

Canadian
Forces
College

Collège
des
Forces
Canadiennes



AIR RESERVE FAMILY SUPPORT – AN UNKNOWN QUANTITY

Major Jennifer M. Campbell

JCSP 47

Service Paper

Disclaimer

Opinions expressed remain those of the author and do not represent Department of National Defence or Canadian Forces policy. This paper may not be used without written permission.

© Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of National Defence, 2021.

PCEMI 47

Étude militaire

Avertissement

Les opinions exprimées n'engagent que leurs auteurs et ne reflètent aucunement des politiques du Ministère de la Défense nationale ou des Forces canadiennes. Ce papier ne peut être reproduit sans autorisation écrite.

© Sa Majesté la Reine du Chef du Canada, représentée par le ministre de la Défense nationale, 2021.

CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE - COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

JCSP 47 - PCEMI 47
2020 - 2021

SERVICE PAPER – ÉTUDE MILITAIRE

AIR RESERVE FAMILY SUPPORT – AN UNKNOWN QUANTITY

By Major Jennifer M. Campbell

“This paper was written by a candidate attending the Canadian Forces College in fulfilment of one of the requirements of the Course of Studies. The paper is a scholastic document, and thus contains facts and opinions which the author alone considered appropriate and correct for the subject. It does not necessarily reflect the policy or the opinion of any agency, including the Government of Canada and the Canadian Department of National Defence. This paper may not be released, quoted or copied, except with the express permission of the Canadian Department of National Defence.”

Word Count: 2,629

« La présente étude a été rédigée par un stagiaire du Collège des Forces canadiennes pour satisfaire à l'une des exigences du cours. L'étude est un document qui se rapporte au cours et contient donc des faits et des opinions que seul l'auteur considère appropriés et convenables au sujet. Elle ne reflète pas nécessairement la politique ou l'opinion d'un organisme quelconque, y compris le gouvernement du Canada et le ministère de la Défense nationale du Canada. Il est défendu de diffuser, de citer ou de reproduire cette étude sans la permission expresse du ministère de la Défense nationale. »

Nombre de mots : 2.629

AIR RESERVE FAMILY SUPPORT – AN UNKNOWN QUANTITY

AIM

With the publication of *Strong Secure Engaged, Canada's Defence Policy* (SSE) in 2017, the Government of Canada (GoC) placed a renewed emphasis on provision of support to Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) members and their families. Of the 111 new initiatives announced in SSE, 28 relate to people and three of them directly relate to improving support to military families. Members of the RCAF Reserve (Air Res), and by extension their families, are an integral part of the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF); however, there is little formal DND/CAF information available about support to Air Res families. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate that Air Res family needs are closely aligned with those of Regular Force (RegF) RCAF families and to highlight that CAF and RCAF family support, while extensive, has systemic and programming gaps.

INTRODUCTION

1. While all CAF members swear an Oath of Allegiance (or make a Solemn Affirmation) to the Crown upon joining the forces, there are nonetheless fundamental differences between Reserve Force (ResF) and RegF members related to conditions and classes of service. For RegF members, there is little question that benefits and services marketed to military members apply to them, and by extension their families. ResF members, who serve in various full- and part-time capacities, may experience more uncertainty regarding the applicability of programming or services to their particular situations. For Air Res families, these uncertainties may be amplified by the fact that Air Res service more closely mirrors RegF service than it does Army or Naval Res service.

2. In order to meet the aim of this paper, three questions must be answered. First, who Air Res families? Second, what are their needs? Third, does current CAF and RCAF family support programming adequately address the identified needs? Unfortunately, there is currently almost no information readily available about the demographics of Air Res families and even less is known about their specific needs, which makes it challenging to determine whether those needs are being addressed.¹ There are currently 3013 members on the Air Res establishment.² While it may be possible to acquire some information about their dependants from Guardian, doing so would require specific requests for data from central agencies that were beyond the scope of this research. A 2016 Military Family Service (MFS) CAF-wide Community Needs Assessment survey only had a 10% participation rate for ResF members and their families (8% members, 1% spouses, 1% parents) and the results were not broken out RegF vs. ResF service or by environment.³ In 2018, MFS published two detailed reports on the demographics and key issues of RegF families.⁴ MFS planned to complete a similar profile of ResF families in 2018 as part of broader work on the Comprehensive Military Family Plan (CMFP), but that work has not been completed to date.⁵ Lacking the necessary demographic data and a specific Air Res family needs assessment, this paper is limited to a review of available

¹ Jennifer Maj Ste-Croix, “Air Res (Family) Demographics,” January 29, 2021.

