

UP & CLOSE PERSONNEL



The RAF Families Federation's Dawn McCafferty shares some of their casework

Dear Families Federation...

I HAVE just been invited to attend RAF Families Federation workshops on Childcare and Deployments. But quite frankly why should I bother?

I attended a workshop last year and nothing has changed since then. What has the Federation actually done that has benefited those you say you represent? And what's the point of having a Federation?

Sorry to be so negative but with a Defence Review coming up, is there any point raising families' concerns and expectations if there's no money anyway?

MRS M

Dear Mrs M...

If we haven't helped you personally with a family-related concern, we can understand that our work on behalf of all RAF families may appear to have no relevance to you.

However, we would strongly encourage everyone to support our workshops as they are an ideal way of voicing independent opinion on family life in the RAF today; opinions which we can then use to support our work.

There are two main elements to our activities: the first is gathering evidence from families, whether via votes cast during workshops or from those families who make direct contact with us by telephone or through our website; the second is using that information as a lever to influence policy change at Government, Ministry of Defence and RAF senior management level.

To date, we have helped more than 800 individual RAF families achieve a solution to a family-related problem. However, our work on behalf of those families does not end there and we use their evidence to highlight areas where support to families has failed or could be enhanced.

A good example is the Defence Estates (DE) Housing Communication Board where the three Families Federations regularly meet with DE and Modern Housing Solutions (MHS) staff to address common housing concerns.

Using evidence provided by RAF families we have been able to influence DE and MHS

and as a result they have improved their processes.

MHS have launched a national pre-paid SFA cleaning contract which families can access for move-out and MHS contractors are now using hand-held Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) giving the occupant the opportunity to give written feedback

regarding their performance on the day.

DE has also reviewed and made significant changes to the way Housing Information Centres (HICs) operate and we have influenced the design of an online application form for SFA (e-F1132) which is due to be launched in October.

We use your evidence to persuade DE to make such changes and whilst policy change can take time, we are confident that persistent presentation of sound evidence is what drives improvement.

The Federation was invited by RAF Air Command to comment, from a family perspective, on the policy for duration of deployments; we used the evidence gained from last year's workshops to do that.

Based on family member's votes, we argued against a blanket policy of six-month tours for all. We did, however, acknowledge that on operational grounds R&R for those on a four-month deployment might need to be withdrawn.

We also supported the Minister's decision that any R&R days lost because of air bridge delays or similar, should be added to the individual's Post Operational Deployment

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FAMILY FUN: Kids let off steam in the summer holidays

Leave. These weren't ideas dreamt up in the Federation office, but based on evidence from the family members who chose to engage with us.

Our chairman uses your evidence to inform a number of strategic level discussions and meetings.

Indeed, the evidence we have already gathered this year on future housing aspirations, childcare, expanding the definition of the family, operational tempo and pay and employment opportunities for Service family members features in her discussions with the Minister and the Armed Forces Pay Review Body.

Recently, our chairman has also cited casework in support of the work to develop the emerging Armed Forces Covenant.

Family-related subjects on a broader scale are discussed quarterly within the Families

Working Group which, in turn, feeds the Families Forum which meets twice a year and is chaired by Andrew Robathan, Minister for Defence Personnel, Welfare and Veterans; your views and evidence influence these meetings.

So, in sum, should you bother? Well, it's up to you. We seek your interaction, especially through our workshops. For us they are a prime source of evidence and, without them, our influence is diminished. Our opinion counts for nothing – it's your evidence and opinions that matter.

If you'd like to at least try to influence the way the RAF impacts on family life and help prioritise the People Agenda to make the most of any scarce money available, we invite you to give up 40 minutes of your life to a workshop. If you don't, we'll never know what it was you wanted to change.

You can find dates and venues for the remaining events this year on our website at www.raf-ff.org.uk Alternatively, speak to one of the Federation team on 01780 781650 so they can use your evidence to help influence further debates.