



Army Families Federation

Families Concerns - October to December 2008

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 affecting the community. 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.

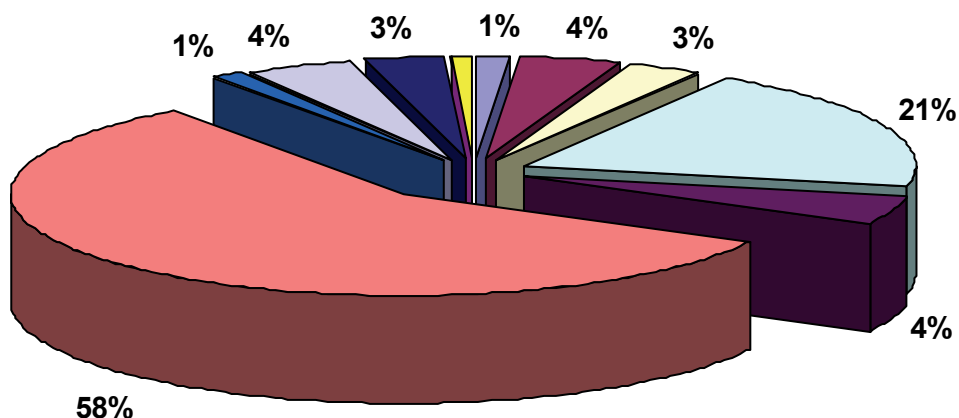
This report is distributed to all AFF staff worldwide, as well as to those who have an interest in delivering policy and assistance to families - who can help AFF secure a fair deal for all Army families.

Methodology


This is a qualitative report. Families contact AFF staff around the world with their issues which are anonymously logged. This information is then entered onto a central database and used to provide the evidence for this report.

Issues are raised with and being staffed by the chain of command.

AFF Worldwide Activity Chart



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



Between October and December 2008 there was a 25% increase in enquiries to AFF over the previous quarter; this was despite the stand down of most Units in December for the Christmas period. Three subject areas saw significant increases in the number of enquiries: Health enquiries increased by 88%, housing enquiries increased by 78% and, chiming with the comments made by CGS in January 09, marriage breakdown increased by 28%.

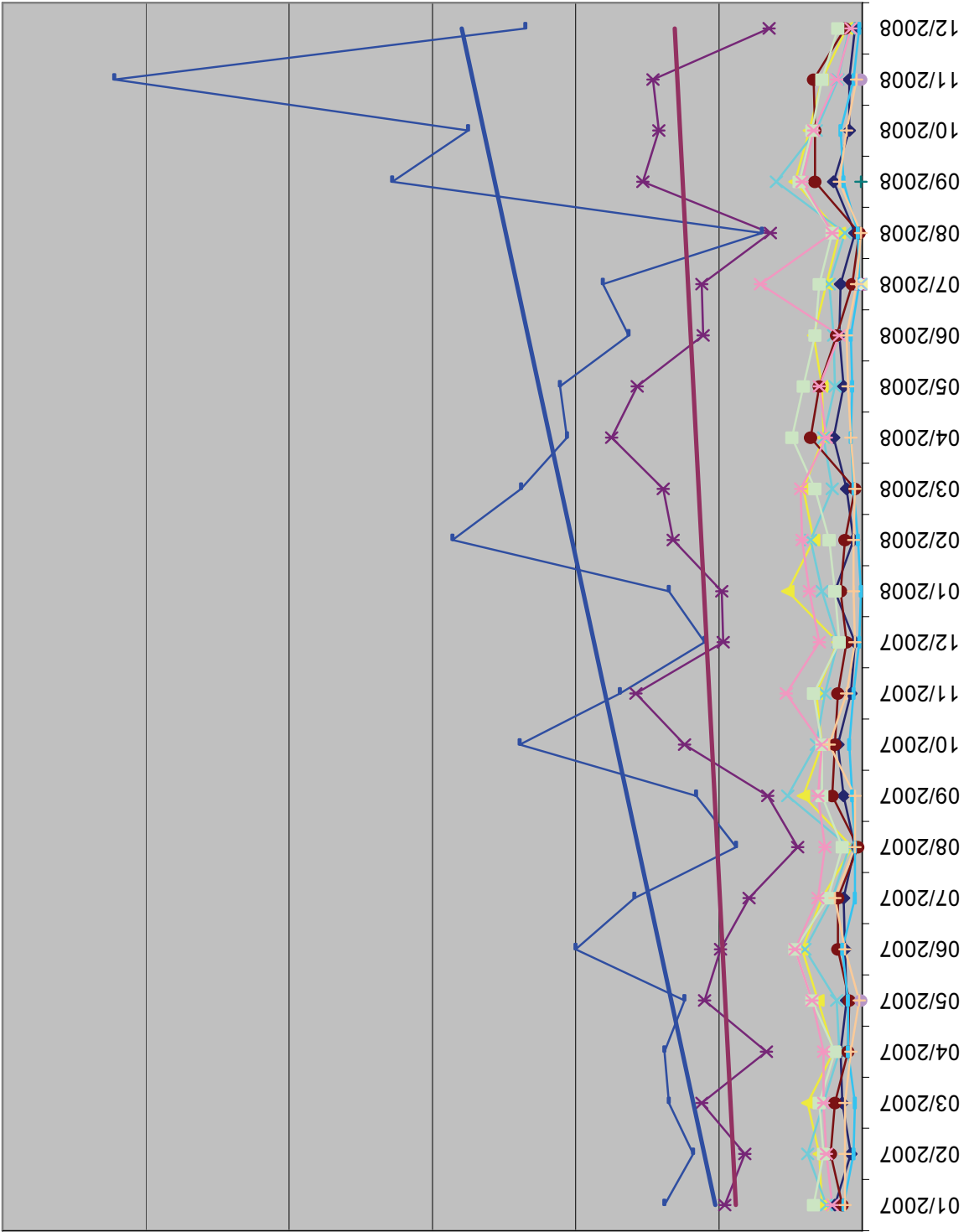
Enquiries about Family Life decreased again this quarter as a percentage of all enquiries, representing 20% of all contacts to AFF. The majority of enquiries within this category were to do with Welfare Support issues (60%), Foreign and Commonwealth (12%) and Separation & Deployment (8%). Many of the Welfare support issues relate to the availability of activities for school age and teenage children and also access to Unit Welfare Offices:

