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**1 Canadian Air Division (CAD)
A1 Family Support Team (FST)**



RCAF Family Connection Program

Foreword

The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) Family Connection Program was inspired by discussions with military families from RCAF Wings and units across Canada. The Program has been developed to promote effective communication and community building efforts by establishing a **family-centric, unit specific volunteer organization** at every RCAF unit through partnerships between the RCAF chain of command, the Military Family Resource Centre (MFRC) and other key family support partners.

RCAF families are fortunate to have access to many high quality family support resources and services provided by local MFRCs and other family support partners. The availability of such programs, however, does not release leaders from their responsibilities to care for RCAF personnel and, by extension, their families. Through a unique partnership between RCAF Commanders, MFRCs and families themselves, the RCAF Family Connection Program is designed to build a stronger sense of RCAF community. By establishing family-centric communications networks, the Program will also ensure families gain greater awareness of, and access to, available MFRC services.

These Guidelines provide an overview of the Program and its objectives. It will elaborate on the crucial role that MFRC staff will play in assisting with the successful implementation of the Program at RCAF units. Active cooperation between the MFRC and local leadership is critical to the long term viability of this family support initiative.

The RCAF Family Support Team is available to assist you as you implement this unique RCAF initiative. Contact them with any questions at RCAFFamily_ARCfamille@forces.gc.ca.

On behalf of the entire RCAF, I would like to thank you for your dedication and hard work in support of CAF members and their families. Your efforts are invaluable as we look forward to continuing our work together in building a strong RCAF community.

A.D. Meinzinger
Lieutenant-General
Commander Royal Canadian Air Force



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Introduction

Background

Following the publication of the 2013 Department of National Defence/Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman's report: *On the Homefront: Assessing the Well-Being of Canada's Military Families in the New Millennium*, RCAF senior leadership proactively stepped forward to engage RCAF personnel, families and national/local family support partners to discuss a wide range of family support issues.

Early in this process, the RCAF Family Support Team (FST) was given the mission to **communicate, facilitate and advocate** on behalf of RCAF families. The FST completed its first phase of activities, travelling coast to coast meeting with leaders, members, families and MFRC staff. The message families shared during those visits was clear: *We need a stronger sense of community and more family-friendly communication within the RCAF – especially at the unit level.* The RCAF took this feedback seriously and developed the RCAF Family Connection Program.

The Program is leadership driven but cannot operate without dedicated support from MFRCs. A formal partnership agreement between Military Family Services and the RCAF outlines the respective roles and responsibilities of the MFRCs, the FST and the local Chain of Command during implementation and execution of the Program.

Why is the Program Important?

The Program acknowledges the requests of military families for locally-based, family centric communications and enhanced connectivity within the military community. The Program is designed to:

- Promote individual, family and unit readiness.
- Establish continuous contact with families.
- Encourage peer-to-peer family connections.
- Enable grass-roots solutions.
- Link families to unit leadership and the RCAF Chain of Command.
- Foster strong, resilient families and unit communities.



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Program Outcomes

Through partnerships between the MFRC and unit Command Teams, a volunteer Family Connector will be assigned to families who are relocating and those experiencing extended service-related separation. This methodology was chosen in order to affect a number of positive outcomes for families, the MFRC and the RCAF at large.

The Family Connection Program differs from existing MFRC programming mainly by virtue of its focus on social connections within each unit. Fostering important social connections between spouses and families within a unit promotes family and unit readiness while enabling grass-roots solutions and support for families. It is anticipated that enhanced social connections between families will help prevent small issues from growing into crises long before they arrive at the MFRC. The Program also provides a mechanism for unit Command Teams to get engaged in improving the welfare of unit families and to play a key role in enhancing unit cohesiveness.

Because Family Connectors will be educated about all MFRC programming and will be integrated into the military community, these volunteers will have 'early detection' of specific needs among families and promptly direct these families to existing family support services at the MFRCs or other key service providers.

In specific terms, the Family Connection Program will:

- Increase awareness of existing family support programs and resources.
- Foster ongoing communication with other families and reinvigorate unit-based social networks.
- Address family support issues at the earliest stage.
- Include ALL family structures and dynamics.
- Establish a feedback mechanism for families at the local level.
- Enhance family resiliency and increase readiness/retention.
- Facilitate smoother family postings through early contact/information sharing.
- Better prepare/support families during service-related separations.
- Empower families to shape the RCAF Community they live in.



