



FFSC Marks 25th Anniversary With Record Numbers

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MILLINGTON, Tenn. (July 9, 2004) – Usage of U.S. Navy Fleet and Family Support Center (FFSC) services is at an all-time high as The Center marks its 25-year anniversary of serving Sailors and their families.

Navy Personnel Command released The Center's 2003 utilization figures, which show more than 4.3 million service contacts at the 55 FFSCs worldwide – a 16.8 percent increase over the previous year and a two-year increase of 35.7 percent.

Navy Personnel Command officials attribute the increased usage to the impact of the war on terror on Navy families and to changes in service delivery at The Centers.

“We are noticing a lot more folks soliciting information from us to deal with extended absence on the home front,” said Captain Mary Ann Margosian, director of Navy Personnel Command's Fleet and Family Support Division. “We also have a lot of family members taking care of military children on their own. We've reached out to those families and the schools to talk about what deployment means.”

Though the war on terror has impacted usage of The Center's various programs, The Center has enhanced delivery of services, dispatching some 75 Return & Reunion teams to sea during a two-month period alone last year and adding online features such as the Department of Defense's new Navy OneSource information and referral system (www.navyonesource.com, user ID-Navy, password-Sailor).

Margosian also credits Center staff for ramping up outreach efforts to Sailors and their families from base to base and responding to their needs. Service members are increasingly aware that The Center offers much more than free counseling and information and referral. Utilization of The Center's Spouse Employment Assistance Program and New Parent Support Program, for example, is up 68.5 percent and 69 percent respectively over the past two years.

“FFSCs continue to evolve. I've said that from Year One, and here we are coming up on 25,” said Anita Keegan, on staff when the first FFSC opened its doors in Norfolk, Va., in July 1979 and still on staff as administrative services coordinator for the Norfolk FFSC. “I still enjoy hearing, ‘I had no idea you did that.’”

The first two Centers opened 25 years ago in Norfolk and San Diego, providing the sort of one-stop services shop recommended by the landmark Navywide Family Awareness Conference in November 1978. They offered information and referral, counseling and a 24-hour hotline staffed by trained senior petty officers and Marine sergeants. The Center in Norfolk cited 6,000 information and referral inquiries and 556 social work cases opened in its first year of operation.

“Prior to 1978, the Navy position on families would definitely be: If we wanted you to have a family, we would have issued one in your seabag,” said Kit Decker, a Navy spouse who has worked for The Center since 1981 and is now head of the FFSC Support Branch in Millington. “I think one of the biggest things the FFSCs have done is recognize what some of the specific stressors were for Navy families and take the lead in developing solutions.”

Today The Center offers 67 delivery sites worldwide and 14 core programs for single and married Sailors alike, including services that help them balance their budgets (Personal Financial Management), move to a new base (Relocation Assistance Program) and make the transition to civilian life (Transition Assistance Management Program). There are now five Centers in Hampton Roads alone – not including a satellite office at the Newport News, Va., shipyard – and they collectively cited nearly 1 million service contacts in 2003.

“I think over time the value of the support programs that are offered in the Navy cannot be overestimated,” Margosian said, citing for example the Sexual Assault Victim Intervention (SAVI) program that has become a model for the other services.

“The military is a very arduous lifestyle. That cannot be denied. We ask a lot of our Sailors. And we offer them something in return. When they have problems or need resources to enhance their careers or family life, we have an avenue for them.”

Perhaps most significant, the FFSC has established itself as a model for crisis response and a go-to organization during times of tragedy. The Center played a key role in relief efforts for families of the USS Iowa in 1989 and USS Cole in 2000. Arguably The Center's finest hour came in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, when a team from Hampton Roads set up two Family Assistance Centers and 24-hour call centers – one in Norfolk and the other at The Pentagon – in less than a day.

Several foreign navies have sent delegations to the United States or requested material to study the FFSC, including Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Russia and Turkey.

“I know that other nations provide some level of support to their Sailors and families,” said veteran FFSC staffer Keegan, who participated in The Pentagon relief effort. “But when their representatives come to this country, we are usually considered the model. We've been the innovators with much of this.”

Margosian acknowledged that there are still many Sailors who have never been inside an FFSC – especially singles who may not be aware of the career-enhancing resources and self-help classes available at The Center. On the 25th anniversary of the program, she invites them to check out The Center and see how far their benefits go.

“Many folks don't get information about the FFSC until it's too late or until it's time to take a TAP [Transition Assistance Program] class,” Margosian said. “Even if you don't have a family, go in there. Know what tools are in your toolbox.”

The FFSC provides operational, mobility and counseling support to service members and their families, helping them adapt to Navy life. FFSC services are a benefit free to all service members, single or married, including activated Reservists, retirees and Department of Defense civilians in overseas locations. There are 55 FFSCs and 67 delivery sites worldwide. For more information about the FFSC or to locate the nearest Center, visit FFSC on the Web at www.persnet.navy.mil/pers66, or e-mail FFSC headquarters at mill_ffsp@navy.mil.