be presented and reviewed at the next meeting of the Council. Nevertheless, DoD continued its efforts to improve the adequacy and effectiveness of military family readiness programs by promoting research-based programs and developing better outcome measures. Below are the major DoD-sponsored assessment projects that have taken place in FY2011:

- **The Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness (CMFR):** CMFR, which is operated by Pennsylvania State University through the DoD and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) partnership, has been actively conducting assessment studies for family readiness programs in addition to providing an online interactive knowledge-based platform to enhance the implementation of research-based programs, dissemination, and assessment.
- **Military Family REACH:** Military REACH, a project through the DoD and USDA Partnership with the University of Arizona, utilizes a multi-disciplinary approach integrating both Research and Outreach to provide a variety of tools to maintain and improve program standards and qualities as well as training for program staff in military family readiness programs. This project offers outreach and professional development through online resources and hosts a live learning lab for program staff seeking constructive professional development feedback for their programs to better support military families.
- **Autism Review I and II:** In collaboration with Ohio State University, DoD has completed an extensive review of the access and availability of evidence-based educational practices for military children with autism spectrum disorders. Starting with five states in Phase I, Phase II expanded the scope of the study to 10 additional states with high military populations and early childhood education programs. Major findings from Phase I and II will be presented in a report that will be released in April 2012.

- **Military Family Life Project Surveys in 2010 and 2011:** The Office of Secretary of Defense has completed data collection for this two-year, two-wave longitudinal survey for spouses of Active Duty Service members. Approximately 13,000 spouses participated in the second wave of the survey; a subsample of Service members allowed us to obtain data from 5,000 couples. In-depth data analysis is underway to assess the impact of deployment on family functioning throughout the deployment cycle. Findings from this study will help DoD formulate strategic plans for family readiness programs.
- **Community Capacity Building Study:** In collaboration with the University of Georgia and the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, this project is developing a military-focused conceptual model of community capacity building, associated practice strategies, asset and need assessment tools, and a six-step community capacity development online training. One component of the project is a formalized needs assessment process which assists in identifying individual and family challenges and priorities in the military community and in mobilizing and coordinating community resources to meet those challenges. The pilot process is scheduled to begin in 2012.

The Council recommends the following two actions:

Recommendations:

1. **Continue leveraging the existing efforts within DoD to provide the strategic plans, policies, and assessment of programs in the area of military family readiness:** The Council believes that instead of duplicating efforts, leveraging the existing initiatives and assessment efforts continues to be the best approach to address ongoing and emerging family readiness issues.
2. **Retain the existing Council priority issues:** The Council determined that the significance of the existing priority issues for family readiness warrants its continued attention. Concerted efforts to address common concerns and maintain communication with other federal advisory committees and DoD task forces would be beneficial to resolve major issues pertaining to military family readiness.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Department of Defense (DoD) Military Family Readiness Council (hereafter referred to as “the Council”) was established in November 2008 under the provisions of section 1781a of title 10, United States Code (10 U.S.C. 1781a) and the Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972. The council has the following three objectives:

- (1) Review and make recommendations to the Secretary of Defense regarding the policy and plans supporting military family readiness.
- (2) Monitor requirements for the support of military family readiness by DoD.
- (3) Evaluate and assess the effectiveness of the military family readiness programs and activities of DoD.

This report to Congress is submitted in accordance with 10 U.S.C. § 1781a, which requires the Council to submit a report to the Secretary of Defense and congressional defense committees annually. This report provides:

- (1) An assessment of the adequacy and effectiveness of the military family readiness programs and activities of DoD during the preceding fiscal year in meeting the needs and requirements of military families.
- (2) Recommendations on actions to be taken to improve the capability of the military family readiness programs and activities of DoD to meet the needs and requirements of military families, including actions relating to the allocation of funding and other resources to and among such programs and activities.