² Ibid.

³ “CAF Community Needs Assessment 2016 Report - Overall Results” (Winnipeg/Ottawa: Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, August 2017), 5, <https://www.cfmws.com/en/AboutUs/PSP/recreation/Documents/CAF%20CNA%202016%20REPORT%20-%20OVERALL%20RESULTS.pdf>.

⁴ Lynda Manser, *PROFILE OF MILITARY FAMILIES IN CANADA* (Ottawa, ON: Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, 2018). Lynda Manser, “STATE OF MILITARY FAMILIES IN CANADA: Issues Facing Regular Force Member and Their Families” (Ottawa, ON: Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, 2018).

⁵ Development of the CMFP is initiative 24 under SSE; the initial plan draft by MFS was not accepted by Chief Military Personnel and work is ongoing. Kara-Lee Casselman, “E-Mail from MFS Staff Member,” January 19, 2021.

data on RegF family needs to determine which of those needs most likely apply to Air Res families based on commonalities in conditions of service. Finally, a brief discussion of the applicability of existing CAF and RCAF family support programming to Air Res families will help determine where there are systemic or programming gaps that should be addressed.

3. The CAF Ombudsman’s 2013 special report to the MND, *On the Homefront: Assessing the Well-being of Canada’s Military Families in the New Millennium* will be used as a framework to establish a plausible needs assessment for Air Res families. The report identified six key findings (Figure 1).⁶ These findings largely mirror the RCAF’s own *Findings and Observations* regarding RCAF family challenges, collected during site visits to all RCAF units between 2014 and 2016.⁷ The Ombudsman’s report specifically excluded data on ResF families, citing “substantial disparities in the nature and scope” of RegF and ResF communities”.⁸ The RCAF site visits did not specifically *target* Air Res families; however, they also did not explicitly exclude them from their data. Given the unique model of Air Res employment, it is assumed that some of the challenges of the military lifestyle for Air Res families are similar to those of RegF RCAF families.⁹ Based on these assumptions, key findings 1, 3, 5 and 6 from the Ombudsman’s report provide a reasonable structure from which to draw conclusions regarding Air Res family needs.

⁶ Office of the National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman, “On the Homefront: Assessing the Well-Being of Canada’s Military Families in the New Millennium,” November 2013, 4–9, <https://www.canada.ca/en/ombudsman-national-defence-forces/reports-news-statistics/investigative-reports/homefront.html>.

⁷ National Defence Government of Canada, “Royal Canadian Air Force, Family Support Team, Findings and Observations,” May 13, 2015, <http://www.rcaf-arc.forces.gc.ca/en/family-support-team/conclusions.page>.

⁸ Ombudsman, “On the Homefront,” November 2013, 1.

⁹ Air Res members are employed in a true “total force” employment model, working alongside their RegF counterparts at RCAF units and Wings. The typical part-time employment model is 12-16 days of Class A employment per month.

Findings 2 and 4 will not be addressed, given that they are fundamentally connected to the premise of frequent geographic relocation which only applies to a very small number of Air Res families.

Key Finding 1: Geographic relocation, operational deployments and the relentless upheaval of military life are the major causes of disruption and strain for military families, triggering many of the challenges they face.

Key Finding 2: It is very difficult for non-serving CF spouses to find and sustain reasonable, gainful, continuous employment.

Key Finding 3: Accessing health care and maintaining a reasonable level of continuity during mandatory moves remains a persistent challenge for military families.

Key Finding 4: Many military families experience difficulty accessing suitable and affordable housing in healthy, cohesive communities.

Key Finding 5: Military families are challenged in providing a healthy environment in which to raise their children.

Key Finding 6: Military families are challenged in achieving both short-term and long-term financial well-being.

Figure 1

DISCUSSION

4. One of the primary challenges in any discussion of CAF support to families is the lack of a single, consistent definition of “family”. The Ombudsman’s report highlighted how multiple definitions of family for different policies and programs caused confusion among members, families, and family support stakeholders.¹⁰ While DND/CAF writ large has not established a single modern definition of family, MFS has modernized their definition of family for the purposes of family support provided under the Military

¹⁰ Ombudsman, “On the Homefront,” November 2013, 2.