Program Function and Structure

Organization and Information Flow

While the RCAF Chain of Command has ultimately responsible for Program execution, each individual and organization involved has a unique and important role to play in ensuring the Program's success. Figure 1 provides an overview of the general flow of information within the Program for units located on RCAF Wings. For specific guidance related to RCAF units on other bases, please contact the FST at RCAFFamily_ARCfamille@forces.gc.ca

RCAF Family Connection Program Network

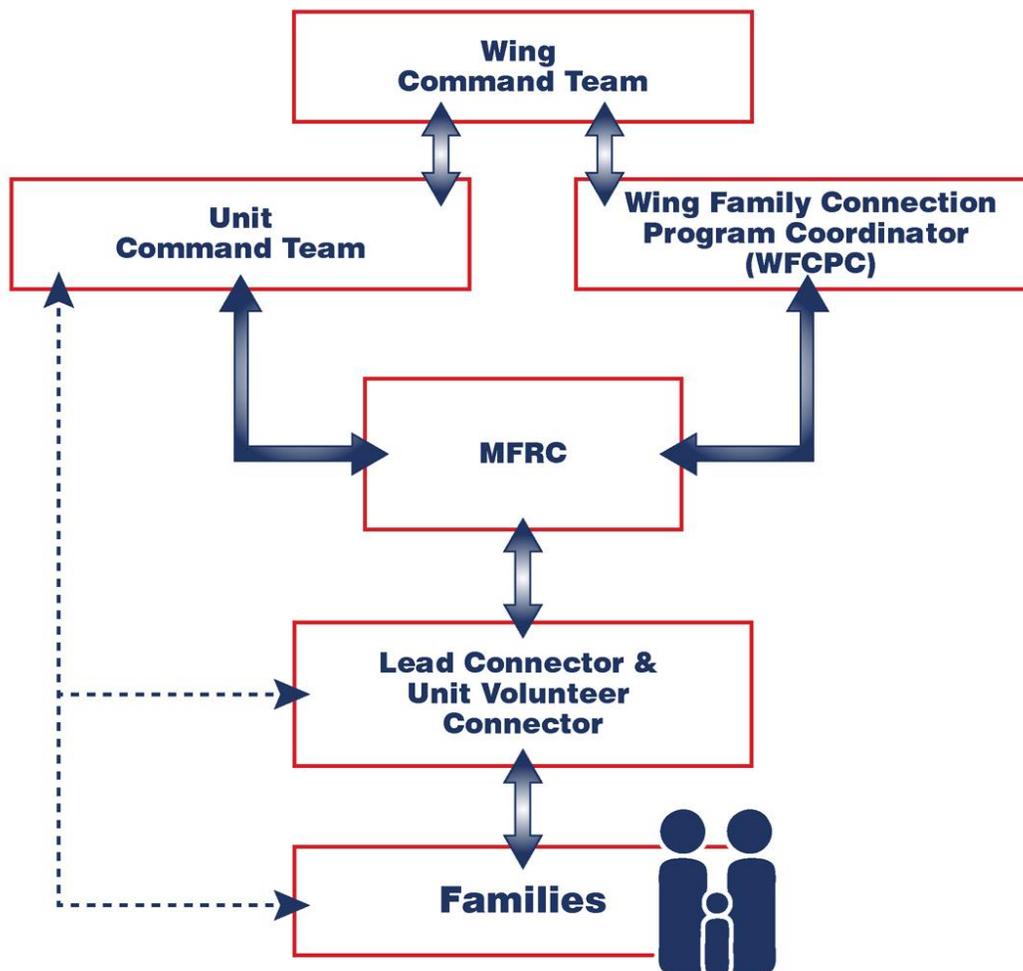


Figure 1



RCAF Family Connection Program

Wing/Unit Family Connection Program Team Dynamics

Figure 2 provides a quick overview of the primary role of each individual/organization that makes up the Program Team at the local level.

Position	Role
Wing Command Team	Is responsible for overall Program execution at all RCAF units in their area of responsibility.
Wing Family Connection Program Coordinator (WFCPC)	The WFCPC is responsible for overall coordination and enduring support of the Program at all RCAF entities in the Wing Command Team's area of responsibility, including RCAF lodger units. Issues with the Program writ large from a unit Command Team perspective should be raised to the WFCPC for consideration and action.
Unit Command Team	Establishes and supports the Family Connection Program at the unit level, including outreach to unit families and connecting with Program volunteers. Works collaboratively with the MFRC to ensure effective Program execution and volunteer recruitment. Meets with Lead Connector on a regular basis and Connectors occasionally. Recognizes all volunteers at least annually.
Unit Family Connection Program Representative (UFCPR)	The UFCPR works on behalf of the Command Team to manage the Program at the unit level. Tasks may include: assisting the MFRC with recruitment and orientation of the Connectors and the Lead Connectors; providing the MFRC with Posting/Deployment/TD instructions; and assisting the MFRC in orientation training for Connectors. UFCPR is the primary Point of Contact for unit-specific Program questions/concerns. They may also coordinate Command Team/volunteer interactions.
Lead Connector	A volunteer family member connected to the unit. Assists MFRC with Family Connector assignments and assists the Command Team and UFCPR with family-centric outreach and communications. Coaches/mentors Family Connectors. Is the primary Program POC for MFRC.
Connectors	A volunteer family member affiliated with the unit. Connectors act as a personal connection to the unit and larger military community for her/his/their assigned families. They proactively welcome new families and provide peer-to-peer support in the form of information and referrals.
MFRC	The go-to organization for military family support outside of the unit. Working in close collaboration with the Unit Command Team, the MFRC is



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	responsible for Program volunteer management and facilitates Program execution. They are an invaluable resource for Connectors and a key partner in ensuring the overall success of the Program. Each MFRC will designate a staff member to act as the POC for program volunteers to reach out to when resource-related assistance is required. The extent of MFRC involvement in the program will vary slightly based on location.
Families	Participate in the Program if desired. Interact with Volunteers, MFRC and the Unit Command Team.

