

Strong family programs

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I recently read that Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Norton Schwartz and Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force James Roy had declared July 2009 – July 2010 the “Year of the Family.” The article stated this initiative would place increased focus on the commitment to, and development and evaluation of, programs that support the entire Air Force family - and by family he meant all married and single Airmen; parents, spouses and children; AF civilians; and retirees.

General Schwartz noted that his intent was to focus on what was going well, and identify what could be improved, with how the Air Force supports its “family.” This initiative will focus on four main topics: health and wellness; Airmen and family support; education, development and employment; and family housing.

It strikes me that all these topics touch Family Programs in one way or another -- and just like the Air Force and the Guard, our Family Programs has undergone radical changes since 9/11. Gone are the days when we’d joke, “If the military wanted you to have a family, they would issue you one,” and Family Support Personnel (i.e. Wing Family Program Coordinators) were looked upon as “children’s party planners.” All senior leaders now recognize the importance of supporting military members and their families through all stages of their service (e.g. enlistment, promotion, deployments, TDYs, and retirement) and all stages of personal and family life (e.g. being single, marriage, children, aging, caring for family members, etc.).

So how can we apply this to evaluating and improving how we support Airmen and families at the 109th? How do we make this the 109th “Year of the Family?” How do we strengthen and improve how we support our Airmen and families?

What is the leadership’s responsibility to you and your family? Currently, we are looking into best practice models to see how we can develop a volunteer group that will provide the base consistent and visible volunteer support. Gone are the days when it was enough to say we have volunteers on paper who we can call when we need something. It is our responsibility to provide whatever support is necessary to facilitate the development of a strong volunteer group focused on supporting all 109th Members and families. It’s our responsibility to find and implement the program supports that you are wanting ... and to be responsive in how quickly we get those things in place for you.

So what responsibility do you and your families have in all of this? I think the responsibility is twofold. First, many new programs have been established that offer support and information for all stages of civilian and military life. Do you know where to go for information regarding coping with an upcoming deployment? How about your children's military education or your employment benefits? What about the latest ANG news and how that may impact our unit? Are you aware of programs to help with investing and retirement after the Air Guard? And secondly, volunteering with the base Family Programs Office to develop a strong Volunteer Group that can support you and your family during times of trouble, transition, or just during every day life, and yes, for planning the children's parties and events.

It is our goal to use the "Year of the Family" as a starting point for a strong program at the 109th—one that leads our base into the future. But to do this, we need you. What is working? What isn't? What would you like to see changed? How would you like it changed? What have you heard is working well in other units? With your feedback and input we can truly make this the 109th Year of the Family. (*Published in The Skibird, Vol. 47, No. 4, Fall 2009*)

1 <http://www.af.mil/news/story.asp?id=123169753>