

IDEAS & ISSUES (MANPOWER)

L.I.N.K.S. for Teachers

Educating the educators

by Maj Jonathan Burgess, Elena McShane,
Brooke Burgess, Jenny Moore & Kate McKenney

With frequent moves and parents constantly deploying, military school-aged children experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, risky behavior, and depression, and a decline in academic performance than their nonmilitary counterparts.¹ One person who can create a safe haven in the life of a military child is their teacher.² However, too often, educators are unaware of the issues military students and parents face, let alone that a parent is deployed, and subsequently do not know how to assist them through this critical part of their lives. Oftentimes there is frustration on the part of the teachers when working with military children and families regarding homework, classroom attendance, conduct, and academic issues.³ Many military parents also express frustration when it comes to communicating with their children's teachers. These things all add up to reduced family readiness, time away from work, and increased anxiety for parents. Personnel from MCAS Yuma have created a solution that can be easily replicated by any installation commander and his current staff.

MCAS Yuma is small when compared to other military towns. As of January 2012, the air station was home to over 5,800 Marines and sailors, 3,150 of whom are married, with approximately 1,300 school-aged children.⁴ After hearing some of the issues parents, teachers, and administrators face, the school liaison officer (SLO) determined that an educational awareness training program might help local educators better understand the military lifestyle and its effects

>Maj Burgess is an artillery officer currently serving as the Department Head, Ground Combat Department, Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron 1.

>>Ms. McShane is the kindergarten through senior high school liaison, MCAS Yuma.

>>>Ms. Burgess is the Director, MCFTB, MCAS Yuma.

>>>>Ms. Moore is a former elementary school teacher and MCFTB Trainer/Children's Programmer. She currently works at MCAS Cherry Point as a personal and professional development instructor educating Marines in the Transition Readiness Seminar.

>>>>>Ms. McKenney is the Director, Child Development Center, MCAS Yuma.

on children. Living in a geographically isolated region in Arizona, military support services in the community are scarce, and bringing in trainers from military-sponsored organizations is very expensive. However, there are support services on the installation available to active duty military, spouses, and children. Lifestyle, Insight, Networking, Knowledge, and Skills (L.I.N.K.S.) is an official Marine Corps acculturation class taught by Marine Corps Family Team Building (MCFTB) on all installations. L.I.N.K.S. staff and volunteers teach topics covering Marine Corps culture and tradition, benefits and services, moving, deployments and separations, communication, and the Marine Corps as a career.

The SLO brainstormed with the MCFTB trainers about how to tap into their training curriculum and modify it to be of maximum effect for local educators, and an idea was proposed to bring L.I.N.K.S. into the schools.

Prior to the start of the 2010 school year, a team of 6, all with an educational background (a total of 33 years teaching from prekindergarten through college) and over 88 years of military life experience, was put together to make a modified L.I.N.K.S. presentation. The main idea was not to make excuses or glorify the military lifestyle, but to give educators a glimpse into what it is really like, while providing them some strategies to assist their military students. It made perfect sense to bring this program to the schools with the heaviest military population first. During the summer of 2010, after communicating with district superintendents and principals, the SLO coordinated for three schools to receive the training.

Teaching the Teachers

The SLO introduced the team and then explained why the team was there to talk to them. After the general concepts of the normal L.I.N.K.S. class

were discussed, the Marine volunteer began the training. As the sole Marine on the team, he started by giving the audience a quick history of MCAS Yuma, the squadrons, the number of Marines aboard the air station, and the annual economic impact the station has on Yuma. Coming from a military family, he brought a unique aspect to the panel of speakers. He was able to relate to the topics as a parent, a Marine, and who, as a child, had a father who deployed frequently, and had to change schools many times. Finally, he was able to provide a Marine's point of view on topics such as dealing with civilians and how Marines generally deal with problems. Speaking in generalizations with the understanding that all Marines are different, the Marine volunteer gave the teachers and principals an idea of what to expect when a Marine parent is called in to speak with teachers or administrators. He left them with the understanding that the best way to help

a Marine and his family is to keep an open flow of communication and information.

Next was a traditional part of the L.I.N.K.S. class, Marine Corps 101, taught by the MCAS Yuma L.I.N.K.S. trainer and a L.I.N.K.S. volunteer, tackling the basics such as how often moves occur and the "normal" cycle of emotions for deployments and separations. The speakers used documented research, humor, and personal stories to relay information about separations and moving. The research provided the bulk of the information while the stories placed it in context. These accounts had the audiences laughing and even crying at times.

Following Marine Corps 101, the MCFTB children's programmer presented information on research regarding children's common reactions to separation and moving. A breakdown of common reactions by age group allowed the audience to understand

the entire family dynamic of deployment, not just that of their students. For example, teachers were reminded of how older students acquire additional household responsibilities during deployments that can affect homework, grades, and class participation.⁵ They were then given a number of strategies for use in the classroom. Some of the most important strategies included identifying military students early on and maintaining regular communication throughout the school year with their families. Other teaching strategies shared included providing a classroom with structure and routine, welcoming constant communication with families, developing a check-in system with students to share their feelings during the deployment, modifying assignments such as writing tasks to allow students to write letters to their deployed parent, and much more.

Finally, it was time for the teachers to participate in a "tactical decision

2013 TOUR SCHEDULE



Serving Veterans, Educators,
Historians and Their Families
Since 1987

VIETNAM BATTLEFIELDS

16 - 28 MAR

45TH ANNIVERSARY OF KHE SANH

Host: Col Bruce Meyers, USMC CO 26th Marines



The Gunnery chose MHIIT

13 - 26 Apr - I Corps "Chu Lai to the DMZ"

10 - 24 May - I, II, III & IV Corps

8 - 21 Jun - I Corps "Chu Lai to the DMZ"

24 Aug - 6 Sep - I Corps "Chu Lai to the DMZ"

24 Aug - 7 Sep - I, II, III & IV Corps "Delta to the DMZ"



No C-Rats this time!