Figure 2

Building the Team - Roles and Responsibilities

Now that the general team dynamics and organization of the Program have been described, the following information is provided to describe the specific roles and responsibilities of all key players.

Military Family Resource Centre

Based on the terms of an approved Partnership Agreement between the RCAF and Military Family Services, the MFRC will have responsibility for the Program's volunteer management process. In addition, the MFRC will assist Wings and /or units with Program execution. This allows the RCAF to leverage the MFRC's expertise in delivering the existing Military Family Services Program.

Close collaboration between the MFRC and the local Command Teams will be required to ensure Program effectiveness. The MFRC will be responsible for the following:

- Advertising the Program within their respective areas of responsibility.
- Ensuring volunteers are screened (including Criminal Record and Child Abuse Registry checks).
- Recruiting volunteers through a general advertising/communication campaign.
- Appointing Connectors and Lead Connectors in collaboration with unit Command Teams.
- Delivering the mandatory Program Orientation and other optional training to all volunteers, including any MFRC specific volunteer training.
- Assigning Connectors to families in collaboration with the Unit Lead Connector and/or Unit Family Connection Program Rep (UFCPR).
- Providing ongoing mentorship and support to Connectors and Lead Connectors.



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- Maintaining volunteer records in accordance with MFS data management and privacy policies.
- Collecting, reviewing and submitting local, Program-related "best-practices" to MFS.
- Communicating Wing and national level family support information to Connectors on an as-required basis.
- Providing Program feedback to MFS and to the local WFCPC.
- Encouraging and facilitating appropriate local grassroots initiatives related to the Program.

These roles will be further addressed in later sections of this handbook.

Command Team

The Family Connection Program is a Commander's responsibility at every RCAF unit. Command Teams are composed of the unit Commanding Officer and the unit Chief Warrant Officer (or Master Warrant Officer in some cases). Command Teams are the critical focal point for the Program and are accountable to their higher chain of command for Program implementation and durability. Each Command Team is responsible for:

- Establishing and supporting the Program at the unit level.
- Encouraging members and families to participate in the Program.
- Working cooperatively with the MFRC to recruit and appoint Program volunteers.
- Welcoming new volunteers to the unit.
- Establishing and maintaining open channels of communication with the Lead Connector and the Connector cadre.
- Meeting regularly with the Lead Connector and at least quarterly with Connectors.
- Providing guidance to Lead Connectors and Connectors regarding direct communications with the Comd Team (i.e. Commander's Critical Information Requirements, contact information, after hours contact, etc).
- Formally recognizing/thanking unit volunteers.
- Appointing a UFCPR and providing unit specific Program guidance to that individual.
- Coordinating the collection of family contact info for Program purposes.

Unit Family Connection Representative (UFCPR)

Each unit has a UFCPR who is selected and appointed by the Command Team. On behalf of the Commanding Officer, the UFCPR will be the principal military unit POC for the Program at the unit level and will be responsible for establishing and maintaining



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positive connections with the unit Family Connection volunteers and the MFRC. The UFCPR should be a seasoned, senior military member. The UFCPR works closely with the Lead Connector and is responsible for the following:

- Liaising with Wing staff for all Program related needs and linkages to higher headquarters.
- Facilitating the MFRC's volunteer recruitment efforts at the unit level as required.
- Ensuring the MFRC is provided with any unit-specific information required for orientation of the Lead Connector.
- Ensuring the MFRC and the Lead Connector are provided with unit-specific information required for Connectors.
- Ensuring the MFRC receives copies of all Posting In/Out messages as well as notification regarding all deployments/ training/TD of 30 days or more.
- Communicating timely, relevant information regarding unit events, family support partner activities and other important matters to the MFRC and the Lead Connector.
- Assisting the MFRC with the mentoring of the Lead Connector if/as required.
- Meeting with the Unit Command Team and the Lead Connector regularly and with Connectors at least quarterly (or as directed by the Command Team).
- Providing feedback/reports to Wing authorities regarding Program statistics, observations or Best Practices, on an as-required or on-demand basis.

Lead Connector

Lead Connectors are volunteers; they are the link between volunteer Connectors and both the RCAF CoC and the MFRC. Wherever feasible, a Lead Connector should be appointed for each unit by the MFRC in close collaboration with the Comd Team. To be Lead Connector, individuals should be adult family members connected to the unit. Potential Lead Connectors must also demonstrate that she/he is capable of carrying out the connector duties in a way that credits the Program, unit and RCAF.