2. FY2011 ASSESSMENT RESULTS

During FY 2011, the Council was unable to meet Council member quorum requirements primarily due to a high turnover of members. As a result, the Council did not have an opportunity to review assessment results or provide the consolidated input pertaining to assessing the adequacy and effectiveness of military family programs. In previous years, the Council supplemented its assessment activities by reviewing the existing assessment efforts and initiatives providing strategic-level input on these efforts in order to avoid the duplication of efforts. In FY 2010, the Council formally recommended that leveraging the existing assessment efforts and initiatives within DoD is the best way to address military family readiness issues. This approach to program assessment was aligned with efficiency efforts within DoD in the current fiscally constrained environment.

DoD continued its efforts to develop better outcome measures for family readiness programs. Within DoD, the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy (ODASD (MC&FP)) plays a leading role in conducting program assessment studies in collaboration with the Services, other offices within the Office of Secretary of Defense (OSD) and through a partnership between DoD and USDA (hereafter called “the DoD-USDA Partnership”) in order to sustain and improve the quality and delivery of military family readiness programs that DoD offers to Service members and their families.

This section provides a summary of major assessment-related projects conducted in FY 2011. Results from these assessment projects will be presented to the Council for review in the next meeting that is scheduled to be held later in FY 2012.

2-1. Inter-Agency Collaborations

The military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan over the last decade have heavily relied on National Guard and Reserve members; however, the traditional installation-centered family support model has proven incapable of providing essential family support programs to this geographically dispersed component of the military community. In fact, approximately three-quarters of today's military families reside in civilian communities, necessitating the paradigm shift in the delivery of universally-accessible family support programs to the Internet and other electronic media technology (e.g., Military OneSource) and to a community-based family support approach, which leverages and augments established networks and resources supporting military families.

As an initial step in addressing this issue, a partnership between DoD and USDA was formally launched in May 2010. The purpose of the DoD-USDA Partnership is three-fold: (1) strengthen community capacity in support of military families; (2) increase professional and workforce development opportunities; and (3) expand and strengthen family, child care, and youth development programs. This partnership is particularly helpful in reaching out to those who are geographically-dispersed, leveraging USDA's robust and established program and networks in civilian communities, covering 32 states for the ongoing projects supporting military families and children. Since its inception in 2010, the DoD-USDA Partnership has focused on cultivating collaborations with educational institutions, non-governmental and community organizations, and other organizations with expertise in early childhood education, youth development, and family studies. Within USDA, the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) is engaging with the Land-Grant University System and Cooperative Extension System faculty and staff to accomplish the goals of this partnership.

As addressed in the Presidential Study Directive 9, enhancing the well-being of military children who have experienced parental deployments over the past decade is a top priority for national security. Although DoD and the Services have sponsored surveys and research studies on the impact of military deployments on families and children, there have been virtually no benchmarking tools or measures to assess their well-being in comparison with their civilian counterparts. In the total force era in which we rely on Reserve Component members who reside in civilian communities, DoD needs to develop a mechanism to benchmark the well-being of military-connected families in civilian communities across the nation in order to understand the long-term effects of deployment on military families. However, this is not a task that DoD can tackle singlehandedly. As a result, ODASD (MC&FP) engaged the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation of the Administration for Children and Families (OPRE/ACF) within the Department of Health and Human Services, which is well-known for its excellence in the development and execution of program evaluation studies. DoD will be able to leverage the OPRE/ACF's expertise in program evaluation to develop robust outcome measures for family readiness programs. This collaboration will be mutually beneficial to both agencies. These inter-agency collaborations are also responsive to the Government Accountability Office

recommendations on promoting inter-agency collaboration to address future cross-cutting issues and challenges.¹

2-2. The Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness

The Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness (hereafter referred to as “the Clearinghouse”) is a Pennsylvania State University initiative within the USDA and ODASD (MC&FP) Land Grant University System partnership. The Clearinghouse is an interactive, knowledge-based platform for helping professionals supporting military families to carry out their program implementation and assessment activities. It is specifically designed to promote and support: (1) the use of research-based decision-making; (2) the selection, dissemination, and implementation of evidence-based programs and practices; (3) the evaluation (process and outcome) of programs and the identification or creation of measures and metrics; and (4) the continued education of professionals assisting military families.