PACIFIC BATTLEFIELDS

19 - 28 Jul - Liberation of Guam & Tinian plus Saipan

Post Tour: 28 Jul - 1 Aug - Hawaii

2 - 11 Aug - Guadalcanal & the Solomon's
"Up the Slot"

60th Anniversary Subsidized Korea Revisits

SOLD OUT IN 2012! SIGN UP NOW FOR 2013!

EUROPE BATTLEFIELDS

18 - 27 Apr - Turkey WWI Dardanelles Campaign- Istanbul, Gallipoli Battlefields & Troy

17 - 27 May - 95th Anniversary of World War I AEF Battlefields & Paris

Post Tour: 26 May - 1 Jun - Battle of the Bulge

24 May - 2 Jun - Viking River Cruise Paris & the Heart of Normandy

25 May - 3 Jun - Battle of the Bulge

1 - 9 Jun - 69th Anniversary of D-Day:
"Normandy to Paris"

Pre-tour: 25 May - 2 Jun - Battle of the Bulge

2 - 14 Jul - 70th Anniversary Battle of Kursk

Moscow - Stalingrad - Tank Battle Reenactment

Post Tour: St. Petersburg

TBD Jul - 70th Anniversary of "Operation Husky"
Invasion of Sicily 1943!



The Fun BUS in France!



Lunch at Le War's Brestange!



U.S. Tank at the Utah Beach!



Russo Group in Moscow!



Guam Liberation Parade



PFI Grandchildren



MILITARY HISTORICAL TOURS, INC.

13198 Centerpointe Way Ste 202 Woodbridge VA 22193

Colonel Warren Wiedhahn, USMC (Ret) President/CEO

703-590-1295 • 800-722-9501 • Fax 703-590-1292

Email: mhtours@miltours.com • Website: www.miltours.com





L.I.N.K.S. for Teachers impacts Marine Corps family readiness. (Photo by Elena McShane.)

game,” putting into practice some of these skills. Teachers were grouped and each was presented with a different scenario based on real-life situations. Each group then shared their ideas and best practices that they felt would best resolve their particular scenario. The feedback received from the administrators and teachers was amazing, including the following comments:

- Very helpful. I have been teaching in different military areas for over 20 years. I’ve learned a lot over those years. I wish I could have learned this earlier. L.I.N.K.S. is really important to schools in military areas. Thanks.⁶
 - I really did not know what to expect from your presentation. I was afraid the staff would not be responsive. That was not the case. I have heard three times already, “I have a student whose father is deployed and now I have a better idea what to do.” I even heard “I wish I had gone through a program like that when my husband was deployed. It would have made such a difference.”⁷
 - ... the XO was talking highly about the L.I.N.K.S. for Teachers workshop you all taught. His son is in one of the classes of a teacher who attended and raved about what a good idea it is. I thought it was wonderful that all the department heads got to hear him speak so highly of your program.⁸
- Make no mistake, teachers and ad-

ministrators are craving information in order to better serve their students, specifically, which children are military, deployment timing, installation support and services available to families, and the military in general.⁹ Some of these items can be addressed by the SLO, while others need to be handled by the parents and teachers.

Local Impacts and Recommendations

Over the past 2 school years, L.I.N.K.S. for Teachers has been conducted at six Yuma-area public, private, and charter schools, and has opened the doors of cooperation in Yuma. L.I.N.K.S. for Teachers has also solidified the SLO’s relationship with the local schools. Schools and facilities are more apt to contact the SLO with questions or issues. Parents have repeatedly commented to MCFTB staff regarding how their teachers are mentioning their training with L.I.N.K.S. and their improved knowledge and communication with military students and families.

The issues military school-age children have are not MCAS Yuma specific. How many other school districts, even in large military towns, could benefit from a L.I.N.K.S. for Teachers program? Every installation should leverage their existing MCFTB/SLO personnel and implement a similar program in their area. This program incurs no additional cost to the Marine Corps. Each

school presentation takes approximately 2 hours and is recommended just before the beginning of the school year. During this window of opportunity, most school districts are offering professional development preparing for the start of the school year. It will offer teachers a greater impact and usage in the classroom. If faculty turnover is low, once a school has received the presentation, there is not necessarily a need to go back the following school year.

Ultimately, L.I.N.K.S. for Teachers impacts Marine family readiness. Expanding the network of support further empowers spouses and children to not only survive, but to thrive, during separations and other challenges. It is a true outreach to educate educators on how to best deal with military families so they know a little more about their students and the community they serve.

Notes

1. Richardson, Amy, et al., *Effects of Soldiers’ Deployment on Children’s Academic Performance and Behavioral Health*, RAND, Arroyo Center, 2011, p. 48.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 33–36.
4. *Marine Corps Air Station Yuma, Arizona Statistical Summary 2011*, accessed at www.yuma.usmc.mil on 9 July 2012.
5. Richardson, p. 37.
6. Evaluation received by unnamed teacher on 21 October 2011.
7. Email from Eula Baumgarner, Principal, Desert Mesa Elementary, to the MCAS Yuma SLO, received on 17 August 2010.
8. Email from Karen Trimble, Family Readiness Officer, Marine Attack Squadron 211, to the MCAS Yuma L.I.N.K.S. trainer, received on 27 August 2010.
9. Richardson, pp. 38–39.