Regt have had to move family office 7 miles down road to new work station leaving families behind in Garrison. Families feel isolated from Welfare office and have stopped going to coffee mornings because of distance.

Under contacts about Health, the issue of NHS Dentists have seen an increase of 113% on the last quarter. Rather than the issue getting worse for families, AFF believe that it is the increased publicity and awareness of the issue that has prompted this increase. All enquirers have been given the guidance issued by PS4 on obtaining an NHS Dentist and we await feedback as to their success.

Activity Trends

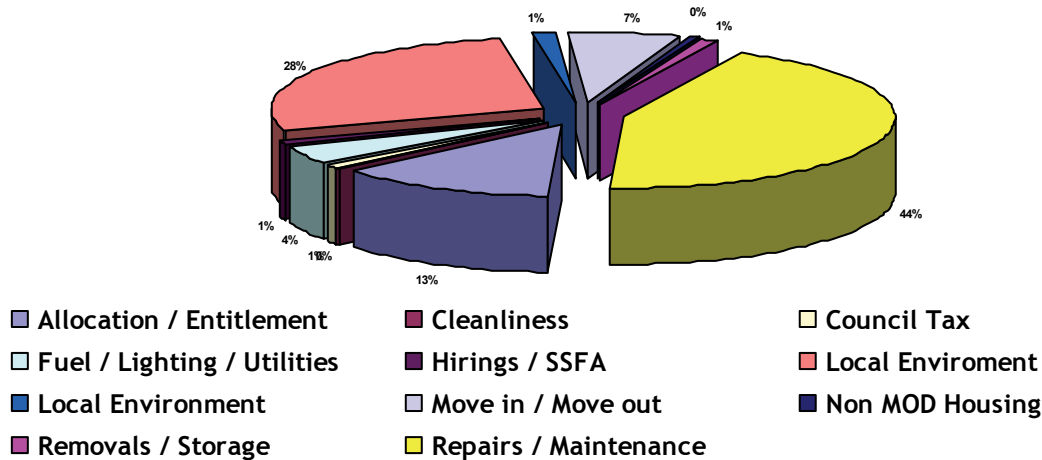
Trends over the past year illustrate fluctuations in the number of contacts to AFF for most issues. However, the chart opposite indicates that Housing contacts in November this year were at their highest during this 24 month period and have shown a steady increase during that time; Family Life contacts also show a steady increase in numbers.