The Clearinghouse comprehensively reviews resources (e.g., programs, practices, and strategies) and based on empirical research places them on a Continuum of Evidence to help professionals, Services’ programs managers and directors, and DoD officials to make informed decisions regarding how best to serve military families. To date, 103 programs have been reviewed on the Continuum of Evidence. Over 50 factsheets have been completed and made available through the Clearinghouse website (<https://www.militaryfamilies.psu.edu>). The Clearinghouse also synthesizes existing and emerging relevant research and disseminates comprehensive, evidence-based information to strengthen military families and communities. The Clearinghouse allows professionals to have access to problem solving and technical assistance support wherever they are, using interactive communication means (e.g., phone, web, Skype, instant messages, and text messaging) to help them adopt evidence-based programs and practices to enhance family readiness.

Using a dynamic and interactive web-based platform, the Clearinghouse is easily accessible to professionals on military installations, as well as to those who work in the communities where military families live, work, and attend school. The Clearinghouse staff has been working with a number of DoD offices to help them identify metrics and conduct process and outcome evaluations of existing programs. To support DoD’s program assessment efforts, the Clearinghouse also takes on small and short-term projects such as literature review as requested. Table 1 summarizes the program areas of the ongoing projects conducted by the Clearinghouse.

¹United States Government Accountability Office. (2005). RESULTS-ORIENTED GOVERNMENT: Practices that can help enhance and sustain collaboration among federal agencies (GAO-06-15).

Table 1. List of FY 2011 Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness Projects

Program	Description
<p>Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) Resource Center</p>	<p>CMFR established an EFMP Resource Center within the Clearinghouse to enhance the knowledge and effectiveness of professionals working with military families who have a family member with special needs. The Clearinghouse is conducting a needs assessment for these families and the EFMP Family Support Providers. The EFMP Resource Center houses the latest research findings related to family members with special needs, evidenced-informed best practices for addressing challenges to the readiness of these families, and up-to-date information regarding the issues faced by these families. The EFMP Resource Center provides opportunities for interactive learning and proactive technical assistance. By hosting the EFMP Resource Center, the Clearinghouse will create a cohesive, supportive virtual community that enables professionals, researchers, military and community leaders to make informed decisions about programs, practices, and strategies designed to promote resiliency and readiness.</p>
<p>Identify Gaps in the Applied Research</p>	<p>This project identifies the gap between evidence and practice. Ongoing reviews and user-friendly summaries of research are critical to building the capacity of professional serving military families. CMFR will continue to synthesize existing and emerging research on topics identified as critical by the DoD-USDA staff. The outcomes of the synthesis of research will be: (1) the identification of robust findings that cut across various research studies; (2) directions for further research based on the gaps within the extant research; and (3) guidance of potential prevention and intervention strategies that could be adopted for use with military families.</p>
<p>Homegrown Programs</p>	<p>In this project, 5-10 homegrown military programs targeted at military families will be identified and assessed (with practitioners) using established standards of evidence. The assessment of these programs and practices will focus on their theoretical base, core elements, and malleability for improvement of efficacy and transportability. Next steps will be piloting the revised homegrown programs in identified sites. A Community of Practice will be formed for those interested in improving their homegrown programs.</p>
<p>Reserve Affairs - Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (forthcoming)</p>	<p>The current focus of the Clearinghouse’s partnership with Reserve Affairs comprises program evaluation and curriculum development for the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program (YRRP). The evaluation component includes four activities: (1) direct observation of YRRP events; (2) revision of the post-event surveys for Liaison Officers and participants; (3) development of a retrospective study of program impact on help-seeking behaviors, and (4) development of a longitudinal study. The Clearinghouse is observing events hosted by all Service branches across all phases of the deployment cycle and creating a report. The revised survey has been completed and used at one event to date. A report will be filed on the success of the pilot study once access to the data is granted. The description of the retrospective study has been submitted for review. The curriculum component purpose is to develop training workshops into the Yellow Ribbon events representing critical topic areas (e.g., family communication, financial responsibility, parenting issues, couple communication, resilient reintegration) to enhance the adaptability and resiliency of National Guard members and Reserve members and their families at all phases of deployment. The overarching intent of each set of workshops is to increase family resiliency across the cycle of deployment by creating unique curricula in crucial topic areas that builds in depth and breadth from one session to the next and engages participants using best practice methods. The Clearinghouse is dedicated to helping our National Guard and Reserve and their families to be both battle-and deployment-ready as well as ready</p>

