



## Networking

### Self-help support for TA and Reserve Force families

One of the hardest feelings for the families of mobilised TA and Regular Reserve soldiers to cope with is isolation. This is not to be confused with loneliness. Frequently, you will be surrounded by family and friends who will all want to help and support you - as best they can. However, they may not understand the specific situation that you find yourself in. It can be enormously comforting to be in contact with others in the same boat and a network enables you to reach other families who also have a soldier in the Reserve Forces.

#### What is Networking?

Networking is a method of keeping in touch with other TA and Regular Reserve families. It could be in person, by phone or by email.

#### What is a Network?

A network is essentially a support group for people experiencing a similar - often challenging - situation. However, there are no rules on the makeup of the group. It is whatever you want it to be. It could include parents, spouses, children, siblings, even friends. It could be as small as a couple of wives sitting to next to each other at a pre-deployment briefing and deciding to swap phone numbers. It could be all the families in an entire TA unit receiving regular email newsletters from their ROSO (Regimental Operational Support Officer).

#### Why do we need one?

Experience has shown us that sharing challenging situations bonds people in a special way. Just as our soldiers gain enormously from comradeship on operations, their families can also benefit from the company and support of others who understand the unique demands that mobilised service brings.

Whilst deployment is often the most challenging time for families of Reservists, there are benefits to be gained from establishing networks long before the call up papers arrive. In Units where only a handful of soldiers are deployed at a time, it would be much better to include a wider number of families. That way, those with previous experience of such separation can be a great source of advice and support to those experiencing it for the first time.

#### How do we set one up?

Again, there are no rules. A network may develop informally through contacts you and your soldier have made with others in his/her unit or perhaps with someone you meet at an Open Day or Briefing. However, experience has shown that networks work best if they are supported by Unit Welfare Staff, usually the Unit ROSO or the local TA Centre PSAO (Permanent Staff Admin Officer). This is especially true if the Unit is very widespread and there is no tradition of, and little opportunity for the families to meet up. So, if you want a network, ask the welfare staff for help in the initial start up. Soldiers could submit the names of friends and family who wish to be included and after the Unit has gained their written agreement, a list of contact details could then be circulated amongst those that are interested. It is then down to the members of the network to decide how they wish to use the information. Some may choose to meet up with any families that live nearby. Others may prefer to keep in contact by phone or via email.

#### Why not use ArmyNet?

Perhaps the safest and easiest way to set up a network would be on the Forum pages of ArmyNet. Because it is secure, all sorts of useful information - such as R&R and training programme dates - can be posted by the unit as well as photos of the soldiers in theatre or on annual camp. However, to access ArmyNet the family has to be registered by the soldier as a guest. Ask your soldier to register you at [www.armynet.mod.uk](http://www.armynet.mod.uk)

## Points to consider

- **Privacy** - In accordance with the Data Protection Act, no one should have their details included in a network without their consent - preferably in writing. Once the soldier has nominated someone to be in the network, the Unit can write to them and ask for their written permission to participate. **It is vitally important to keep all the contact details private.**
- **Respect for the Unit Welfare Staff** - Whilst the welfare staff are there to help you, they also have many other hats to wear in a TA Unit where manpower is limited. Remember that the network is essentially there for the families to support each other. The Unit is supporting the network, not running it - that is down to the families themselves.
- **Respect for other members of the network** - Here some rules would be useful. Try to restrict your contact to sensible hours and do not abuse other people's good will. There may well be rare occasions when you desperately need a friendly voice at midnight but think about the effect that call may have on the receiver before you pick up the phone. This is where the Army support will be invaluable. If a member of the network was abusing the system, the welfare staff could be asked to intervene rather than other members of the network. Sometimes the abuse can be a cry for help and the welfare staff are the right people to deal with it.

It may seem a bit of a hassle to set up a network but the support and the friendships that you will gain will more than make up for it. Go on, ask your soldier or your welfare officer and get started today!

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