Family Services Program. That definition includes members of the ResF and “their spouses, children, parents, relatives of significance or people who self-identify as the family” of a ResF member.¹¹

Ombudsman Key Finding 1

5. Frequent geographic relocation is not a hallmark of Air Res employment; however, ResF members and their families are not immune to the “relentless upheaval of military life”. ResF members deploy on operations, albeit on a voluntary basis, and it is assumed that their families encounter challenges similar to those of RegF families. Although deployment on named operations members may be less common for ResF members, the risk of physical or mental injury or illness, identified by the Ombudsman, is the same for both ResF and RegF personnel.¹² Furthermore, the daily risk to RCAF personnel conducting air operations from their home bases, and the risk perceived by their families, does not discriminate between RegF and ResF employment. Finally, ResF members and their families also experience the disruption of pers tempo separations – sporadic absences for temporary duty and/or training. In fact, given that Air Reserve members both train to the same standard as and work directly alongside their RegF counterparts, it is reasonable to assume that many ResF members may experience a similar pers tempo to their RegF peers. These absences have documented impacts, such as relationship strain and concerns about child-rearing and child development, that would

¹¹ Office of the National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman, “Progress Report on the Status of Recommendations - On the Homefront: Assessing the Well-Being of Canada’s Military Families in the New Millennium,” Government, June 11, 2020, <https://www.canada.ca/en/ombudsman-national-defence-forces/reports-news-statistics/investigative-reports/homefront.html>. “About the Military Family Services Program,” accessed January 23, 2021, <https://www.cafconnection.ca/National/About-Us/Military-Family-Services/About-the-Military-Family-Services-Program.aspx>.

¹² Ombudsman, “On the Homefront,” November 2013, 36.

apply equally to Air Res families.¹³ Overall, there is reason to believe that Air Res families face many of the same challenges related to deployed operations and high pers temp as RegF families.

Ombudsman Key Finding 3

6. The health care challenges of Air Res families may be different from those facing RegF families. Their relative geographic stability means that once Air Res families have acquired a primary health care provider in the community, they should experience a relatively stable level of health care. There have been, however, documented challenges for ResF members regarding continuity of extended health coverage for family members under the Public Service Health Care Plan (PSHCP); however, the extent of these problems is unknown and likely only applies to small number of ResF members who are not former RegF. Gaps in access to mental health care services likely also affect Air Res families. Mental health is identified in the CMFP as one of the 8 determinants of wellness, however, the Ombudsman noted significant gaps in the availability of mental health services for families, as well as shortfalls in funding for those service.¹⁴ It is reasonable to expect that Air Res families face similar challenges to RegF in accessing appropriate mental health care, including lack of appropriate mental health service providers in RCAF communities and limited PSHCP coverage for mental health care.

Ombudsman Key Finding 5

7. Access to suitable childcare, proximity to supportive extended family members, and issues related to dependent education were three primary concerns raised by RegF

¹³ Ibid., 38.

¹⁴ Manser, "STATE OF MILITARY FAMILIES IN CANADA: Issues Facing Regular Force Member and Their Families," 87; Ombudsman, "On the Homefront," June 11, 2020, 85.

families to the Ombudsman in 2013.¹⁵ Difficulty securing adequate childcare is a significant challenge in many Canadian communities, not just military communities. Hence, it is expected that Air Res families also struggle to secure appropriate childcare. The relative geographic stability of Air Res families implies that once Air Res families have childcare, they are likely able to retain that care as long as necessary. Air Res families also have the same priority access to MFRC childcare centres as RegF families, although there may be minor exceptions across locations. However, there are conceivably unique childcare challenges for some Air Res families. For example, Class A ResF employment (typically 12 days/month or 3 days/week) may only necessitate part time childcare; however, part time spaces are typically more difficult to find. Families may pay for full-time care despite only requiring part-time care, which has financial consequences. Furthermore, the RCAF is known to have a higher proportion of shift workers than other environments and childcare for shift workers is lacking in many communities.¹⁶ Air Res members work alongside their RegF peers, so it not surprising that Air Res families with young children experiencing shift work would face similar challenges securing child care for overnight or extended shifts.

8. Equal access to high quality education in their official language of choice is another concern of military families. Frequent moves pose challenges related to continuity of education for many RegF families; however, limited geographic mobility means that educational continuity is not likely a significant challenge for Air Res families. Still, the impact of military lifestyle factors on children in Air Res families

¹⁵ Ombudsman, “On the Homefront,” November 2013, 64–69.

¹⁶ Government of Canada, “Royal Canadian Air Force, Family Support Team, Findings and Observations.”

should not be discounted. The absence of the military parent (or parents) can lead older children to assume some of the roles and responsibilities of the missing parent and can result in previously unseen behavioural, emotional, and disciplinary issues in children of all ages and schools are not generally well equipped to deal with the specific military lifestyle challenges.¹⁷ Furthermore, young children are unlikely to experience differences between the requirements of ResF vs. RegF employment. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that Air Res families experience school related challenges at roughly the same rate as their RegF counterparts.

