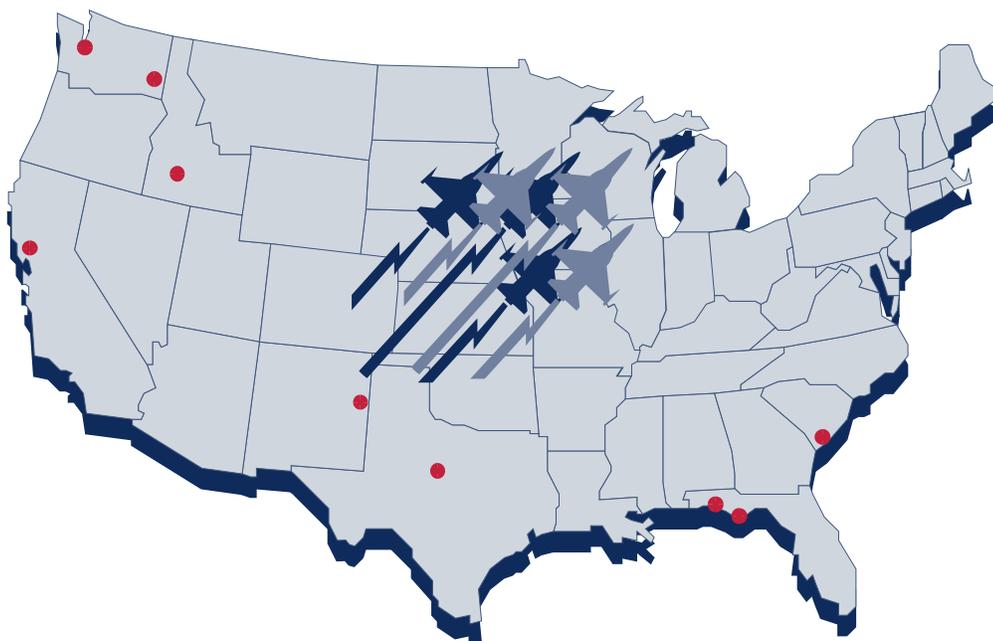




COMMUNITIES IN BLUE **FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**



Gary L. Bowen, Ph.D.
James A. Martin, Ph.D.
Jay A. Mancini, Ph.D.



Conducted by:
Caliber Associates
for the
United States Air Force

Project Director:
Barbara J. Rudin, Ph.D.

**COMMUNITIES IN BLUE
FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**

Authors:

**Gary L. Bowen, Ph.D.
James A. Martin, Ph.D.
Jay A. Mancini, Ph.D.**

Project Director:

Barbara J. Rudin, Ph.D.

Production and Graphics by:
Tom Swasey

*This report is dedicated to
Lieutenant General
Charles H. Roadman, II, for
his vision, leadership, and
commitment to building
healthy communities.*

Sponsored by:

Air Force Family Advocacy
Division, Brooks Air Force
Base, Texas

USAF Contract Number
G5-23F-8062H

Conducted by:

Caliber Associates
Fairfax, Virginia
© 1999 Caliber Associates

Table of Contents

	Page
Authors' Preface	1
Foreword	2
Highlights of this Report	3
Introduction	5
About this Report	5
Report Objectives	6
The Current Context	6
Assumptions about Individuals, Families, and Communities	7
A Definition of Community	8
A Conceptual Model	8
Results of the Study	11
Additional Observations on Community	21
Conclusions: Future Directions	23
Appendix: Methodology	26
About the Authors	28
Acknowledgments	29

Note: The views and opinions contained in this report are those of the authors and should not be construed as official Department of the Air Force position, policy, or decision unless so designated by other authorized documents.

Cite as: Bowen, G. L., Martin, J. A., & Mancini, J. A. (1999). *Communities in Blue for the 21st Century*. Fairfax, VA: Caliber Associates.



Authors' Preface

The significance of community in the military has a long history. Nearly 2500 years ago (480 BC), as Steven Pressfield describes in his novel *Gates of Fire*, 300 committed Spartan warriors held their ground at Thermopylae for seven days against the invading army of more than a million Persians.¹ Though faced with certain death, these men demonstrated discipline and bravery while defending their homeland.