At the unit level, the Lead Connectors works closely with the UFCPR to ensure that the Program runs smoothly and meets the specific needs of unit families. The Lead Connector will help recruit new Connectors as needed, mentor existing Connectors alongside the MFRC, and coordinate Program activities for the unit and its Connectors.

A Lead Connector Work Description is included at Annex A; however, these are the most important things to keep in mind about Lead Connectors:

- Lead Connectors are essentially the team lead for the Program within the unit; however, they remain volunteers and care must be taken to ensure they are not overtasked.



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- Lead Connectors will work closely with the MFRC and the UFCPR to coordinate and track Connector assignments. They also maintain a direct link to the Comd Team for family support issues.
- Lead Connectors may maintain a contact list for participating unit families and share information with Connectors and families as necessary and appropriate.
- Lead Connectors are the primary Program point of contact for the unit with the MFRC.
- Lead Connectors would ideally commit a minimum of two consecutive years to the Program.
- The Lead Connector is the first point of contact at the unit for a Connector who has questions or concerns.

Connector

Connectors and the families they support are at the heart of the Program. Connectors provide families with a personal connection to the unit and the larger military community. By proactively reaching out to assigned families Connectors provide a warm welcome as well as peer-to-peer support in the form of information and resources. Connectors are appointed by the MFRC in collaboration with the unit Command Team. To be a Connector, individuals should be an adult family member connected to the unit. Potential Connectors must also demonstrate that she/he is capable of carrying out the volunteer duties in a way that credits the Program, unit and RCAF.

Although a full Connector Volunteer Work Description is included at Annex B, these are the most important things to keep in mind about Connectors:

- Connectors are ambassadors for the Program, the unit and the MFRC. Their primary job is to reach out to and connect with families who are experiencing relocation or service-related separation.
- Connectors are responsive to, but not responsible to the unit Comd Team.
- The MFRC ensures that all Connectors are screened as volunteers; however, Connectors do not have a government security clearance and shall not be provided with personal information about members or families with the exception of personal contact information for families who have consented to participate in the Program.
- Connectors are MFRC volunteers and as such are not part of the CoC. If there are concerns about the continued suitability of a Connector to represent the unit and/or the RCAF, those concerns should be addressed by MFRC staff.
- Connectors would ideally commit a minimum period of one year to the Program and are welcome to remain involved with the program for longer.



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- Connectors who show particular interest and commitment should be considered for future Lead Connector opportunities.



Volunteer Management

The Program relies upon the existing volunteer management expertise of the MFRC. In accordance with the RCAF/MFS Partnership Agreement, the MFRC is responsible for overseeing and facilitating the volunteer management process, including recruiting, screening, appointing, training and employing volunteers in conjunction with the local Wing Commander and/or unit Command Team. The level of involvement will vary from location to location and should be a joint decision between the MFRC and the Wing Comd Team.

Recruiting

Energetic and enthusiastic volunteers from every RCAF unit are absolutely essential to the success of the Family Connection Program. Without them, the Program cannot function effectively. While individual MFRCs know the dynamics of the communities in which they operate and are well poised to leverage the existing volunteer pool, the FST has also worked to develop Program-specific recruiting materials for local use. These products are available by contacting the FST directly at RCAFFamily_ARCfamille@forces.gc.ca or by working with your local military public affairs section.

Individual unit Command Teams will also assist with recruiting by reaching out to unit families to announce the Program and encourage participation. You should ensure that unit Command Teams are familiar with the appropriate MFRC point of contact to share with unit families when they recruit and advertise for the Program.

Screening

In order to ensure the integrity of the Program, prospective volunteers must complete a Vulnerability Sector Check and Criminal Records Check.

The MFRC should coordinate directly with the local Military Police unit and/or civilian community policing organization to determine the preferred local process for requesting the required checks.

Volunteer Recognition

Recognizing volunteers for their contributions to the Program is important. Volunteers who feel that their work in support of RCAF families is valued are more likely to continue to work with the Program and more likely to encourage others to volunteer as well. MFRCs are encouraged to include Program volunteers in their pre-existing volunteer



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recognition activities and also to work with Comd Teams who may wish to recognize volunteers at the unit level.

Volunteer Eligibility

Any adult family member is eligible to be a Program volunteer as long as they meet the screening requirements, are willing and able to complete the necessary training and have a sincere desire to help other military families and have demonstrated that they are capable of carrying out the duties of a connector in a way that brings credit to the Program, the unit and the RCAF. This includes uniformed military members, adult children, parents and any other loved one who is active in the military community.

In the case of dual service couples, members may volunteer as a Family Connector for their own unit or the unit of their service spouse.

Appointing

Potential Program volunteers do not need to have any specific training or experience to be considered as a Family Connector; however, the following personal traits are generally desirable for all volunteers:

- Good communication skills
- Positive attitude towards the CAF, RCAF, the MFRC and a favourable view of the local area
- General knowledge of various military family support resources
- Ability to work as a member of a team and to get along well with others from various backgrounds
- Respect for the value of privacy and confidentiality

In addition to the traits listed above, volunteers interested in taking on the role of Lead Connector for a unit would benefit from the following skillsets:

- Basic leadership skills
- Organizational skills
- Excellent communication skills

Even if Comd Teams are not actively involved in recruiting and appointing volunteers, it is important that volunteers are connected with the UFCPR and identified to the unit Comd Team so that they can start to build unit connections and have access to information about unit activities.