Ombudsman Key Finding 6

9. Overall, today's CAF personnel are well compensated. Nevertheless, RegF families have routinely reported financial stress.¹⁸ At face value, a number of the reported factors that contribute to this stress for RegF families would not necessarily apply to the majority of Air Res families, such as the financial implications and reduced spousal employment opportunities due to frequent postings. However, in reality, given the high proportion of Air Res members who are retired RegF members, it is feasible that their long-term financial well-being is still being negatively impacted by challenges faced during their RegF service. Moreover, Air Res members may experience financial stress related to the lack of certainty/stability of ResF service. For example, while many ResF members routinely surge from Class A to Class B for extended periods of time, this level of employment is never a guarantee and is subject to funding availability. Should families come to rely on that income, its loss could be extremely stressful.

¹⁷ Ombudsman, "On the Homefront," November 2013, 67.

¹⁸ Ibid., 69; Manser, "STATE OF MILITARY FAMILIES IN CANADA: Issues Facing Regular Force Member and Their Families," 94.

Support to Air Res Families

10. This review has largely considered Air Res families through the lens of the challenges faced by RegF RCAF families. A key difference between RegF and Air Res families is the lack of geographic mobility in the ResF. Stable, long term community connections may provide some protection for some ResF families experiencing the upheavals military family life such as deployment and high pers tempo; however, community connections will vary family to family and should not be assumed. The counter argument is that families tied closely to the civilian community may feel isolated from the military community when facing specific military lifestyle challenges such as deployments, and civilian support networks may not have as deep an understanding of the impacts of these lifestyle factors on families.

11. The RCAF has staff dedicated to family support at both the strategic and operational levels.¹⁹ These teams do not discriminate between family support issues raised by RegF or ResF members and they work diligently to advocate on behalf of all RCAF families. Furthermore, both teams are comprised exclusively of reservists, reducing the risk that ResF family concerns will be inadvertently overlooked. While these organizations do not provide direct support to Air Res families, they do represent important nodes in the larger network of family support stakeholders. Furthermore, the RCAF Family Connection Program is uniquely designed to provide additional support

¹⁹ At the strategic level the office of the RCAF Family Advocate consists of a Colonel and Chief Warrant Officer and contracted civilian employee. At the operational level the Family Support Team under the 1 Cdn Air Div A1 is comprised of a Major and a Sergeant.

and connection to all RCAF families; as a result, it is focused on addressing the needs of individual families through connection and access to information.²⁰

12. Most family-support services available to RegF families are also available to ResF families.²¹ Air Res families are eligible to access all services offered to families by MFS and MFRCs under the auspices of the Military Family Service Program (MFSP), by virtue of the MFS definition of family. The location of Air Res Flights on CAF bases facilitates this access. However, this also means that systemic and programming gaps identified by MFS directly impact Air Res families.²² A 2019 analysis of CAF-wide family support identified 26 systemic and 119 programming gaps.²³ Many of the identified gaps align with the issues faced by Air Res families, such as access to mental health services, deployment and pers tempo support, and support to military children. There are very few references in the gap analysis to ResF members or families; where ResF gaps are noted it is in the context of quasi-national programs not available at urban or remote MFRCs. Goose Bay is the only location with an Air Res Flt that is consistently mentioned as lacking otherwise available programs.²⁴ The systemic gaps however,

²⁰ The RCAF Comd has recently approved a name change and rebranding for this program from *Family Sponsor Program* to *Family Connection Program*. National Defence Government of Canada, “Family Sponsor Program | Royal Canadian Air Force,” March 2, 2016, <http://www.rcaf-arc.forces.gc.ca/en/family-support-team/family-sponsor-program.page>.

²¹ Note that there are two services listed under *Families of Regular Force Members* that are not listed under *Families of Reserve Force Members*: CAF Savings Plan; and Financial Assistance (Support Our Troops). However, closer inspection indicated that ResF families are eligible to apply for Financial Assistance (Support Our Troops). The CAF Savings Plan website only refers to “spouses”, but does not discriminate between RegF and ResF; more research would be required to determine eligibility of this program to ResF families. “Morale and Welfare Services Directory,” accessed January 30, 2021, <https://www.cfmws.com/en/OurServices/ServicesDirectory/Pages/default.aspx>.

²² Department of National Defence, “The Mapping and Gaps Analysis of Services for Military Families Report,” Comprehensive Military Family Plan (Ottawa, ON, March 2019), <https://www.cafconnection.ca/getmedia/4b303964-935f-4883-8e11-17582ea20dc6/GAP-Analysis-Report-2019-ENG.pdf.aspx>.