As told by Pressfield, before the Spartans went into battle, they would break a twig into two equal pieces and carve their name into each half. They tied one half of the twig to their wrist for identification purposes should they be injured or killed on the battlefield; they dropped the other half into a basket remaining in camp during battle. The surviving warriors retrieved their twigs from the basket. Those remaining unclaimed twigs provided a count of the men lost in battle.

It appears that the Spartans understood the importance and meaning of community. The two halves of the twig had more than practical value. As described by Pressfield, they symbolized the two sides of man--the "blood" and the "wine." The piece of twig worn as a bracelet into battle represented the baser side of mankind (the "blood"). The other half left in the basket embodied the social self (the "wine"). The social self fully embraced community life, cherishing family, children, friends, the arts, and music.

The Spartans believed that this "wine" part of self was a stronger force than the "blood" side of self. When the warriors returned from battle, they joined the jagged halves of the twig--reintegrating the two parts of self. Because of the strength of the social self, these warriors were able to re-enter their communities and re-engage with their families.

As it was for the returning Spartans, the nature of our modern military community is an important factor in how well service members integrate the warrior and citizen parts of themselves. But healthy and competent communities are not givens. They must be nourished through the deliberate actions of base and unit leaders, human service professionals, and fellow citizens--actions that promote and foster a necessary sense of community.

Communities in Blue for the 21st Century is a report about community life in the Air Force. Conducted by Caliber Associates for the U.S. Air Force Family Advocacy Division, findings are presented from site visits to nine Air Force bases in the continental United States. Views about sense of community, community capacity, and formal and informal networks are presented from officer and enlisted active duty members, civilian spouses of active duty members, and civilian and contract employees of Air Force human service agencies. The results are intended to inform prevention efforts that assist the Air Force in strengthening the social infrastructure and fostering the sense of community for Air Force members and families.



But healthy and competent communities are not givens. They must be nourished through the deliberate actions of base and unit leaders, human service professionals, and fellow citizens--actions that promote and foster a necessary sense of community.

¹Pressfield, S. (1998). *Gates of fire*. New York: Doubleday



Senior Air Force leaders view "community" as highly significant for individual and collective well-being and as a cornerstone in the realization of core Air Force values.



Study results illuminate the nature of community life in the Air Force and the vital role that formal and informal networks of social care play in the lives of Air Force personnel and their families.



Foreword

Stories about the plight of America's communities, the erosion of community spirit, and the increase in isolation and alienation of individuals and families appear frequently in the popular press. These same concerns are increasingly being debated in the professional literature. The question about whether community spirit actually has declined in America has been a focus in many of these stories, and an issue discussed in a number of recent academic articles and books.

This question about the current state of community in our society is as relevant for military communities as it is for civilian communities. Senior Air Force leaders view "community" as highly significant for individual and collective well-being and as a cornerstone in the realization of core Air Force values.

Much of the discussion about community has not been informed by research. Many assumptions are made about the nature of community, the importance of community, and what can be done to support community. Dialogue, planning, policies, and practices based on systematic inquiry on the dimensions of community are lacking. This study is a step in addressing the relative absence of research on community within the Air Force, especially as it involves the sense of community among members and their families.

While this inquiry is exploratory, the findings are noteworthy. This study helps us understand the basis for identification with the Air Force as an institution--specifically the importance of the unit to which one is assigned and the geographic community where one is based. The study examines the capacity of Air Force communities to respond to internal and external threats, and it highlights the process and structure that allows individuals and families to make connections with other community members.

Study results illuminate the nature of community life in the Air Force and the vital role that formal and informal networks of social care play in the lives of Air Force personnel and their families. The findings reflect how people feel about community and how they act on these feelings. The data suggest that most members and their families have a positive view of their AF community. Yet not everyone is so optimistic about community life in the Air Force. Participants in the study describe many service members and families as feeling disconnected from their base community and experiencing difficulty connecting with other members and families.

The data enlighten us on how people navigate their community and connect with others, even in this period of profound change in the nature of military service and military family life. This report points out the need for community and describes how the assets of formal and informal networks can be marshaled to promote community capacity and a heightened sense of community among service members and families.

