

Taking Care of the Family-Military Style The Exceptional Family Member Program

By Tech. Sgt. Reginal Woodruff

Editor's Note:

This article first appeared in the 2004 Tidewater edition of Celebrating Special Children.

1st Fighter Wing Public Affairs Code Q is a mystery to most people, but for more than 600 families at Langley those five letters unlock the door to special services, while locking the door to some assignments.

Code Q is an assignment limitation identifier for active duty military members who have dependents with special, long-term or permanent medical or educational needs. The code is used by Air Force assignment personnel to determine the best location for airmen, based on Air Force manning and family member needs. Widely known as the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP), the renamed Special Needs Program (SNP) is the medium for managing special needs families.

"We currently have 635 special needs families assigned to Langley," said Maj. Denise Dunklee, special needs coordinator. "People can be identified as having a special need by their primary care provider, mental health, pediatrics, or they can refer themselves. It can be a simple long-term condition like asthma or a serious short-term condition like high-risk pregnancy."

"Once they are enrolled into the program, they're given a Q code that goes worldwide. We periodically check in with our families to make sure that their needs are being met and that they are aware of services as far as special support, financial, housing services, respite care, family housing requests, upgrade for housing, transportation, subsidies and things that are available in the local community that we can assist them with."

According to Maj. Elizabeth Calvano-Carpenter, formerly the officer in charge of Family Advocacy, the program is currently being restructured Air Force-wide to provide dedicated service to coded families. She said that Langley has moved ahead of other bases in the process, appointing an Overseas Clearance Monitor (model for Family Member Relocation Clearance Coordinator) and having Dunklee fill the SNC position - two positions key to the SNP process.

People involved in the SNP process also participate in periodic forums where professionals discuss different topics related to special needs families. People from other branches of the military also attend to discuss the

assignment process and to build relationships between the services.

"It's becoming an intraservice program; a computer database makes information accessible by all branches of services," said Dunklee. "Q code is understood by Navy and Coast Guard so they know what it means, what the implications are and to look further."

Some people have been caught trying to use the code to get out of assignments, but Dunklee said that more often airmen are surprised to learn they have a family member with needs that prevent them from PCSing to certain locations. Some try to hide the fact.

"People used to think having a Q code was a negative mark, 'I'm limited on where I can go,'" said Dunklee, "so people did not enroll in the program. Now it's more that you're doing a better service to your country and to your family if you enroll in the program. And it's quite encouraged by first sergeants and commanders."

According to the major, she receives four to five letters about people waiting to join their sick family member or that someone had to retrain because their family member could only be helped at a base where the airman's job isn't needed.

"It's all about matching the family's needs with the needs of the mission. It's wonderful when it all comes together. It's like opening a door," she said. ■

For more information on these programs, see the following websites:

- www.efmconnections.org/efm/Efmp/Efmp.asp (click on each branch of the service to see the details on what each branch provides).
- www.armycommunityservice.org/vacs_efm/user/faq/faq_user_display.asp?action=display_channel_objects&channelID=147209

Frequently Asked Questions About EFMP

Is this program available to members from all branches of the service?

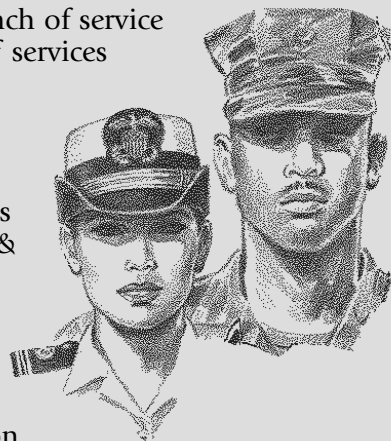
All branches have similar—but not identical—programs. Each branch of service calls their program a different acronym that best reflects the type of services they provide through that program.

Does each branch of the military have a different name for the program?

There are different names: Air Force is SNIAC—Special Needs Identification and Assignment Coordination Process; Army, Navy & Marines is:

EFMP—Exceptional Family Member Program; Coast Guard is: SNP—Special Needs Program; in the National Guard, it depends on which branch of service (ie: Army-National Guard, Air Force-National Guard, etc.

Also, the branches do not provide identical services. For information on the Coast Guard, go to their website to get more information: <http://www.uscg.mil/USCG.shtm>



Is this a mandatory program for servicemen and women who have family members with special needs?

Yes. The exceptional family member program (EFMP) is a mandatory enrollment program for active duty personnel, (to include members of the Coast Guard), whose goal is to locate military families in geographic areas where the needs of their special needs family member can be met. Active duty personnel and their dependents can call their installation offices to find out more about the program.

Who makes the determination as to whether or not a family qualifies for entry into this program?

The EFMP is not based on “qualifying” to entry. In other words, individuals do not need to meet a certain criteria to be enrolled. A family that has someone with diabetes, for example, should be enrolled; same if there is a child with dyslexia for example. There is not a minimum or a maximum to how much one is disabled in order to enroll. This is a Federal Mandatory Program specific to active duty families.

Are there any ramifications on promotions for those enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program?

No. The EFMP is a program that has been established to assist families (depending on branch of service) while ensuring mobility of the active duty personnel. It is not a deterrent to deployment or reassignments; even if the reassignment excluded the family from moving with the military member: sometimes military members have to take on a hardship and relocate without their families, because of the need to be mobile. This means that the family is supposed to have a “backup plan” in case this happens. It’s part of being enrolled in the EFMP.

Celebrating Special Children would like to thank Cristina Pippin, the Parent Education Coordinator of STOMP (Specialized Training of Military Parents), who took time from her busy schedule to answer these questions. For more information about STOMP, a federally funded Parent Training and Information (PTI) Center established to assist military families who have children with special education or health needs. See their website at www.stompproject.org.