

Chapter Seven: Professional Partnerships

7.1 Building Relationships

The Relocation Assistance Program is part of Marine and Family Services which in turn is part of Marine Corps Community Services (MCCS), this is the Marine Corps' structure for improving quality of life for Marines and their families. RAP is one component in a systemic organization where each part relies on the other to achieve a single mission: assist the Marine Corps to make Marines and win battles. It stands within the five pillars of MCCS comprised of General Support, Business Operations, Marine Corps Family Team Building, Semper Fit, and Marine and Family Services. Other installation organizations also share this mission such as the Red Cross, the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society, thrift shops, base housing, religious programs, spouse organizations, and medical treatment facilities. They all play critical roles in assisting the well-being of Marines and their family members. There's a synergy involved that cannot be ignored. Therefore, it is incumbent on RAP personnel to build and nourish relationships with personnel from the other supporting programs.



KEY POINT

Dictionary definition of relationship: “a particular type of connection existing between people related to or having dealings with each other.”

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language
Third Edition 1992

To capitalize upon the synergy of all these local support systems, it is incumbent on RAP personnel build and maintain positive relationships. Building relationships sometimes involves going out of one's comfort zone. This effort made by the RAP will be rewarded when Marines and family members reap the benefit of multiple helping agencies

responding to their needs in an organized way. Following are some tips to initiate the process.

- Attend MCCA team building functions, such as an employee appreciation day picnic.
- Participate in co-worker activities, such as a baby shower or retirement ceremony, even if the honoree is unknown.
- Make a point of talking to a stranger, or two, at all of these events.
- Make “cold calls” to the different programs to meet and greet the people there.
- Offer to help others, and follow through on that offer when asked.
- Catch people doing something right, and compliment them on it.
- Acknowledge co-workers with a smile.
- Highlight and promote another agency or program in newsletters or e-mail blasts.
- Openly share RAP information and resources with other agencies and programs.

7.2 Five Pillars of MCCA

The five pillars of MCCA are related to each other in purpose and are therefore often physically located near each other on base. They stand alone in specific function, yet they overlap in many ways which opens doors to productive and supportive collaborative efforts. All five pillars work together to fulfill the mission of MCCA thereby supporting the quality of life of Marines and their family members so that the Marine Corps can, in turn, fulfill its mission of defending the country. It’s a continuous circle of service provided, received, and delivered. RAP’s role is to provide relocation assistance to support Marines and their families in the mobile military lifestyle.

Marine and Family Services. RAP operates within the framework of Marine and Family Services alongside related services such as transition assistance, family member

employment assistance, personal financial management, family advocacy, clinical counseling, new parent support, and lifelong learning.

Experienced RAP staff understand how these programs overlap and apply to relocation assistance. RAP personnel are strongly encouraged to forge partnerships and relationships with their fellow M&FS managers, particularly for programming purposes to better serve relocating Marines and family members. The Transition Assistance Management Program helps Marines and their families as they separate or retire from the Marine Corps, their final career relocation. The Family Member Employment Assistance Program helps Marine spouses in their career development and employment search as they move from installation to installation. Personal Financial Management can help with budgeting for a move, while the Exceptional Family Member Program helps families with special needs transition from one locale to another. Clinical counselors offer assistance with personal issues such as depression or adjustment challenges that may be influenced by relocating. Lifelong Learning offers educational opportunities that can be continued at most duty stations. Children, Youth, and Teen programs offer critical child development services to include daycare, after school care, and recreational programs and activities.

Marine Corps Family Team Building (MCFTB). MCFTB provides programs to enhance quality of life, personal growth, and information about the Marine Corps lifestyle. MCFTB offers a cadre of spouse education classes and seminars ranging from classes directed to those new to the military lifestyle, to seminars directed toward assuming leadership roles in the community. RAP personnel may refer customers to any of the MCFTB programs, such as the Key Volunteer Network (KVN) to meet new people and to learn about the community and L.I.N.K.S. for basic information about Marine Corps life. In turn, if MCFTB service providers know what RAP offers and know a RAP service provider personally, they will likely refer people needing relocation assistance to RAP. It's called a warm handoff when one service provider can refer a patron personally, by name, to another service provider. A warm handoff is good customer

service. So, the relationship between two co-workers results in a positive experience for the patron.