Program	Description
	to re-enter civilian life once their deployments have ended.
Resource Center for the Prevention of Child Obesity	The Resource Center for the Prevention of Child Obesity (Resource Center) is an interactive, searchable web-based platform for professionals to access information on the effectiveness of existing obesity prevention and intervention programs and practices to better serve military families. The Resource Center catalogues evidence-based obesity prevention programs, helping to infuse empirical evidence into the military's efforts to prevent childhood obesity. Specifically, the Resource Center is in the process of: (1) developing a searchable electronic database of obesity prevention and intervention programs, including both DoD and civilian programs; (2) determining the evidence base of these obesity programs using the Clearinghouse's Continuum of Evidence; (3) developing user-friendly fact sheets for each obesity program listed on the Clearinghouse website under Obesity Prevention; and (4) providing opportunities for interactive learning and proactive technical assistance. By hosting the Resource Center, the Clearinghouse has created a cohesive, supportive virtual community for helping professionals, researchers, and military and community leaders.
Navy Youth Sports & Fitness Program Project	The Navy Youth Sports & Fitness Program (NYSFP) project is a contract through the Navy that focuses on the development and implementation of: (1) consistent youth sports and fitness programming across installations worldwide; and (2) post-curriculum pilot-testing measures and an NYSFP evaluation plan. The ultimate goal of NYSFP is to promote healthy living among Navy families by encouraging lifelong engagement in physical fitness activities through exposure to sports and fitness activity participation during youth and adolescence. Consistency in NYSFP across all installations is essential to ensure that Navy families can rely on safe, positive, and predictable opportunities for their children to participate in youth sports and fitness programs and activities throughout multiple relocations. At the completion of this project, a plan will be in place for the Navy to create a consistent, high-quality, and innovative NYSFP. The NYSFP project package includes the development of: (1) an <i>Operations Manual</i> (Continental United States: CONUS); (2) a <i>Model Program Guide</i> (outside of the Continental United States: OCONUS); (3) a <i>Directory of Opportunities</i> to create a consistent flow of information at each CONUS installation for parents and NYSFP coordinators; (4) an implementation plan (i.e., training and technical assistance) for installations worldwide; and (5) an evaluation plan (i.e., methods for tracking the long-term benefits achieved) for installations worldwide.
Emergency Family Assistance Centers Best Practices	This project is to develop a best practices resource guide for Emergency Family Assistance Centers to build the capacity of those serving military families (e.g., military family support professionals, military and civilian social service providers, installation commanders, and volunteers) by providing military families with a comprehensive, evidence-based practices planning guide to maintain readiness in the face of significant and unexpected emergencies. The Clearinghouse will gather and review best practices from the civilian community related to emergency response on behalf of families, including the growing research on first responders; gather and review military best practices (e.g., Pentagon After Action Report; the military branches' policies and manuals); and develop a guide of best practice (DoD-wide Emergency Family Support) that represents a compilation of the common best practices as well as best practices tailored to unique situations faced by military families.

