

Army Families: Let Your Voice Be Heard!  
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My favorite phrase I've coined is, "let's face it, being a military family member is challenging, but it can also be extremely rewarding." I go on to add, "if you are given the right resources and information you can make this life work for you." This past week that phrase of mine was brought to life through a process called AFAP.

As a military family member I encounter many of *those* people. You know the one I am talking about; the complainer, the drama queen, and the one for which nothing ever works out. I always get a kick out of challenging *those* people to make a difference by sharing their problem and how they solved it, by teaching others how to cope, or by making changes in the system to better their community. I am sure that you also encounter those types of people. I wanted to share with you a resource that can not only make a difference in your own life, but that you will be able to share with other Army families as well.

How many of you know what Army Family Action Planning is? I learned about this Army program and experienced it first hand last week. Army Family Action Planning (AFAP) is an Army-wide program to improve Army quality of life. Through AFAP, all members of the Army, including Active, Reserve, and National Guard Soldiers, family members, retirees, surviving spouses, DA Civilians, and military technicians have a forum to voice concerns to Army leadership and make recommendations for change. The Army is the only branch of DOD that has such a program.

How did it start? In the late 1970's, Army spouses wanted to improve on the standard of living for their families. They realized they would have to get organized in order to accomplish this. They brought light to problems, suggested ways to resolve them and then volunteered their efforts to fix them. The community--minded spouses and their commitment to good standard of living within the Army formed the beginning of AFAP. AFAP was formally adopted at the first HQDA planning conference in July 1983 and the Army Family Action Plan was published in 1984. At the same time, the Community and Family Support Center (CFSC) was created and given the mission to continue and institutionalize the grass roots process begun by Army spouses.

I am sure you thinking, "Ok Tara what's in it for me?" Below, from the [www.myarmylifetoo.com](http://www.myarmylifetoo.com) website are some of the things that are a result of past AFAP Conferences.

Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance increased from \$50,000 to \$200,000.

Basic Allowance for Housing increased by 11% -- part of a plan to eliminate out-of-pocket housing costs by 2005.

Thrift Savings Plan for Military was authorized and implemented.

AER provides grants in overseas locations to assist with financial aid for spouses to pursue undergrad, vo/tech, high school completion, and English as a Second Language studies.

A DOD Reserve Component family member ID card was established.

A vehicle can be stored at government expense when a soldier is reassigned to an area where shipment isn't authorized.

Family Separation Allowance was increased from \$75 to \$100 per month.

TLE was authorized for first-term enlisted personnel as well as first-term officers.

Family Support Groups were institutionalized.

Programs like Army Family Team Building (AFTB) and Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) were born.

Informational and interactive Web sites have been established to address retirement information and planning, employment opportunities and application, and enlisted soldier assignments.

Implemented a 55% SBP benefit for post 62 annuitants phased in over 3.5 years.

Travel & transportation provided to Family Members of Soldiers not injured in contingency.

As you can see this process can make some huge changes in the lives of military families. A total of 601 issues have entered the AFAP in its 22 year history. They're making a difference and it is being heard loud and clear. I being a military spouse of 9 years just learned about AFAP this year, and I consider myself to be a pretty resourceful military spouse. I question why more Army families aren't participating? The answer is similar to that of all Army and military services in general, marketing. There seems to be a great disconnect in getting the information about how the process works out to the families who desperately are searching for answers and would participate had they known this was taking place.

How do you participate? The [www.armylifetoo.com](http://www.armylifetoo.com) website offers some helpful tips.

1. If you are part of the Army, you can be an AFAP participant.
2. If you are a commander, you can support a strong AFAP program in your community, and you can draw on the real-time quality of life information AFAP provides.
3. If you are a soldier, retiree, civilian, or family member - Active, Guard, or Reserve - you can be part of local, AC/ASCC/DRU and HQDA AFAP programs.
4. Be a delegate and share your good ideas.
5. Volunteer to help with a conference, assist with the program, or be a member of the local AFAP Advisory Committee.
6. Become familiar with current AFAP issues - tell people what's happening - get them energized to promote Army well-being

through the AFAP process. (The Issue Update Book on the AFAP web site contains all of the issues).

There are many levels in which you can participate. AFAP is done at a local or post level as well as regional and DA level. At your local level, participating can be as simple as submitting an issue. Many post websites have made this easy but allowing you to submit a form detailing your issue through their post website. Even if that is not the case, you can still make contact with your local Army Community Services (ACS) building or ask for the installation volunteer coordinator. These people will put you in contact with the person running your local AFAP conference.

AFAP issues can be local or national level. It is a great chance for you to get your voice heard. Is there something going on in your community that you don't think anyone is aware of that needs to be fixed or changed? Do you have a passion about a certain topic to the extent you are involved and see issues others may not? Do you just simply have a problem that could be solved but don't know where to ask for help? Filling out an AFAP form and/or participating in the conference can be a tremendous help to you and other families just like yours!

Here are some resources to get you started:

The Army Life Too AFAP Homepage

[http://www.myarmylifetoo.com/skins/malt/display.aspx?mode=User&Action=display\\_page&ModuleID=8cde2e88-3052-448c-893d-d0b4b14b31c4&ObjectID=75dafa85-9742-43c6-a9eb-11ac359b4c39](http://www.myarmylifetoo.com/skins/malt/display.aspx?mode=User&Action=display_page&ModuleID=8cde2e88-3052-448c-893d-d0b4b14b31c4&ObjectID=75dafa85-9742-43c6-a9eb-11ac359b4c39)

How to write a good AFAP issue (download)

[http://www.myarmylifetoo.com/skins/malt/display.aspx?moduleid=2a285ab0-5db1-4f36-9b91-f2263c973c32&mode=user&CategoryID=4349950c-03ce-4d9a-bb5a-6f920d4781ca&Action=download\\_resource&ObjectID=deecdce7-6d05-4614-9e65-af64a7867e5f&IgnoreTimeOut=true](http://www.myarmylifetoo.com/skins/malt/display.aspx?moduleid=2a285ab0-5db1-4f36-9b91-f2263c973c32&mode=user&CategoryID=4349950c-03ce-4d9a-bb5a-6f920d4781ca&Action=download_resource&ObjectID=deecdce7-6d05-4614-9e65-af64a7867e5f&IgnoreTimeOut=true)

HQDA Jan 2006 AFAP Conference Issues

[http://www.myarmylifetoo.com/skins/malt/display.aspx?moduleid=2a285ab0-5db1-4f36-9b91-f2263c973c32&mode=user&CategoryID=dc4868ad-ccfe-4fe6-a618-08a2f1f9e14a&Action=display\\_user\\_category\\_objects](http://www.myarmylifetoo.com/skins/malt/display.aspx?moduleid=2a285ab0-5db1-4f36-9b91-f2263c973c32&mode=user&CategoryID=dc4868ad-ccfe-4fe6-a618-08a2f1f9e14a&Action=display_user_category_objects)