



# Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

## Assistance Center working to make a difference for military Families

By: Stacy Neumann, Medical Department Activity Public Affairs

Brenna Novack credits counseling for the drastic change in her household.

“We were struggling and having a hard time. The kids may have been acting out because of the issues they had,” the military spouse remembered. “When we signed up, it definitely changed our lives.”

Novack was having a routine physical at Evans Army Community Hospital when she mentioned to her provider that she was having issues at home. The provider suggested a therapist, referring her to MEDDAC’s Child and Family Assistance Center. After several years of struggles, she said, this made a difference.

“Our house before was completely chaotic. Now, we want to be together and do things we haven’t done before. We can have game night. We can have Family night,” enthused Novack.

Started in 2009 as one of three Army pilot programs to provide behavioral health services to active duty Families, the local CAFAC has now grown to more than 20 providers. Psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, marriage and family therapists, triage technicians and nurse case managers come together to treat the entire Family. The center offers couples and marital counseling, triage services, child and adolescent services as well as behavioral diagnostic workups.

“We knew the need was there. Without the strong support and backing of Family, we see a decrease in our Soldiers’ abilities to put their heart into the fight,” said Lt. Col. Erin Wilkinson, CAFAC chief.

The CAFAC is designed to help strengthen Family resiliency. In its initial year, the center had approximately 4,000 visits. That grew to about 18,000 in 2010. With deployments, PCS moves, and other military-related stressors, Wilkinson said the staff sees a lot of adjustment issues. It’s one of the reasons the CAFAC now administers a school based behavioral health team. In 2001, a behavioral health provider embedded into a local school to address the needs of military students. Since then, four more providers and District 8 schools have been added to the program.

“Attendance improves. The children have better relationships with teachers. There’s less acting out.” Wilkinson explained, “You don’t have to take the child out of school for an appointment and it provides continuity. Our provider can really be an advocate for a child’s special needs.”



The school-based providers can also refer children and their Family to the main center for additional services.

The CAFAC takes walk-in emergencies, self-referrals and referrals from medical providers. Wilkinson said she's seen far more Soldiers coming in for services with Family members and command support is strong. She emphasized that each case is reviewed and providers evaluate the Family's needs as a whole.

Novack said it's an approach that has worked for her military Family.

"We have techniques we can use. My husband and I have learned new ways to deal with our kids. We don't let problems get out of hand," she explained. "It has made a tremendous change. I tell others, if you can get on board, you definitely need to get on it. Even my relatives out-of-state say they can tell how excited I am about our Family. They can hear it."

Wilkinson said that's exactly what her staff wants to accomplish.

"A therapist's greatest sense of fulfillment is when they see a Family or patient take what they received and improve their lives," she emphasized. "It makes their day."

The telephone number for the Child and Family Assistance Center is (719) 503-7070.