Communities in Blue for the 21st Century is a beginning roadmap to action for policies, programs, and practices that account for the significance of community. This report should be considered a resource for dialogue among military leaders, military personnel and their families, human service program professionals, and others who are tasked with promoting quality of life in the Air Force and with strengthening Air Force communities. It is a starting point in our collective efforts to ensure that the sense of community in the Air Force is preserved, reinforced, and enhanced.

John P. Nelson, Ph.D.
Colonel, U.S. Air Force
Chief, Family Advocacy Division, AFMOA
Brooks AFB, Texas

Highlights of this Report

This report addresses four important community questions: *What is the sense of community in the Air Force? What is the capacity of Air Force communities to respond to threats? How do people in the Air Force community form and foster connections? What is the future of community in the Air Force?* The answers to these questions demonstrate the vital role that formal and informal networks of social care play in the lives of Air Force personnel and their families.

What is the sense of community in the Air Force?

Slightly more than one-half of the respondents in this study rated the sense of community at their base as *very strong* or *strong*. One in six rated the sense of community at their base as *weak*.

Most respondents believed that residence (residing on-or-off the base) is the primary factor determining community identification. Many also believe that where the spouse works, where the children go to school, and where family members participate in social activities provide a basis for community identification.

What is the capacity of Air Force communities to respond to threats?

Most respondents expressed confidence in their communities' ability to respond both to adversity, such as a natural disaster, and to positive challenges, such as a community service project. More than four in five respondents rated the sense of shared responsibility and collective competence in their communities as either *very high* or *high*.

Respondents felt that their community is better at responding to the big, occasional problems than to those that are common to everyday life.

How do people in the Air Force community form and foster connections?

The majority of respondents felt that it was *very easy* or *easy* to make connections with other service members and families. But nearly one-quarter of junior enlisted members and one-fifth of junior officers felt that service members and families experienced difficulty in making such connections.

Most respondents felt that if people wish to make connections, they will. Many respondents suggested that the level of OPSTEMPO in the AF and the increasing number of deployments make it hard to get settled in a base community and to meet neighbors.

Respondents frequently mentioned chapels, community centers, and base libraries as locations where residents make contact with one another. One of the most common locations reported was the base gym or fitness center. Fitness centers seem to serve many of the social functions that Officer and NCO clubs once served.

Most respondents believed that residence (residing on-or-off the base) is the primary factor determining community identification.

Respondents felt that their community is better at responding to the big, occasional problems than to those that are common to everyday life.

The majority of respondents felt that it was very easy or easy to make connections with other service members and families.



Roadblocks that limit efforts by members and spouses to help each other included high work demands, operational stress, and frequent separations.

While the instinct of community is present in AF communities, especially in situations of adversity, many AF members and families perceive a decline in the military norm of "taking care of our own."

A consistent theme in the research findings is the importance of unit leaders as community builders.

Unit-based activities were frequently mentioned as the primary way people connect with one another and with the base community in general. A number of people were identified as *keystones* of the community--people who are able to motivate others and who are known to get things done. Often these were unit leaders.

Helping one another during deployments was seen by many respondents as a critical aspect of coming together as a military community.

Roadblocks that limit efforts by members and spouses to help each other included high work demands, operational stress, and frequent separations.

Respondents felt that coordination between agencies in delivering services and programs was still the exception rather than the rule. As one agency director commented: "We are still operating as stovepipes."

What is the future of community in the Air Force?

While the *instinct of community* is present in AF communities, especially in situations of adversity, many AF members and families perceive a decline in the military norm of "taking care of our own." Respondents feel that there is an attitudinal and behavioral shift occurring in the Air Force toward individual identity, autonomy, and self-reliance.

Though privatization and outsourcing may have economic benefits, many worry that these actions are diminishing identification with the AF as an institution and a way of life. This loss of identification with the institution is seen as a threat to sense of community.

There are considerable untapped opportunities for base agencies to build informal community networks. Yet base agencies often look at Air Force members and families as needing services, rather than possessing assets and strengths that can be used to support each other, and as a factor in building community capacity.

A consistent theme in the research findings is the importance of unit leaders as community builders. The military unit remains the primary basis for one's sense of community in the Air Force and represents an important conduit by which members and families establish connections with one another and gain access to agency-based services and programs.