- ◆ Additional Needs
- Allocation / Entitlement
- ▲ Education & Childcare
- ✕ Employment
- * Family Life
- Health
- + Housing
- + Housing
- ✕ Marriage Breakdown
- ◇ Military Agency
- Money
- ▲ Move in / Move out
- ✕ Postings to
- * Signpost to
- Additional Needs
- + Travel
- Linear (Housing)
- Linear (Family Life)

HOUSING

(58% of all enquiries; 74% of GB enquiries October to December 2008)



It was very disappointing to see that Housing enquiries had risen by a staggering 78% for the whole of AFF over this quarter. Despite the fall in enquiries during the previous quarter regarding Allocation and Entitlement, this area saw a 28% increase during this quarter. AFF suspect that this is linked to problems encountered by families after their move during Summer 2008.

“DE do not look at garden sizes and family sizes when allocating houses. We have tiny garden and children where other couples have older or no children and have large garden.”

“Paperwork lost in the system”


“I have 2 small children and been allocated a house with no garden in Bulford”

Young couple have been allocated a house in Bulford, both do not drive and he works in Tidworth.

As can be seen from above the types of enquiry have changed but centre on lack of local knowledge or understanding of the stresses of Army family life and this has consequently led to families being allocated inappropriate SFA or housing in inappropriate areas.

Contacts about Repairs and Maintenance increased by 145% and this quarter account for 44% of all Housing enquiries. Enquiries suggest that families still have to wait long periods for seemingly basic repairs to be carried out:

Family had boiler breakdown and were given small heaters. Needed 3 visits before boiler sorted out as vans did not carry the right parts.



“Appt for gas safety checks made for PM. Arrived home at 12.30 to a note from contractor saying he'd been at 15.30!”

“Leak in bedroom roof since April. Helpdesk don't know what's happening”

The enquiries for Local Environment have seen an increase in actual number this quarter of 61% - they now account for 29% of the total Housing enquiries. Many of the enquiries cite problems with other occupants of SFA and AFF believe will only be remedied by full re-engagement of the chain of command and by more intelligent allocation to ensure that Welfare and Estate staff are aware of who their residents are.

“Teenage children a problem on the estate - antisocial behaviour”

“Play Parks in Tidworth are always covered in glass and rubbish, why can't there be more police on the beat at night.”

“The overall look of Pirbright is poor, feels that it's a community the Army has forgotten”


With the dark evenings, car parking and lighting have also proved a problem for many SFA residents.

“The lights on my estate, are not working”

“Cars are still being parked on the pavements and in the evenings people are having to walk on the road”

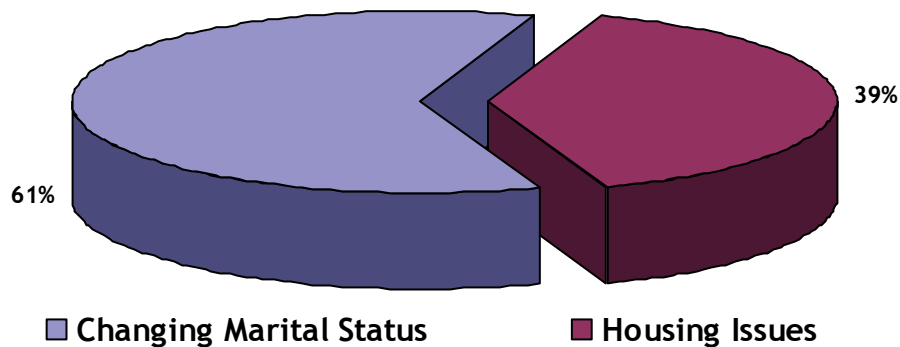
Residents have complained about the parking, as its not residents parking, students are parking there but the occupants do not have drives etc, which means they have not been able to park.

AFF have discovered that the ownership of roads and lighting is often unclear to the Garrisons, Defence Estates and MHS and so having someone take ownership of a problem can prove difficult. In Arborfield where there was a major problem with lighting, the only way to a quick solution was to raise a health and safety issue with Defence Estate and MHS staff.



MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN

(1% of all enquiries October to December 2008)



While Marriage Breakdowns account for only 1% of enquiries brought to AFF this and last quarter, the area showed a 28% increase in numbers. Changing Marital Status accounts for 61% of the enquiries while 39% are helping estranged spouses to deal with Housing difficulties.

Spouse has given her serving partner an ultimatum, it's the army or me!! This was brought on by lack of help with MHS mainly.