²³ Ombudsman, “On the Homefront,” November 2013, 74; Department of National Defence, “Gaps Analysis,” iv.

²⁴ Department of National Defence, “Gaps Analysis,” 27.

categorized under the headings *awareness, advocacy, alignment* and *availability*, are likely to impact Air Res families in much the same ways they impact RegF families.²⁵

CONCLUSION

13. The preceding discussion of Air Res family needs based on relevant Ombudsman, RCAF and MFS research, makes numerous assumptions. Until further demographic information or a ResF specific family-needs assessment is conducted, this review may help inform future RCAF decisions regarding support to Air Res families. In his 2013 report, the Ombudsman recommended that the CAF become “more aggressive on the research front”, and although there has been a significant amount of family-oriented research done in the intervening seven years, there remains a serious dearth of research on reservists and their families.²⁶ It is conceivable that Air Res family concerns more closely mirror their RegF family counterparts than they do Army and Naval Res family needs; however, without additional research this cannot be stated unequivocally. Air Res families may also have unique needs that are as of yet, undocumented. Air Res families, for the most part, have access to the same programs and services as their RegF counterparts; conversely, it is likely their awareness of these services is just as low as that of RegF families. Either way, the largest Air Res family support gap that needs to be closed is the information gap. The CAF and the RCAF cannot expect to adequately support families they know very little about.

²⁵ Ibid., 66.

²⁶ Ombudsman, “On the Homefront,” November 2013, 82.

RECOMMENDATION

14. It is recommended that the RCAF compile the following data as baseline information:

- a. Detailed Air Res family demographics, including age ranges of Air Res members, their spouses/partners and children (by marital status and years of service);
- b. Recent pers tempo statistics for Air Res members (by rank, location, marital status and dependant children); and,
- c. Number of years of previous RegF service (by rank, location and marital status and dependant children) data.

15. The RCAF should also work with MFS to determine the feasibility of conducting a ResF specific needs assessment, with results broken out by environment. Short of conducting a national needs assessment, the RCAF should work with MFRCs to gain a more fulsome understanding of how Air Res family needs are viewed at the local level, to help identify larger trends.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Canada. Department of National Defence. "About the Military Family Services Program." Accessed January 23, 2021.
<https://www.cafconnection.ca/National/About-Us/Military-Family-Services/About-the-Military-Family-Services-Program.aspx>.
- . "CAF Community Needs Assessment 2016 Report - Overall Results." Winnipeg/Ottawa: Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, August 2017.
<https://www.cfmws.com/en/AboutUs/PSP/recreation/Documents/CAF%20CNA%202016%20REPORT%20-%20OVERALL%20RESULTS.pdf>.
- . "Family Sponsor Program | Royal Canadian Air Force," March 2, 2016.
<http://www.rcaf-arc.forces.gc.ca/en/family-support-team/family-sponsor-program.page>.
- . "Morale and Welfare Services Directory." Accessed January 30, 2021.
<https://www.cfmws.com/en/OurServices/ServicesDirectory/Pages/default.aspx>.
- . "Royal Canadian Air Force, Family Support Team, Findings and Observations," May 13, 2015. <http://www.rcaf-arc.forces.gc.ca/en/family-support-team/conclusions.page>.
- . "The Mapping and Gaps Analysis of Services for Military Families Report." Comprehensive Military Family Plan. Ottawa, ON, March 2019.
<https://www.cafconnection.ca/getmedia/4b303964-935f-4883-8e11-17582ea20dc6/GAP-Analysis-Report-2019-ENG.pdf.aspx>.
- Casselman, Kara-Lee. "E-Mail from MFS Staff Member." January 19, 2021.
- Manser, Lynda. "Profile Of Military Families In Canada." Ottawa, ON: Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, 2018.
- . "State Of Military Families In Canada: Issues Facing Regular Force Members and Their Families." Ottawa, ON: Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services, 2018.
- Office of the National Defence and Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman. "On the Homefront: Assessing the Well-Being of Canada's Military Families in the New Millennium," November 2013. <https://www.canada.ca/en/ombudsman-national-defence-forces/reports-news-statistics/investigative-reports/homefront.html>.
- . "Progress Report on the Status of Recommendations - On the Homefront: Assessing the Well-Being of Canada's Military Families in the New Millennium," Government, June 11, 2020.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/ombudsman-national-defence-forces/reports-news-statistics/investigative-reports/homefront.html>.

Ste-Croix, Jennifer, Major. "Air Res (Family) Demographics." January 29, 2021.