



Army Families Federation

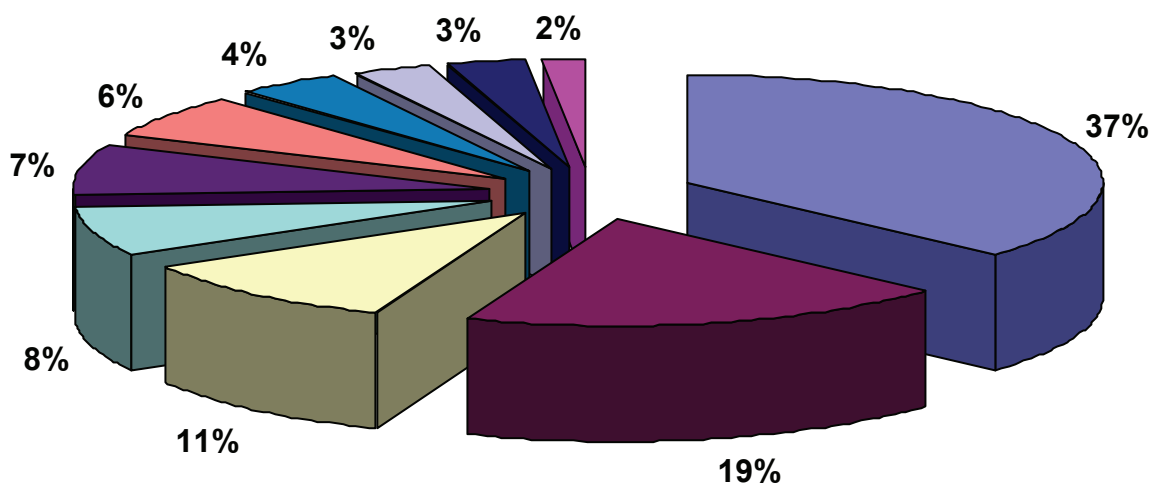
Families Concerns - July to September 2007

AFF Families' Concerns is produced quarterly to illustrate the issues and concerns that bring Army families to the Army Families Federation. Enquiries are gathered from Army families worldwide, and thus provide an accurate reflection of matters important to all Army families. Some families contact AFF to find resolution to problems, some to talk to people who understand their issues and can raise them up the chain of command on their behalf; to log them and try and find resolution for the next generation of Army families.

This report is distributed to all AFF staff worldwide, as well as to those who have an interest in delivering policy and assistance to families - who can help AFF secure a fair deal for all Army families.

Methodology—This is a qualitative report: when families contact AFF staff around the world their issues are anonymously logged. This information is then entered onto a central database and used to provide the evidence for this report.

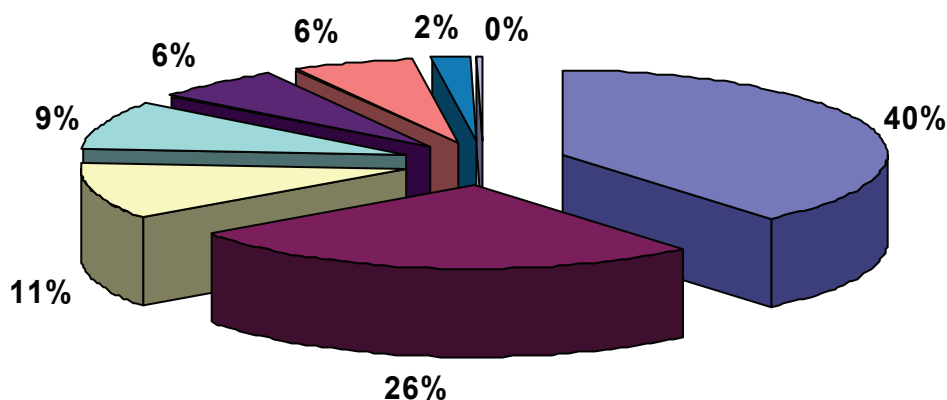
AFF worldwide activity chart



- | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Housing | Family Life | Signpost to |
| Education & Childcare | Employment | Money |
| Health | Special Needs | Travel |
| Marriage Breakdown | | |

HOUSING

(39% of all enquiries between July and September 2007)



- | | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| Allocation / Entitlement | Repairs / Maintenance | Non MOD Housing |
| Cleanliness | Removals / Storage | Fuel / Lighting / Utilities |
| PFI / New Build | Hirings / SSFA | |

AFF worldwide statistics for the period July to September 2007 are again dominated by Housing: 39% of worldwide queries (an increase of 2% over the previous quarter) and over 50% of all GB enquiries. It is pertinent that 78% of the housing contacts during this period were in July, which is traditionally the start of the 'moving season'. The majority of queries within the housing category this quarter were: 40% allocations and entitlement, 26% repairs and maintenance enquiries, 11% non MOD housing, and 9% cleanliness.

