

Yellow Ribbon Program Aids Guardsmen with Deployment

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Photo by CPT Wencke Tate

DRAPER, Utah — **S**oldiers, Airmen, and families of the Utah National Guard have at their disposal a program to help them move smoothly back into a normal life after a long deployment.

The Yellow Ribbon program, mandated by the National Defense Authorization Act of 2008, was instituted to help ease the strain of returning home. One of its main purposes is to give Soldiers a cooldown time after a deployment, while allowing their leaders to keep a caring eye on them as they move back into their civilian lives.

“Yellow Ribbon is a reintegration program that helps Servicemembers and their families prepare for deployment and brings families back together when it’s time to come home,” said MAJ Annette Barnes, Utah National Guard Servicemember and Family Services director. “Following 9/11, Guard Soldiers and leaders noticed that active-duty Servicemembers were having fewer problems with reintegration because they would come home, take a week or two off, and then come back to work. For many Guardsmen, by the time they would come back, after the 90 day “hands-off” period following deployment, they would be facing challenges alone, without the Army’s or unit members’ help. Because they were seeing so many more issues with the Guard, they changed the 90-day policy.”

The mandatory Yellow Ribbon family events are scheduled 30 and 60 days after the Servicemember returns home. At the events, Servicemembers and their spouses can talk about any problems they have noticed during their first month of reintegration. There is another event held at 90 days, where only the Soldier or Airman comes to drill to complete a post-deployment health reassessment.

“They answer questions about how they’re feeling, if they’re having any struggles, and at that point we can find anyone who seems to be having any particular issue or challenge,” said Barnes.

At the end of 180 days, if a commander sees that there are still problems with a good portion of his or her people, they can ask for a continued event every 180 days up to five years.

“Communication is the key to most of our struggles for life in general,” said Barnes, about some of the objectives of the Yellow Ribbon program. “So if we can get families talking to each other, then they know where to go to get answers to their questions and get the resources they need. We don’t want families to just be struggling through this process; we want families to get super pro at [working through issues] so they can thrive through this process.”



Susan Summers welcomes Servicemembers to the 30-day post-reintegration event held at the Hyatt Summerfield Suites Jan. 9.

“The Guard Family Program was always doing this, but now additional resources have been provided for pre-deployment events as well. On the way out the door for deployment, Servicemembers and their families go through training to get any pre-deployment help they may need,” added Barnes. “Before their Soldier or Airman comes home, spouses participate in reunion briefings to help them prepare for their Servicemember’s return and to explain to them what to expect.”

“Your Servicemember might not be sleeping as well as they used to sleep, they might be startled by loud noises or they might be easily agitated,” explained Barnes. “It’s part of ramping a Soldier down. We try to prepare families, spouses and parents of Servicemembers to be aware of what may be happening.”

The new Yellow Ribbon program came about because of the National Defense Authorization Act, passed in 2008, which made it a mandated program.

“So we’re not just scraping by and begging and borrowing to try to provide these things,” said Barnes.

Because of the NDA Act, National Guard leaders are now required to provide these mandated programs for Servicemembers.

“I want the leadership to realize this is a mandatory program,” Barnes said. “From the time you come out of Basic Training, you always hear about preventive-maintenance checks and services (PMCS). We need to do PMCS on our Servicemembers too, because they’re the ones at the trigger, or at the steering wheel or at the end of a pen performing these tasks for us, and so they are more important than the equipment. They are our number-one resource.” 