Volunteer Agreement

All Program volunteers must sign a volunteer agreement acknowledging their participation in the Family Connection Program. MFRCs are welcome to use an existing document or create a Program-specific agreement locally. However, any volunteer agreements used for Program purposes must *specifically* address the mandatory privacy and confidentiality requirements. Volunteers are required to protect the privacy of the families they work with. The requirement to keep all personal information confidential does not cease once they are no longer a volunteer with the Program.

Volunteer Training

One of the MFRC's main roles as part of the Family Connection Program is to train and mentor Connectors and Lead Connectors. The FST has developed a core training package. The training package includes both a power point presentation (with speaker's notes) and a detailed Family Connection Program Volunteer Handbook. It will provide all volunteers with the basic skills and knowledge necessary to assist families without overstepping their boundaries as a volunteer or risking their personal health and well-being.

Additional optional training may be given to equip volunteers to help families cope with challenging situations. The recommended content for any additional training is covered in the next section of these Guidelines.

MFRCs are welcome to either use their own *existing* volunteer training program and material OR coordinate with MFS to acquire appropriate materials, such as those currently in use at other MFRCs (for example – the Family Network Training Guide used by the Esquimalt MFRC).

The MFRC may also use its own discretion regarding training of existing volunteers who have already demonstrated the necessary skillsets or have previously had training that covered the necessary sensitization skills and community resource knowledge base. While all volunteers should complete the core Program training package and the unit-specific training, some volunteers with previous training or experience may not require any additional training.



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Optional Content – Volunteer Training

In addition to the core training package provided by the FST, there are three optional topic areas that you may wish to include as part of the training for all volunteers. Lead Connectors may also be provided training specifically tailored to their role as mentors.

The lists below outline the information that would be beneficial to discuss with all volunteers:

Communication

- Dealing with difficult people/dealing with conflict
- Active listening skills
- Tailoring communication to your audience
- Dealing with the Media (what you can and cannot say as a volunteer and to whom volunteers should direct media queries)
- Social Media Guidelines (what is safe to post and where, OPSEC basics, etc)
- Suggested Communication Tools (e-mail, group text, closed/secret Facebook groups, telephone, etc)

Helping Others in Crisis

- Self-care strategies
- Resources/Tools available to deal with crisis situations (locally, regionally, nationally)
- Who to ask for help or more information
- Mandatory Reporting Requirements (in accordance with applicable Provincial laws)
- The Mental Health Continuum

Military Family Support 101

- MFSP Program Model/How the MFRC works
- General Military Structure/Unit functionality
- Unique local programming/resources for military families
- General resources for military families and the volunteers supporting them
 - Local
 - Regional
 - National



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Lead Connector Specific Training

This portion of the training, to be developed and provided by the MFRC, is intended specifically for Lead Connectors. It addresses issues that will not necessarily apply to all Connectors.

Specifically, the training should cover the following topics:

- What to consider when matching Connectors to families
- Mentorship role of Lead Connectors
- Record Keeping
- Dealing with exceptional cases (such as Imposed Restriction, long career courses for ab-initio students, etc)

In addition to the specific tasks of Lead Connectors, the following topics may be addressed if time permits. If it is not feasible to address these issues during the initial training phase, it is highly recommended that they be considered for possible follow-on training sessions.

- Leadership/Management Tips for volunteers
- Motivating Community Members (for recruiting and advertising)
- Best Practices for running a meeting



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Unit Specific Training

RCAF units are also required to prepare a small orientation package for their volunteers. This portion of the training will ensure that volunteers feel connected to the unit and the Command Team. It will also allow the unit to establish clear communications practices and boundaries from the outset. While each unit should develop their own volunteer orientation package, units may request some MFRC assistance when doing so. The following information should typically be included in unit specific training:

- Welcome from Command Teams (in person)
- Unit Mission Overview and operational tempo
- Unit Organizational Overview
- Unit Policies (Conduct, Media etc)
- Unit Social/Family Activities
- Unit communication processes
- Tour of Unit lines (if required)
- Command Team/Volunteer Relations
- Volunteer Hours of operation
- Place of Work/Parking
- Confidentiality - Reminder
- Communications Procedures (Internal/External)
- Use of Long Distance (if required)
- Dealing with Media - Reminder
- Buddy System/Mentoring of new Connectors
- Resignation/Leaving the Program Connector cadre



Program Execution

Communications

Active communications networks help build community – and that is the goal of the Program.

Communication efforts will target two main audiences:

1. Incoming members along with their families
2. Family members being recruited to volunteer in the Program

Communications will require collaboration with Command Teams.