Semper Fit. Semper Fit is the health and wellness pillar of MCCA. Gyms, physical fitness programs, health-related classes and support groups, recreation, massage therapy, health fairs and sporting events fall under Semper Fit's purview. A relocating Marine and family may well want to become involved in a physical fitness program that helps alleviate the stress of moving. Gyms are locations where numerous Marines and family members patron for a variety of recreational and fitness activity on a regular basis. For the purposes of marketing and ensuring reciprocal referrals, it is advisable that RAP personnel become acquainted with the wellness staff and subsequently exchange resource knowledge. If RAP personnel know Semper Fit personnel by name, they can refer a patron to a specific person for whatever their need is. This, again, is a warm handoff, and very good customer service.

General Support. General Support generally refers to those "back of the house" functions that support MCCA. Such functions include human resources, marketing, finance and accounting, information technology, and training. A few of these functions are worth mentioning since they may be of tremendous value to the RAP. Information technology (IT) and marketing professionals can undergird RAP's provision of service. IT support is crucial to running an effective program. It's where service and client databases are stored and where loan locker inventories are maintained, and web sites hosted. The Internet is a mainstay in searching for relocation information. For example, SITES, www.dmdc.osd.mil/sites, is a website that offers information about almost every military installation worldwide. When computer problems are encountered, service delivery is impaired, if not halted altogether. When relationships exist between co-workers, they are more likely to respond favorably when their services are needed. It's reasonable to conclude that IT troubleshooters will respond more quickly if they recognize the person who is calling them for help.

The same principle about relationships applies to marketing. As discussed in Chapter Three, the marketing staff has access to expertise and information that members of the RAP staff may be able to use to “get the word out” to their target population about the Relocation Assistance Program. If a RAP manager gets to know the people in Marketing, those co-workers are likely to provide help when asked.

Availability of General Support may differ from base to base. However, if direct support is not forthcoming, indirect support may be available. Any support is more likely when relationships between co-workers have been forged and are maintained.

Business Operations. Business Operations is the revenue producing pillar of MCCS. It consists of the Marine Corps Exchange, Seven Day Store, Package Store, Gas Station, Club system and other activities that generate funds through the provision of a specific service or good. Certainly relocating personnel want to know the who, what, when, where, why and how of shopping and dining on base. If RAP personnel get to know key personnel at the local exchange, for example, a complementary exchange of information may take place. Flyers and brochures may be exchanged and posted or distributed for mutual benefit. Personal relationships facilitate this type of interaction.

7.3 Base Agencies

There are agencies that support quality of life programs in addition to the MCCS programs. They may be located on base, sometimes physically near MCCS facilities. They may also have branch offices within the community. Some common agencies are the American Red Cross (ARC), www.redcross.org; the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society (NMCRS), www.nmcrrs.org; the Armed Services Young Men’s Christian Association (ASYMCA), www.asymca.org; and the United Service Organizations (USO), www.uso.org.

American Red Cross. The American Red Cross is known for its ability to respond to disasters or emergencies at a Marine’s home of record. It also offers classes from

babysitting, to swimming, to cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Volunteer opportunities for youth and adults offer a means for a newcomer in the community to meet people, learn skills to put on a resume, and make networking contacts that might help in looking for employment at the new location.

Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society. The Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society provides financial assistance in the form of budget counseling, loans, grants, and scholarships. They also offer a budgeting for baby class and give a baby's layette to eligible families. The layette consists of various baby items including blankets and sweater sets that are hand knit or crocheted by volunteers. Newcomers to a base may very well need some financial help to complete their move. Volunteer opportunities are also available to facilitate meeting people and to learn new skills.