Allocation and entitlement enquiries suggest the allocation system has not been satisfactory for either families or Unit Welfare Officers (UWOs). This element of housing would have been particularly germane during the summer period which is the busiest time for Service families to move. In particular, families reported difficulties communicating with HICs; this appears to have had a detrimental impact on morale and prevented families from making important practical arrangements associated with their move. Examples of complaints include:


'Poor allocations service making accompanied service difficult - rupture to military covenant'

'Customer care from HIC staff lacking - inappropriate comments being made'

'HIC helpful but lack of awareness of military life and challenges'

'Client contacted HIC and was dealt with in a rude manner - unwilling to write letter of complaint as waiting for allocation of SFA'

'Lady waited on telephone to HIC for 25 minutes then got cut off'



Some people expressed disappointment at their housing entitlement; a senior soldier complained that as an RSM he had been allocated a quarter below his entitlement and asked what incentive there was for other soldiers when they saw an RSM in the same house as a trooper.

The enquiries about repairs and maintenance included contacts about cleanliness of quarters on move in. These contacts suggest that there is lack of consistency in standards and begs the question why houses are being accepted back by DE/MHS when they are clearly not clean:

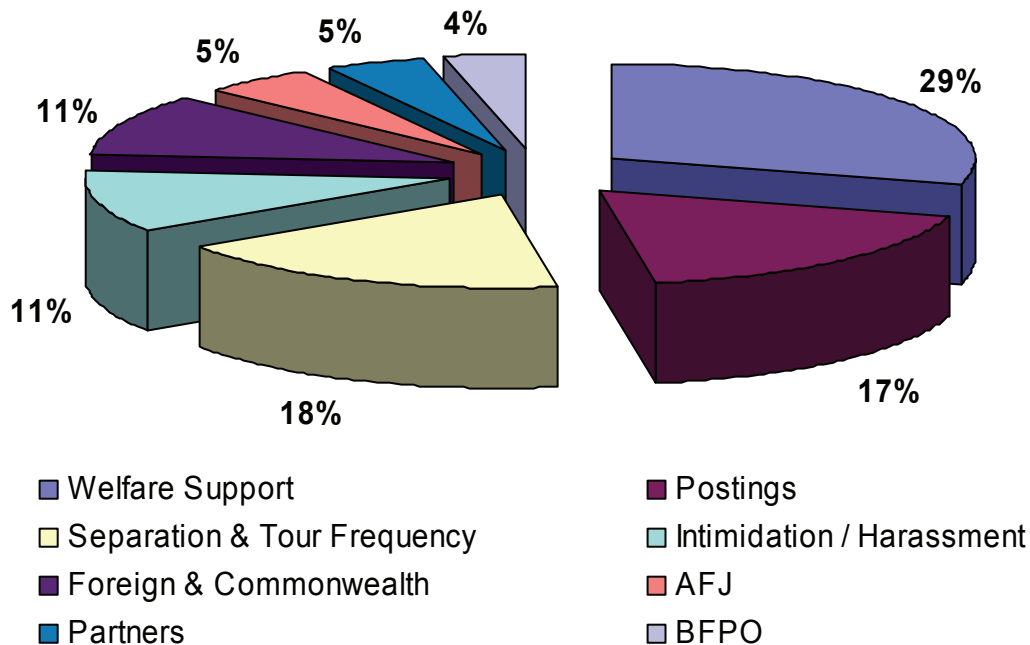
'When soldier turned up to new quarter he opened the door and got an overwhelming smell of dog wee. The man from DE who was doing his march in also agreed with him. His family were there and his removals were turning up that afternoon. What could he do?'

'Quarter refused because dirty/junk left behind in garden. No one would accept responsibility'



FAMILY LIFE AND THE ARMY

(19% of all enquiries between July and September 2007)



The 'Family Life' category encompasses areas of family life which are directly related to Army life and can affect how valued both the family and the soldier feel. The largest portion of these enquiries this quarter related to welfare support (30% of Family Life enquiries). In some instances the welfare support can only be delivered from within the chain of command; Unit Welfare Officers (UWOs), who in the main deliver support that meets or exceeds the community's expectations, and AFF fully supports the role of the UWO. However, AFF's database shows that support often comes from within the community, thus underlying the importance of building a strong community within the Unit and amongst the families:

'Senior soldier contacted us. He was on exercise and had a soldier whose wife has just been diagnosed with postnatal depression. What should he do?'

'Client was mother of a soldier who was serving in Afghan. Son's friend had been shot and sent back to a UK hospital. The hospital was close to her and she wanted to know if she could visit'

There are, however, instances when a family does not know who their UWO is or how to contact them or the support does not live up to their expectations, which can lead to families feeling under valued or vulnerable:

'No advice or support provided for the spouses of individual augmentees'

'Client has been in and out of hospital for the past 2 months and hasn't heard from the UWO. Client would like to know why the Welfare Office hasn't been in touch to offer support.'