MFRCs are encouraged to include information about the Program in their general advertising campaigns. Social Media can also be a valuable means of communicating information, and MFRCs are encouraged to discuss effective use of social media with volunteers and other key players.

Unit Command Teams will facilitate MFRC advertising and recruiting efforts, by ensuring that all unit members are aware of the Program and strongly encouraging unit members to share this information with their families.

Feedback mechanisms will also play an important role in maintaining and improving the Program over time. In addition to working with Command Teams, MFRCs will need to gather Program feedback from volunteers and share that information with MFS and the Wing Family Connector Coordinator, as appropriate.

Family Information – Acquisition and Sharing Processes

Connecting with families is both the primary function and one of the most challenging aspects of the Program. While the responsibility to offer a Family Connector new families or families experiencing service-related separation lies with Comd Teams, the MFRC should facilitate this process where possible. Local procedures should be identified in a collaborative manner by MFRC staff, the WFCPC and local UFCPRs.

Initially, Command Teams should reach out to families through unit members (in accordance with the Privacy Act) and directly to families where prior consent has been obtained. When a posting message is received by the *gaining unit*, it is recommended that an e-mail and a letter will be sent to the uniformed member by the gaining unit's Command Team. Both the e-mail and letter will invite the member's family to participate in the Program. Similarly, in the case of a family experiencing service-related separation (30 days and over), the unit should approach the member and family to request the family's consent to participate in the Program.



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If the family wishes to participate, it is critical that every request for a Connector be directed to the correct individual so that a match can be made. This may happen in a few different ways:

- The member or family may contact the gaining unit to request a connector.
- The member or family may contact the MFRC.
- The member or family may contact the FST using a common mailbox (RCAFFamily_ARCfamille@forces.gc.ca).

Regardless of who receives the request, it must be passed to the individual section responsible for matching families with Connectors in a timely manner. In most cases this will be either the Lead Connector or an MFRC staff member.

By providing contact information, the family is thereby giving permission to be contacted by a Family Connector and establishing their participation in the Program. While initial consent will likely be provided via e-mail or verbally, a formal consent form is also included at Annex C for Program use as required. Use of the consent form is not mandatory and MFRCs are welcome to use their own forms in its place.

Both Comd Teams and the MFRC have a role to play ensuring families are aware of the Program and feel welcome to participate. How a family hears about and requests to participate is less important than the fact that they do hear about and are interested in participating.

Eligibility

The Program should be available to any family in the unit, regardless of circumstance. Families should be offered a Connector in each of the following scenarios, though this list is not intended to be exhaustive and exceptions may apply. .

Geographical Moves: Families posted into an RCAF unit within Canada will be contacted and offered a Connector on behalf of the gaining unit. This applies regardless of whether the losing unit is an RCAF unit or not. In addition, families who reach out to the MFRC during the posting process should be given an additional opportunity to consent to their participation in the Program.

Local Moves: When members are posted to another RCAF unit within their existing geographical area (i.e. local move), offers of a Connector to the member's family on behalf of the gaining unit shall be made as a means of welcoming the family to the new unit and ensuring they will be included in subsequent unit-level communications and activities.



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Single Members: Single members shall also be contacted by the gaining unit to determine if there is someone they wish to have added to unit level communications lists or be contacted in case of an extended service-related absence. Should the single member become married or committed to a long term relationship, the Command Team shall ensure the family is offered the opportunity to participate in the Program at that time.

Dual Service Couples: Dual Service Couples shall be treated as any other RCAF family from the unit level perspective. The gaining unit should contact the service spouse of the new member to invite him/her to participate in the Program. For example, in the case of a Corporal posted to Wing Supply who has a service spouse – Sergeant – posted to Wing Operations, the Corporal would be contacted by Wing Operations and the Sergeant would be contacted by Wing Supply. This method, while potentially duplicating support, ensures that the family is connected to both units for communications purposes and for the purposes of support during service-related separations.

Service-Related Separations: For the purposes of the Program, families should generally be offered a Connector for any service-related separations of a month or more (ex: Career Courses, Temporary Duty, Deployments and Imposed Restrictions). In these cases, the Lead Connector from the home or losing unit (in collaboration with the MFRC as required) shall assign a Connector to the family remaining in situ.

If information flowing to the family from the employing or gaining unit is deemed to be beneficial and/or necessary, the Lead Connector should request the assistance of the MFRC to ensure the family is offered a Connector and, at a minimum, included in unit-level social networks or communications.

While 30+ days of separation will generally be the threshold for Connector assignments, Command Teams may request a Connector be assigned for lesser periods of time for families in special circumstances (for example, a new baby, family member with special needs or multiple absences of the member in a short period of time).