2-3. Military REACH Project

Military REACH, a project through the DoD-USDA Partnership with the University of Arizona, utilizes a multi-disciplinary approach integrating both research and outreach to support those who work with and on behalf of military families. Through a three-fold approach, the project team provides empirical research that identifies and addresses key issues impacting military families and the programs that serve them, offers outreach and professional development through online resources, and hosts a Live Learning Lab for program staff seeking constructive professional development feedback for their programs. The program website, Military REACH (www.reachmilitaryfamilies.arizona.edu), provides users access to professional development training and coaching tools, relevant and current research, and information to support those who work with Service members and their families.

Training for those who provide services to Service members and their families has significant impact on service and program quality standards. Military REACH developed Online Professional Development Modules called *Foundations of Positive Youth Development Programs*. This training curriculum focuses on each of the eight features of positive youth development programs as identified by Eccles and Gootman's (2002) National Academy of Sciences publication, *Community Practices for Promoting Positive Youth Development*. In addition to the training modules, the program offers an interactive tool to identify professional development opportunities across the country. Available on the Military REACH website, the professional development searchable database offers users an opportunity to locate information on certificate programs, webinars or degrees focused on youth development, family studies and human development, or social work. Simultaneously, Military REACH has been developing an observational tool, *Practitioner Improvement Instrument: For Afterschool and Youth Development Professionals*. This tool is specifically designed to measure the behaviors of youth development practitioners that promote high quality programs, grounded in Eccles and Gootman's eight essential elements of youth program quality. To promote evidence-based programs for military children and youth, Military REACH conducted literature reviews and produced a report entitled *A Review of Evidence-Based Programs Aimed at Preventing or Reducing Risky Behaviors in Youth* in October 2011. The report reviewed 529 evidence-based programs addressing eight content areas: (1) Academic Issues, (2) Behavior and Mental Health Problems, (3) Drug and Alcohol Use, (4) Juvenile Justice Involvement, (5) Life Skills, (6) Mentoring, (7) Physical Aggression and Violence, and (8) Risky Sexual Behaviors.

Military REACH also has been developing *Putting Research to Work for Military Families*, a series of article reviews that focuses on research published in the past 10 years in relevant fields for military family support, such as positive youth development, early childhood and youth programs, and military families. Each review summarizes key findings of an academic study published in a peer-reviewed journal and provides information on the implications of this research for programs, policies, and future studies, along with a rating of the quality of the research using a rigorous rating system. To date, 67 articles have been reviewed and all reviews are made available through the Military REACH website; the review of articles is ongoing.

2-4. Military Family Life Project Surveys in 2010 and 2011

The Military Family Life Project (MFLP) surveys were initiated in recognition of the need for a longitudinal survey design that measures the impact of deployments on the well-being of military families over time. The MFLP is a two-wave longitudinal survey study of Active Duty families, developed through collaboration between ODASD (MC&FP) and DMDC. The first wave of the survey was fielded in May 2010 and the second wave was fielded in May 2011. The sample represents spouses from all DoD Service branches in the Active Duty component. Of over 101,000 spouses who participated in the first wave, approximately 28,500 completed the second wave survey. To collect the paired sample, the Status of Forces Survey of Active Duty Members (SOFS-A) conducted in June 2010 and June 2011 asked Service member spouses of the MFLP survey participants to answer items that complemented the items in their spouses' MFLP surveys. Approximately 5,000 couples completed the MFLP surveys and the SOFS-A matching items. These survey results can help DoD and the Services plan to offer the right family readiness programs to the right people at the right time during the deployment cycle. Collection of the second wave data and further data analysis will enhance the efficacy of the MFLP surveys in program planning and policy-making in the arena of family readiness.