A Final Comment:

This exploratory report provides a glimpse into the nature of Air Force community life and offers a model for the development and operation of formal and informal social networks designed to promote a sense of community among members and families. The report is intended as a resource for dialogue and as a starting point in promoting a greater sense of community in a 21st-century Air Force.



Introduction

Military leaders understand the importance of a strong sense of community to mission success. In a recent publication, *Global Engagement: A Vision for the 21st Century Air Force*, the Air Force Chief of Staff and the Secretary of the Air Force underscored the Air Force's commitment to strengthening its social infrastructure (p. 23):

The Air Force believes that one of its most important attributes is a sense of community among its members and their families. Far more than simple 'pride in the team,' this factor builds the motivational identity and commitment that underlie our core values, career decisions, and combat capability. . . . The Air Force is rededicating itself to both maintaining this sense of community and finding new and more efficient ways of providing it.

Communities in Blue for the 21st Century is consonant with this commitment to community and provides important information on how Air Force personnel and families view their communities. The stories told by these men and women provide insight into how community is experienced, and suggest how a sense of community can be supported.

About this Report

Communities in Blue for the 21st Century summarizes the results from recent site visits to nine Air Force (AF) bases. Sponsored by the U.S. Air Force Family Advocacy Division, research teams led by Caliber Associates examined base-level community life and the operation of formal and informal networks of social care. Bases were purposefully selected to reflect variation in mission, size, location, operation of family advocacy prevention efforts, and levels of family adaptation as reported by active duty members in the 1997-1998 AF Needs Assessment. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with officer and enlisted active duty members, civilian spouses of active duty members, and civilian and contract employees of AF human service agencies. Respondents answered questions about three dimensions of AF community life: sense of community, community capacity, and formal and informal networks. The appendix

Military leaders understand the importance of a strong sense of community to mission success.

Communities in Blue for the 21st Century summarizes the results from recent site visits to nine Air Force (AF) bases.

Sample Bases



Respondents answered questions about three dimensions of AF community life: sense of community, community capacity, and formal and informal networks.



As the first systematic investigation of community life in the AF, this report has significant implications for policy and program development for building strong communities in support of members and families.



The 1990s represent a turning point in the size, composition, and stationing of America's military forces.



describes the research methodology and the respondents. The appendix also discusses the analysis.

The findings from these site visits are responsive to:

The call by the Chief of Staff and the Secretary of the Air Force to discover strategies promoting a sense of community among AF members and their families;

The Air Force Surgeon General's strategic initiatives for "Building Healthy Communities" through prevention and intervention activities;

AF implementation of a base-level Integrated Delivery System (IDS).

As the first systematic investigation of community life in the AF, this report has significant implications for policy and program development for building strong communities in support of members and families. All communities contain components of formal organization and informal support that have the capacity to promote and sustain quality of life. This study provides a snapshot of AF community life, and a baseline for leaders to use in promoting strong and resilient community support systems for sustaining healthy, well-functioning members and families in a 21st-century AF.

Report Objectives

Four objectives informed the design of this research:

Assess the "sense of community" present in the AF today;

Identify the collective capacity of AF members and families to manage demands and confront situations threatening the welfare of the military community;

Explore how easily AF members and families make connections with one another, as well as with informal and formal groups within the AF and the associated civilian community;

Identify ways community members, base agencies, and AF leaders can foster connections among AF members and families.

The Current Context

The renewed interest of AF leaders in communities as systems of social care has been prompted by rapid and profound changes in America's military. The 1990s represent a turning point in the size, composition, and stationing of America's military forces. As we enter the 21st century, continued change is likely in response to emerging threats and new military technologies, as well as evolving national policies and various domestic political and fiscal considerations. In the context of these changes, both military leaders and social scientists have begun asking questions about the sense of community within the military--an institution that has traditionally prided itself for "taking care of its own." In this changing and uncertain environment, many AF leaders are asking whether this is still the case.