Matching Connectors

How Connectors are matched with new families or families experiencing a service-related separation is ultimately at the discretion of the unit, the Lead Connector and the MFRC. Although it will not always be possible to “match” families and Connectors perfectly on all levels, the following criteria should be considered when assigning Volunteers:

- Primary language spoken at home
- Family Structure/Dynamics
- Special Needs of Family Members



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- Military life experiences
- Length of time as a military family

Making Introductions

Once a decision has been made as to which volunteer should be assigned to which family, a casual written introduction is a great way to give the relationship between volunteer and family a positive start. It should include basic information about each individual with the goal of establishing some familiarity and ensuring the initial interaction between the two is a little more comfortable and a little less awkward.

Annex D includes a sample introductory letter. It can be adjusted to include local information, as necessary; however, the following are useful guidelines to keep in mind for the staff member or Lead Connector who is writing introductions:

- Use first and last names
- The introduction can be made via e-mail, social media or text as appropriate
- Include a small detail about each person to help build an initial connection
- If there is specific information or concerns you know the family has, mention them so the Connector is aware
- Be sure to include contact information and identify a preferred method of contact if appropriate

Unit Family Connection Program Database/Roster

Building community is one of the primary goals of the Program. As the Program becomes well established, the creation of a Unit Family Connection Database/Roster will facilitate regular, relevant and timely communication from both the MFRC and their respective Command Teams to all existing families within the unit.

This Unit Family Connection Program Database/Roster should be maintained by the Lead Connector (facilitated by the MFRC as necessary). As contact information for families is received by Command Teams or by the MFRC, it should be passed to the Lead Connector.

How a Lead Connector maintains this information will be based on the direction and follow-on guidance provided by the MFRC and the Command Team. For example, it could be a simple paper list or an elaborate MS Excel database.

It may include names, addresses (physical and email) and phone numbers for those families who have consented to participate in the Program.



RCAF Family Connection Program

This information must remain protected at all times and is to be disclosed on a need to know basis only. All information collected by the Unit Family Connection Program shall be used solely for specific Unit's Family Connection Program purposes, under strict confidentiality and in compliance with The Privacy Act; the Privacy Code for Military Family Services Program (MFSP); and, the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA).

Record Keeping

Volunteers should keep a basic record their contact with families. Volunteers have been provided a Unit Family Call Log in the "Set Up Box" section of the Volunteer Handbook which should be used for this purpose. On a quarterly basis, the MFRC should collect these call logs and keep them on file for a minimum of 3 years.

Upon completion of their term as a volunteer, all other Family Connection Program related records (such as Unit Family Information Sheets, etc) should be surrendered to the MFRC for destruction.

Annual Program Evaluation

Annually in the fall, following the APS, the FST will request Program information from Wings and units. Although it is primarily the responsibility of the Wing to submit this information, the MFRC will be invaluable in ensuring that accurate and useful information is shared with the FST and MFS. The following is a list of the information that should be submitted annually upon request:

- Number of postings (internal and external)
- Number of volunteers (broken down by unit)
- Number of participants
- Number of refusals vs. No reply
- How was the Program advertised/marketed
- Lessons Learned
- Identified Best Practices
- Number of volunteer training sessions held
- Costs – incurred by the MFRC
- Costs - incurred by the Wing/units

Also - Post APS the family and volunteer questionnaire (available on the CFMWS website) should be shared with all participants



RCAF Family Connection Program

Privacy Issues

All personnel involved in executing the Family Connection Program have a responsibility to ensure that the personal information of RCAF members and their families is collected and safeguarded in accordance with the Privacy Act. Doing so not only shows respect for members and families, but also protects the credibility and integrity of the RCAF Family Connection Program and minimizes risk to the RCAF as a whole.

Program Connector volunteers will have access to the contact information for their assigned families. Lead Connectors may have access to a complete list of families who have agreed to participate in the Unit Family Connection Program. Command Teams will only share contact information for families who wish to participate in the Program.

On occasion, as volunteers work closely with families to help them access resources and navigate difficult family situations, families may choose to confide in them and share very personal information. Connectors should be reminded of the importance of confidentiality and be advised that, without the express permission of the family, they should not share information about the family with either the Command Team or MFRC personnel.

Connectors who fail to appropriately protect private information should be immediately dismissed from the Unit Family Connection Program.



RCAF Family Connection Program

Annex A: Volunteer Position Description – Lead Connector

Purpose: The primary purpose of a **Lead Connector** is to work with the Military Family Resource Centre (MFRC) Volunteer Manager, unit Command Team and unit Connectors to execute a unit's Family Connection Program. The Lead Connector is appointed by the MFRC in collaboration with the unit Command Team.

Skills Summary: This individual must possess notable communication, coordination and interpersonal skills, a strong desire to support other RCAF families and have good knowledge of existing family support challenges and available national, regional and local family support resources.

Eligibility: Normally a spouse/partner/loved one of a unit member with Connector or other relevant experience.

Screening: Lead Connectors must have a Criminal Records Check and Child Abuse Registry Check.