Armed Services Young Men's Christian Association. The Armed Services Young Men's Christian Association is a member association of the YMCA of the United States of America, working with the Department of Defense. Several Marine Corps installations host this organization. For example, the ASYMCA can be found aboard the following bases: Camp Lejeune, Camp Pendleton and Twentynine Palms. Check the website for other locations. This is a religious organization based on Christian principles, endeavoring to provide education, recreation, social, and religious programs to members of the armed services.

Religious Program. Religious organizations, often sponsored by the base Chapel, are also resources for RAP personnel who are assisting Marines and their families to relocate. A familiar religious affiliation can ease the process of moving to a new place. Many installation Religious Programs offer personal growth retreats such as CREDO, and marriage enhancement workshops.

United Service Organizations. The United Service Organizations, or USO as it is more commonly known, is located on a few Marine Corps bases, for example, some of those

on Okinawa. Marines and their families traveling to new duty stations might be interested to know that the USO offers some special amenities to service members at most airports.

RAP, its personnel, and patrons will benefit from establishing relationships with these agencies. They can ease the relocation experience for Marines and their families. Therefore, it's important for RAP managers to reach out and get to know people from these organizations and stay up-to-date on how they can benefit relocating personnel.

7.4 Civilian Organizations

There are civilian organizations that can ease the relocation transition, including tourism boards and chambers of commerce. Search www.chamberofcommerce.com to find contact information for local chambers and tourism boards. An introductory phone call, with regular follow-up calls, will serve RAP personnel well when they want to refer patrons to services offered by these organizations.

A relationship between RAP and the local public school system can result in facilitating a young person's adjustment to a new school. Knowing someone to contact at the local school means the RAP manager can call that person to let them know a new student is arriving. This may result in a warm welcome for a child, thus starting him or her off on the right foot in a scary situation. Giving parents the name of a person at the school that they can call for enrollment information eases their minds and facilitates the moving process for the entire family.

Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America, and other related organizations, are available on most bases. This is another venue to help young people adjust and begin to feel like they "belong" in their new community.

7.5 Maintaining the Network

Once relationships have been initiated, it's important to nourish them so that they will grow, and then to maintain them. Developing relationships can make a RAP manager's job easier in the long run. Maintaining them and using them to provide outstanding customer service may result in a sense of pride in a job well done. RAP service providers may also realize a transcendent sense of fulfillment for helping Marines and their families at a vulnerable and often painful time in their lives.

Two things to keep in mind when developing a maintenance program are

- maintaining relationships is easier than starting from scratch
- due to the transient nature of the military lifestyle, contact personnel may change on a regular basis

Some tips for maintaining the network are

- set up a system for regular follow-up since this facilitates turning the process into a habitual, regular, routine that almost runs on its own
- keep the system simple
- determine time increments for regular follow-up, whether it will be once a week, once a month, or once every two months
- choose whether the follow-up contact will be phone, e-mail, snail mail, or visit. It can change from person to person, and situation to situation (e.g. one month a birthday card sent via snail mail may be appropriate; another time e-mailing a professional article may be the way to go)
- make it personal (e.g. reminders to touch base can be on 3 x 5 index cards, programmed reminders on the computer calendar, or yellow post-it sticky notes)
- keep notes so that subsequent communication can relate back to previous conversations

- SMILE a greeting at each encounter, whether visual or on the phone (smiles can be heard – also take care with the tone expressed in e-mails)



KEY POINT **E-mail Etiquette Tips**

- Be concise and to the point
- Use proper spelling, grammar & punctuation
- Answer swiftly
- Do not attach unnecessary files
- Do not overuse the high priority option
- Do not write in CAPITALS
- Don't leave out the message thread
- Read the e-mail before you send it
- Do not overuse Reply to All
- Avoid using “stationary” images as this slows transmission
- Do not forward chain letters
- Do not copy a message or attachment without permission
- Do not use e-mail to discuss confidential information
- Use a meaningful subject
- Use active instead of passive
- Avoid using URGENT and IMPORTANT
- Avoid long sentences
- Don't send e-mails containing libelous or offensive remarks
- Keep your language gender neutral
- Don't reply to spam