Assumptions about Individuals, Families, and Communities

This research is informed by a number of assumptions that reflect trends and developments in military communities. These assumptions were drawn from recent reviews of the literature that informed the design of this investigation.²

Communities, like individuals and families, can be characterized by the way they function;

The AF has made a considerable investment in formal community program development, and AF leaders are committed to developing and sustaining healthy communities;

The lifestyle of future military members is likely to be a far departure from the "company town" settings of the later 20th-century military community. Already, radical shifts have occurred in the military's human service delivery system during the last decade, including increased privatization and outsourcing of many support functions;

A lack of connection and a sense of isolation may leave members and families vulnerable in high stress situations and overly dependent on formal community resources. The functioning of AF members and families is enhanced when they are embedded in dense community networks of social relations with other members and families;

The military's informal community will need to assume a larger role in the future for sustaining the quality of life members and families require and expect;

AF leaders believe that enhancing informal community networks represents an additional opportunity to promote well being among members and their families. In this regard, the AF's informal sector (its people) represents an underdeveloped source of community capacity;

A policy and practice challenge is to identify ways in which AF human services agency staff members and unit leaders can work singly and collectively to strengthen informal connections among members and families in work units and neighborhoods.

The lifestyle of future military members is likely to be a far departure from the "company town" settings of the later 20th-century military community.



AF leaders believe that enhancing informal community networks represents an additional opportunity to promote well being among members and their families.

²Bowen, G. L. (1998). *Community resiliency: A research roadmap*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, School of Social Work.

Bowen, G. L., & Martin, J. A. (1998). Community capacity: A core component of the 21st century military community. *Military Family Issues: The Research Digest*, 2(3), 1-4.

Bowen, G. L., Martin, J. A., Mancini, J. A., Nelson, J. P. (1999). *Community capacity in the United States Air Force: Antecedents and consequences*. Fairfax, VA: Caliber Associates.

Bowen, G. L., & McClure, P. (1999). Military communities. In P. McClure (Ed.), *Pathways to the future: A review of military family research* (pp. 11-34). Scranton, PA: Military Family Institute.

Martin, J. A., & Orthner, D. K. (1989). The "company town" in transition: Rebuilding military communities. In G. L. Bowen & D. K. Orthner (Eds.), *The organization family: Work and family linkages in the U.S. military* (pp. 163-177). New York: Praeger.

Van Laar, C. (1999). *Increasing a sense of community in the military: The role of personnel support programs*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.



In this report, the concept of community focuses primarily on the spatial settings in which AF members live and work.

Communities in Blue for the 21st Century is informed by a model of community capacity including three central concepts that provide a framework for the research findings: community capacity, sense of community, and formal and informal networks.

Symbolized as the tree trunk in the diagram below, community capacity is the central concept in this model.

A Definition of Community

In this report, the concept of community focuses primarily on the spatial settings in which AF members live and work. These settings include the AF installation and the local civilian community surrounding it. Functional relationships also are an important consideration in this discussion of community. Consequently, members who are deployed are included within the boundaries of community. Units and neighborhoods are considered the primary social addresses for military members and families in this definition of community, and attention is focused on these identifications, memberships, and connections that members and families have within them.



A Conceptual Model

Communities in Blue for the 21st Century is informed by a model of community capacity including three central concepts that provide a framework for the research findings: community capacity, sense of community, and formal and informal networks. As noted previously, these concepts helped structure this study's interviews and focus groups.

Community Capacity

Symbolized as the tree trunk in the diagram below, community capacity is the central concept in this model. We believe that in communities with high capacity, community members:

Demonstrate a sense of *shared responsibility* for the general welfare of the community and its members; and



Evidence *collective competence* in taking advantage of opportunities addressing community requirements and needs, meeting challenges, solving problems, and confronting situations that threaten the integrity of the community and the safety and well-being of its members.

While community capacity involves the operation of both formal and informal networks of social care, this discussion is focused primarily on the operation of community capacity in informal networks. Informal networks range in size and structure from small coalitions of individuals in work units and neighborhoods to large groups that traverse the existing boundaries of units and neighborhoods. From the perspective of its definition, community capacity represents behaviors and action rather than the potential for action. For example, it is one thing to believe that a community could and should respond during a time of need but quite another to observe that a community makes things happen in such a situation.