2-5. Autism Review: Phase I and II

DoD worked with Ohio State University to review access and availability of evidence-based educational practices for military children with autism spectrum disorders. The Phase I study focused on the following five states with a high concentration of military population: California, Georgia, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia. Researchers reviewed the national and state-level developments that affect the availability and access to autism spectrum disorders-related educational services, and educational services provided to children with autism spectrum disorders ages 3 to 21 in local school districts serving military installations in the aforementioned five states. Phase I results show that military children have access to evidence-based educational practices at school districts serving military installations, although the levels or type of services do not always meet the needs of families. The review recommended that DoD (1) enhance the assignment process for military families of children with autism spectrum disorders to include more specific information about the needs of such children; (2) expand the evidence-based practices covered by TRICARE's Autism Demonstration Project; (3) infuse additional family supports into the Exceptional Family Member Program; (4) add the contents on autism spectrum disorders to the Military Family Readiness Clearinghouse at Penn State University, and (5) monitor the number of military families with children with autism spectrum disorders assigned to specific districts to avoid overwhelming a particular district's resources. As part of Phase I, the project team also developed the Education Directory for Children with Special Needs that provides useful advice and resources to help assignment personnel as they assist families in preparation for a new assignment within the 50 states.

Expanding the scope of research, Ohio State University conducted Phase II of the project, which focused on a review of special education services in an additional 10 states with a high concentration of military personnel. The project included a comprehensive review of access and availability of evidence-based educational practices for military dependents with autism spectrum disorders, intellectual disabilities, and emotional disorders ages 3 to 21, and a review of

early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities (birth to three) in all 15 states covered in the Phase I and Phase II studies. The study was completed in November 2011. Key findings from these studies will be presented in a separate report to Congress in April 2012.

2-6. Community Capacity Building Study

ODASD (MC&FP), the University of Georgia Family and Community Resilience Laboratory, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, through the DoD-USDA Partnership have collaborated to begin the Building Community Capacity study. This collaboration will provide state family program leadership with evidence-based community capacity-building strategies. These strategies will be designed to help support Service members and their families. This project includes plans for a military-focused conceptual model of community capacity building, as well as associated practice strategies, asset and need assessment tools, and a six-step community capacity development online training.

A primary goal of this initiative will be to deliver a state-of-the-art training platform that includes both web-based and self-paced training modules. This comprehensive, interactive, and informative online training is intended to provide participants with conceptual models and practice strategies to develop a community capacity-building approach for U.S. military family support organizations. This training will be aimed to provide personnel and family support professionals with a six-step process of capacity-building, including elements of engagement, assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, and sustainment.

One component of the project is a formalized needs assessment process which assists in identifying individual and family challenges and priorities in the military community and in mobilizing and coordinating community resources to meet those challenges. The needs assessment process includes the development of online tools and resources for Service members, families, unit leadership and family program leadership. The assessment of individual fitness and resilience of military families with touch-point resources such as Military OneSource to assist with addressing their needs and achieving their aspirations is also being considered. Family program leadership will have access to snapshots of the military community's needs state-wide, which will allow them to coordinate necessary resources to address those aggregate needs. Additionally, ODASD (MC&FP) is developing a mapping system in collaboration with University of Nebraska at Lincoln and the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics. This program management tool will help family program leadership access available resources and identify gaps in support for military families in their state. The study group is planning to begin the pilot process in 2012.

3. COUNCIL ACTIVITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3-1. The Forthcoming Change of Council Membership

The Council was established for the purpose of assessing the effectiveness of military family programs and making recommendations to the Secretary on DoD family policies and programs. The Council is required to convene twice each year by law. In FY 2011, however, the Council could not hold the two required meetings due to the inability to obtain a quorum of the

Council members. This issue was mainly attributed to high turnover among members and competing priorities for the members' schedules. Currently, the Council consists of 14 appointed members to include:

- Chair: Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness(P&R))
- Vice Chief of Staff, U.S. Army
- Vice Chief of Naval Operations
- Vice Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force
- Assistant Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps
- Director, Army National Guard, National Guard Bureau²
- Commander of the Marine Forces Reserve³
- The Senior Enlisted Advisors of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps
- Three representatives from non-profit organizations supporting military families:
 - The National Military Family Association
 - The Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors
 - The Armed Forces YMCA

Upon the enactment of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY 2012, the composition of the Council members has changed. Section 574 of NDAA for FY 2012 amended subsection (b) of section 1781a of title 10, U.S.C. to change and expand the membership of the Council, to consist of the following 18 members:

- Chair: Under Secretary of Defense (P&R): A designated representative is allowed to chair the council in the Under Secretary's absence;
- One Service member representative from each of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force;
- One representative of the Army National Guard or the Air National Guard;
- One Spouse or parent of a member of each of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force: Two spouses or parents shall be the spouse or parent of an Active Duty Component member and two of them shall be the spouse or parent of a Reserve Component member;
- The Senior Enlisted Advisors of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps: Two of these members may instead be selected from among the spouses of the Senior Enlisted Advisors;
- Three representatives of military family organizations: This includes military family organizations of families of members of Active Duty Components and of families of members of the Reserve Components;
- The Director of the Office of Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs.

This membership change will add more flexibility in the member composition and most importantly will help ensure that the Council will be able to obtain a quorum for meetings. This change also will provide more opportunities for family members to become active Council

² The National Guard membership rotates between the Air and Army National Guard every three years.

³ The Reserve Component membership rotates among the four Services every three years.

members and explore all available options to ensure that no more than one meeting per year will be in the National Capital Region.

3-2. Council Recommendations

In the meeting held on December 12, 2011, the Council members revisited the following priority issues that the Council had for FY 2011.

1. Five issue areas of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff's Integrated Process Teams (the Chairman's IPTs): For FY 2011, the Council decided to align with the following five issue areas of the Chairman's IPTs, including (a) spouse employment and empowerment, (b) educational development and excellence, (c) child care, (d) health care, and (e) strategic communications. As Army General Martin E. Dempsey assumed responsibility as the new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on September 30, 2011, the Designated Federal Officer of the Council has been engaging his office to streamline the Council's priority issues with the new Chairman's issue areas.
2. Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP): Although the Advisory Panel on Community Support for Military Families with Special Needs, which was created under the NDAA for FY 2011, exists to address issues faced by military families with special needs, the Council determined that the significance of the issue for family readiness warrants its continuing attention.
3. Boots on the Ground (BOG)/Dwell Time: The Council recognizes the importance of sufficient BOG/dwell time for Service members and their families in a deployment cycle. The Council members suggested further exploring the necessity to conduct research on the impact of BOG/dwell time on military families in the next meeting.
4. Disability Evaluation System: This is a joint initiative between DoD and the Department of Veterans Affairs to simplify and streamline the evaluation system for the wounded, injured, or ill. The Council is concerned about the impact of the time-consuming disability evaluation process on families of the wounded, injured, or ill. The Recovering Wounded Warrior Task Force has been looking into this issue.

The Council recommends the following actions:

1. **Continue leveraging the existing efforts within DoD to provide the strategic plans, policies, and assessment of programs in the area of military family readiness:** Within DoD, ODASD (MC&FP) plays a pivotal role in the recently-established efforts in program assessments and initiatives. The Council believes that instead of duplicating efforts, leveraging the existing initiatives and assessment efforts continues to be the best approach to address ongoing and emerging family readiness issues.
2. **Retain the existing Council priority issues:** The Council determined that the significance of the existing priority issues for family readiness warrants its continued attention. Concerted efforts to address common family readiness concerns with

another federal advisory committee and DoD working groups will be beneficial to resolve major issues pertaining to military family readiness.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The Council was not able to reach a quorum for meetings due to high turnover among members and competing priorities for the members' schedules in FY 2011. As a result, the Council did not have an opportunity to review results of the existing DoD-sponsored assessment studies. This data will be presented to the Council at the next meeting in FY 2012. Nevertheless, DoD continued its efforts to improve the adequacy and effectiveness of military family readiness programs by promoting research-based programs and developing better outcome measures. The membership change mandated by NDAA for FY 2012 provides greater flexibility in the member composition, which should mitigate previous problems with the Council's ability to fulfill quorum requirements. The membership change will also improve the Council's ability to ensure military family readiness programs are targeting the most pressing issues of military families.