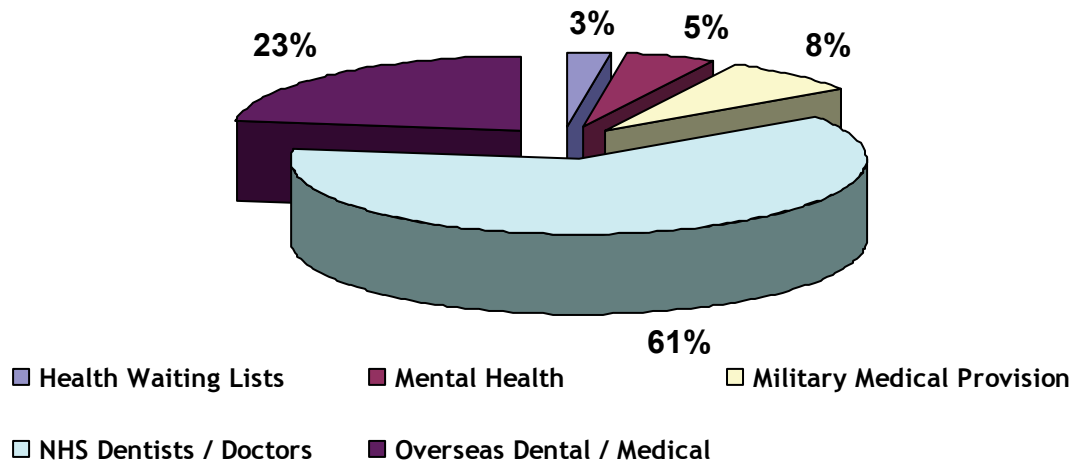
"I'm worried about being homeless after our divorce. There are no family on my side and I have very little money. "

"My husband has walked out on us, it seems so easy for him, he's moved in the block, I'm left with 90 days to move out of our SFA with our 18 month old baby, I don't know what to do."

PS4(A) in conjunction with SSAFA-FH and the MoD and other two services are updating the SSAFA-FH Guide to Marriage Breakdown. AFF believes that it is essential that this is available to the widest possible distribution. There seems to be a reluctance by estranged spouses to approach either the Unit Welfare Office or the Army Welfare Service for assistance (*"I have no information and I've been isolated by my husband"*, *"no help at all"*, *"couldn't get into camp anymore"*) there is a perception by some that the Army and it's welfare system will look after the Serving partner but the estranged spouse must fend for themselves.

HEALTH

(4% all enquiries October to December 2008)



Contacts to AFF about Health increased by 4% this quarter as a percentage of the total enquiries, but with an 88% increase in the actual numbers; access to NHS Dentists/Doctors increasing again this quarter to represent 61% of enquiries compared to 55% in the last quarter. AFF has continued to highlight difficulties experienced by families in accessing dentists, and has publicised the work being done by PS4 and Divisions in engaging with local Primary Care Trusts to identify problem areas and provide solutions. Finding a dentist via the PCT route however does not necessarily mean you will have access to a local dentist as these comments testify:


“On waiting list for dentist, cost £10 on bus to get there with children, before I have paid for the dentist.”

“I have been on the waiting list in Tidworth for a year going anywhere else is not an option as I don't drive and my husband is away in Afgan. I have 3 children and getting them all on the bus is very difficult and expensive.”

“My dentist is miles away, so my children have to have a day off for a short check up. When really if I could get a dentist in my area it would only take an hour”

There has also been a significant increase in enquiries regarding overseas Dental/ Medical care this quarter which rose from 12% of Health enquiries to 23%.

Families have reported difficulties accessing military dentists overseas due to availability as priority is given to serving soldiers. (Cyprus)



*Contact wanted to know why it takes so long to get an appointment with the dentist, she had to phone back three times each time to be told that they had not opened the book for the next set of appointments and must ring back.
(Germany)*

Families in BFG reported problems accessing a GP and in some areas were concerned that there was no access to a female GP in particular.

“Why are there several surgeries where there is no access to a female GP?”

“There is only one female doctor in the JHQ medical centre which makes appointments very difficult to get. There is a temporary female doctor but you don't know how long they will be here for and it is very difficult if you need to plan in advance.”

There have also been a number of concerns raised about Hospital Liaison Officer coverage out of hours in BFG. When a medical centre is closed families must use the nearest recommended German Krankenhaus and there have been a number of instances where HLOs have not been available to deal with language difficulties.

Client had attended Kinder clinic in Gutersloh Garrison. Concerned that the HLO service is not a sufficient service for families having to use out of hours care.