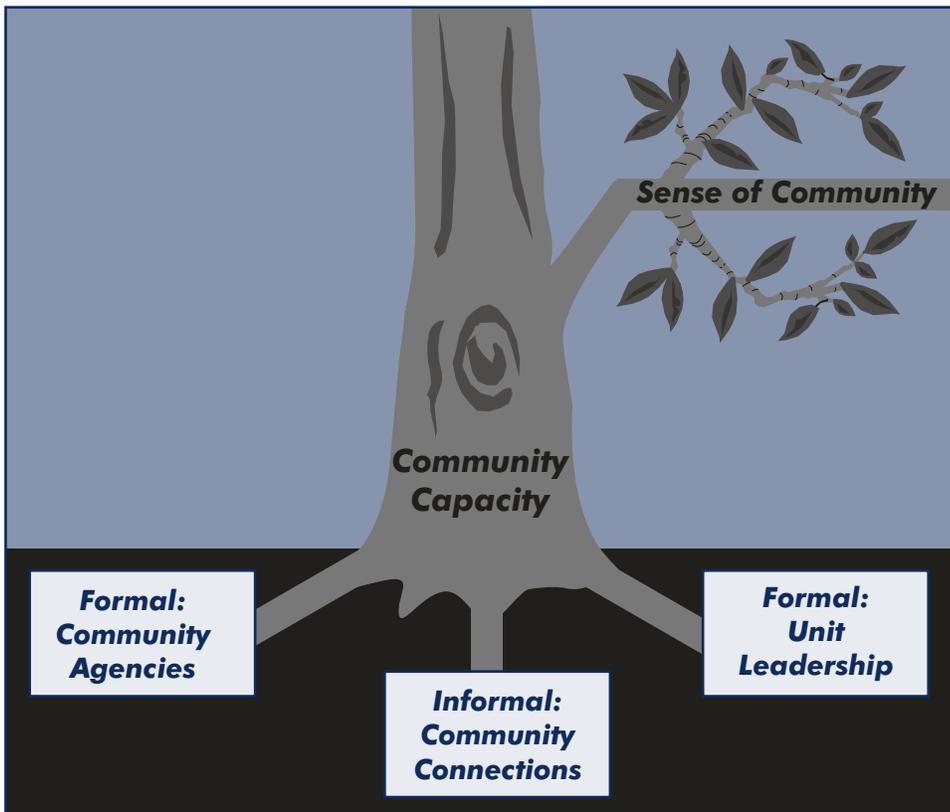
The two dimensions of community capacity (shared responsibility and collective competency) are assumed to reinforce each other mutually over time. Communities in which members evidence both high shared responsibility and high collective competence are considered "empowered" communities. Without a sense of responsibility, communities may have the competence to solve problems but lack the motivation or the will to do so. In such detached communities, formal networks (e.g., community agencies) may perform functions that the informal community could easily provide for itself.

Community capacity increases as community members share varied life experiences and successfully handle a range of situations and tasks. In the military environment, these situations may range from ensuring adequate play space for children in a base housing area to managing the response to a natural disaster.

While community capacity involves the operation of both formal and informal networks of social care, this discussion is focused primarily on the operation of community capacity in informal networks.

From the perspective of its definition, community capacity represents behaviors and action rather than the potential for action.

Community Capacity Model



Communities in which members evidence both high shared responsibility and high collective competence are considered "empowered" communities.



Sense of community has both psychological and behavioral aspects, which capture the degree to which members and families feel a sense of common identity, esprit de corps, camaraderie, and rootedness in the community, and the degree to which they are active participants in the community.

A community able to maintain, regain, or establish a favorable sense of community over time despite adversity or positive challenge is considered resilient.

Informal community connections include voluntary associations (e.g., unit-based support groups) and relationships with friends, work associates, and neighbors.

Sense of Community

A sense of community emerges over time as community members evidence shared responsibility and collective competence. Like a branch from the trunk of a tree, the fibers defining a sense of community are supported by community capacity, yet they have distinctive qualities and characteristics. Sense of community has both psychological and behavioral aspects, which capture the degree to which members and families feel a sense of common identity, *esprit de corps*, camaraderie, and rootedness in the community, and the degree to which they are active participants in the community. When this occurs, the twigs sprouting from the branch are anchored and hardy, and capable of providing nourishment and support to the leaves, which represent members and families.