Duties and Responsibilities:

- ❖ Complete the required RCAF core Volunteer Orientation and unit specific Volunteer Orientation packages.
- ❖ Maintain a professional image and demeanor at all times.
- ❖ Work in close coordination with the MFRC and the Unit Family Connection Program Representative (UFCPR).
- ❖ Be open and responsive to the MFRC and Command Team Program guidance.
- ❖ Assist the UFCPR with the development and/or updating of unit specific Volunteer Orientation products.
- ❖ Assist the MFRC Volunteer Manager with the orientation and recruiting of unit Family Connectors.
- ❖ Assist the MFRC Volunteer Manager with assigning Connectors to newly posted-in families and/or those who will experience a service-related separation of 30 days or more.
- ❖ Coach and mentor Connectors in concert with the MFRC.
- ❖ Create and/or update a unit family roster/database and network.
- ❖ Communicate timely, relevant information regarding unit events, family support partner activities and other important matters, as deemed necessary by the MFRC and Command Team, to the family network.
- ❖ Encourage families to become involved in unit functions while being visible and present at as many unit family functions as able.
- ❖ Advocate for families to the Command Team and/or the MFRC as the need arises.
- ❖ Meet with unit Connectors and the MFRC Volunteer Manager regularly; discuss challenges, establish Best Practices.
- ❖ Submit feedback on the national or unit Connector Program to the MFRC Volunteer Manager and Command Team, on an as-needed basis.
- ❖ Be prepared to undertake Connector duties (when circumstances dictate).
- ❖ Maintain accurate contact lists/records on behalf of the MFRC Volunteer Manager.



RCAF Family Connection Program

Annex B: Volunteer Position Description - Connector

Purpose: The primary purpose of a **Connector** is to assist with the execution of the unit's Family Connection Program. Connectors are appointed by the MFRC in collaboration with the unit Command Team.

Skills Summary: This individual must possess good communication and interpersonal skills, a strong desire to support other RCAF families and have knowledge of existing family support challenges and available national, regional and local family support resources.

Eligibility: Normally a spouse/partner/loved one of a unit member.

Screening: Connectors must have a Criminal Records Check and Child Abuse Registry Check.

Duties and Responsibilities:

- ❖ Complete the required RCAF core Volunteer Orientation and unit specific Volunteer Orientation packages.
- ❖ Maintain a professional image and demeanor at all times.
- ❖ Work in close coordination with the MFRC and Command Team (through a Lead Connector or Unit Family Connection Program Representative (UFCPR)).
- ❖ Be open and responsive to the MFRC and Command Team Program guidance.
- ❖ Make initial contact with assigned families via telephone or electronic means (as applicable).
- ❖ During relocation, provide families with basic local information (Contact Call) and provide links to them for local, regional or national family support partners for larger or more in-depth issues.
- ❖ Follow-up with families (normally by phone or in person if/when the opportunity arises) throughout relocation preparations, during the House Hunting Trip and for a few weeks to a month post-arrival at the new location.
- ❖ During extended periods of service-related separation, contact an assigned family prior to the uniformed member's departure to determine the level of support required by the family as well as the desired frequency, mode and timing of contact.
- ❖ Offer Connector contact information should families decline Connector assistance.
- ❖ Regularly follow-up with families encountering separation (normally by phone or in person if/when the opportunity arises) including up to one month post reunion.
- ❖ Maintain a contact/call log for all interactions with assigned families (and note where families have opted out of the Program) and submit this information to the Lead Connector or MFRC Volunteer Manager.
- ❖ Encourage families to become involved in unit functions while being visible and present at as many unit family functions as able.
- ❖ Liaise (with the permission of the family) with the Command Team (via UFCPR coordination) when matters arise that will significantly affect families.
- ❖ Meet with the Lead Connector or MFRC Volunteer Manager regularly; discuss challenges, recommend Best Practices.
- ❖ Maintain accurate records.



Annex C: Consent Form



Annex D: Sample Family Volunteer Introduction

A short introductory e-mail or private message from either the Lead Connector or the MFRC POC is a great way to set the family and Family Connector up for success. It gives them a little bit of background about one another, so they're not walking into an initial conversation blind.

Hi Jessica and Laura,

As the Lead Family Connector for 435 Sqn, I would like to introduce you to each other.

Jessica – Welcome to our community! Laura Smith has volunteered to be your family Connector. She is a wealth of knowledge and information and will be able to help with any questions or concerns you may have. She has lived in Winnipeg for 4 years and has experience with the French school system, which I know you have questions about. You are always more than welcome to contact the MFRC or me. We are all here to help.

Laura – Jessica Leblanc will be moving to Winnipeg from CFB Borden with her family. Thank you for volunteering and if a question arises that you don't know the answer to, please don't hesitate to contact me or the MFRC. We will do our best to help find the answer.

Please be sure to stop by the MFRC on your House Hunting Trip to pick up a Welcome Package. They are located at:

102 Comet Street
Winnipeg, MB
Canada
R3J 3Y5
204 833-2500 x 4500

Best of luck and I look forward to meeting you soon Jessica. I hope that you both enjoy your connection.

Take care,

Russ Allen
435 Sqn Lead Volunteer
Cell: 555-555-5555
E-Mail: example@FamilyConnection.com