Postings

(19% of Family Life contacts)

This quarter there has been a decrease in contacts over postings; this could either indicate an improvement in the posting order system, or reflect seasonal fluctuation - the figures for April to June would have shown greater contact due to the summer moving season. Contacts in this category include the impact of late posting orders, but they also indicate lack of clarity about the rules relating to older children especially related to the extended service option in some trades. Comments include:

'Client's posting was given with one week's notice and relocation leave would not be granted due to short notice of LTA. Client posted to non-operational theatre in UK mainland'

'Client's spouse posted to UK mainland and has not received the posting order' However Unit have now demanded that serving spouse report for duty immediately. Client is 33 weeks pregnant and will now have to move from NI to UK mainland on own'

'Client has a 21yr old daughter who has been given Limited Dependent status. Just accepted a 3yr posting to Cyprus - may need to change posting due to daughter's status. Client was not informed of her daughter's likely status prior to posting. Has concerns this age ruling will affect other families in future due to extended service option offered for some trades'

Foreign & Commonwealth


(11% of Family Life contacts)

The impact of Army life on Foreign & Commonwealth families initially gained the attention of AFF/the chain of command at the AFF International Families Conference 2004, after which the Foreign & Commonwealth Task Force was established. Whilst progress has been made to improve conditions for these families (soldiers can now apply for UK citizenship after five years of service and spouses can apply after a further two years), there are still outstanding issues that can have a negative impact on their family life. For example, families wanting to access tertiary education are unable to obtain home status and therefore have to pay the more expensive foreign student fees.

'Spouse upset that she cannot obtain home status for a Nursing course at Guildford University. Says it affects many F&C spouses'

'Husband out of army, but she will not get UK status for two more years - has already deferred course for two years - when can she pay home student fees?'

Families have also experienced difficulties travelling within Europe due to lack of understanding about required visas. For example, one client rang to explain that he had experienced a problem at Rotterdam port and that he and his family were



not allowed to board the ferry. It transpired that he did not have *schengen visas* for his wife and Fijian child, assuming that the G1 status stamp in his passport would be sufficient for the whole family.

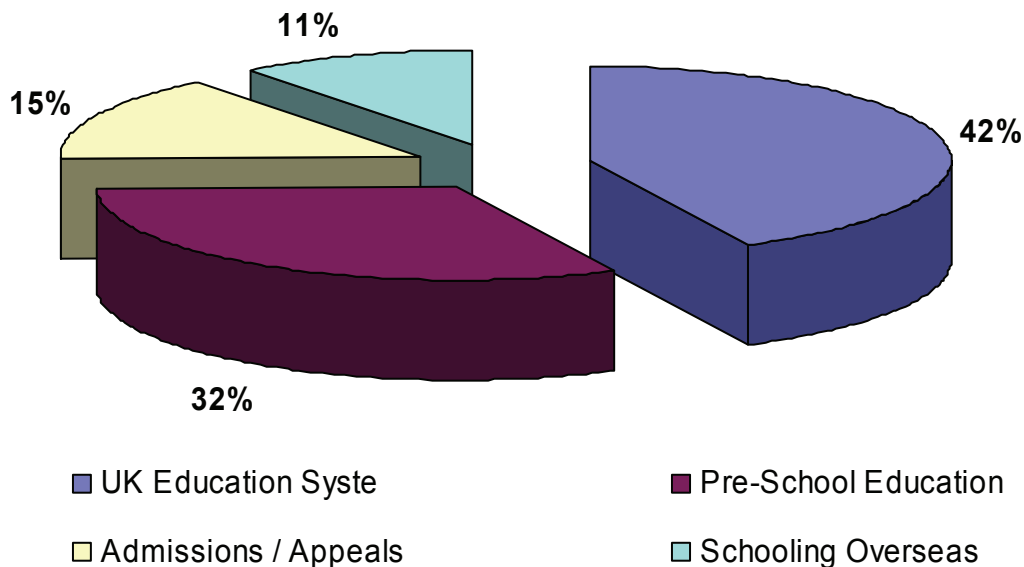
Foreign & Commonwealth families sometimes also need additional support in areas such as educating their children:

'Ghurkha families posted to Hullavington living in Corsham quarters. No support available to children at school. English is a second language.'



Education and Childcare

(9% of all enquiries between July and September 2007)



32% of contacts in this category related to pre-school and childcare provision, and include concerns about the cost of childcare, the ability to find childcare places, and also from spouses wanting to train as childminders. There is definite interest in Childcare Vouchers, and the introduction of this scheme later in 2007 will be most welcome; increasingly families depend on dual incomes and facilitating access to childcare would ease pressure on the family budget.

'Client struggling to pay full time nursery fees as both parents are serving; is there a scheme being introduced whereby soldiers can pay at source for childcare vouchers?'

'Wife called regarding childcare vouchers for military and when would this be available'

Availability of childcare also impacts on a spouse's ability to access further education, and this is particularly noticeable in overseas postings such as in Cyprus where additional provision would be most welcome:

'The Education Centre is offering free courses at the moment whilst there is deployment. However, there is no childcare facility run alongside some of the more beneficial courses e.g. GCSEs in the afternoon'