Part of empowerment involves providing opportunities and roles for individuals and families to participate in community life. A strong sense of community promotes individual and family adaptation and supports military mission requirements. A community able to maintain, regain, or establish a favorable sense of community over time despite adversity or positive challenge is considered resilient.

Formal and Informal Networks

Community capacity is an emergent outcome that springs from the actions and interactions within and between formal and informal networks. These networks act as the root system that nourishes community capacity and the sense of community. The focus in this research is on informal community connections and how formal networks promote these informal networks. These formal networks include community agencies and unit leadership. Informal community connections include voluntary associations (e.g., unit-based support groups) and relationships with friends, work associates, and neighbors. These relationships develop through mutual assistance and support over time. When this system of formal and informal networks is fully operative in nourishing community capacity, a protective and resilient web of support surrounds and sustains members and families.

The formal and informal networks represented here as community agencies, community connections, and unit leadership have both horizontal and vertical integration. Horizontal and vertical integration captures the consistency of knowledge, attitudes, and behavior among individuals within and between formal and informal networks. A combination of strong and weak ties within and between formal and informal networks that are supportive of promoting community capacity and a sense of community allows members and families to remain resilient in meeting mission requirements, and in managing their personal, family, and work responsibilities. Strengths in any one area help compensate for deficits in other areas.



Results of the Study

The findings of this study of AF community life are divided into four sections: sense of community, community capacity, community connections, and strategies for fostering community connections. In addition, a number of observations are provided which aid in understanding the community-related results.³

Sense of Community

Respondents were asked to rate the psychological sense of community at their base on a 10-point scale from *very weak* to *very strong*. Two questions assessed the behavioral component of sense of community. One question asked respondents about the level of activity of service members in community events and activities sponsored by the base. A parallel question inquired about the level of activity of family members in base-sponsored community events and activities. Both behavioral questions were assessed on a 10-point scale from *not at all active* to *very active*.

Psychological Sense of Community: Overall

Slightly more than one-half of respondents (51%) rated the sense of community at their base as *very strong* or *strong*.

One in six (16%) rated the sense of community at their base as *weak*.

Psychological Sense of Community: Subgroups

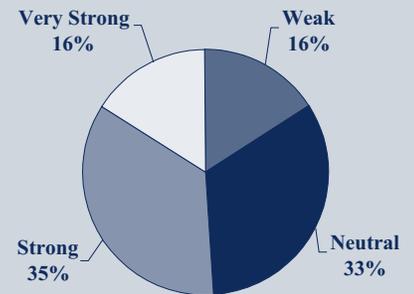
A relatively higher proportion of civilian and contract employees (65%), senior officers (61%), and respondents who had lived in their communities more than three years (56%) rated the sense of community at their base as *very strong* or *strong*.

Fewer than two in five junior enlisted members (38%) gave the sense of community at their base a *very strong* or *strong* rating.

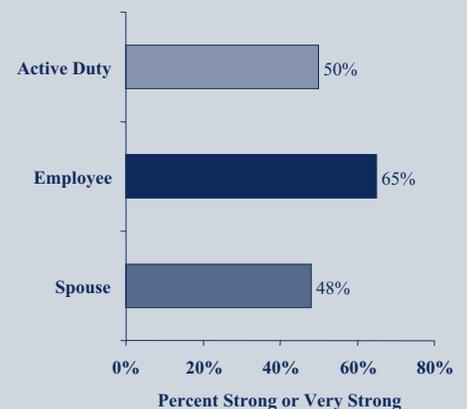
Respondents' ratings of the sense of community at their base did not vary by whether they lived on or off the base.

³ Respondents completed a six-item community capacity rating form as they participated in the interview or focus group. These items were evaluated on ten-point rating scales. As discussed in the Appendix, the ten-point rating scales were divided into four ordinal categories for analysis. Although value labels differed by item, ratings between 1 and 4 were assigned a *low*; ratings of 5 and 6 were assigned a *moderate or neutral*; ratings of 7 and 8 were assigned a *high*; and ratings of 9 and 10 were assigned a *very high*. Findings from the community capacity rating form are included in this section of the report.

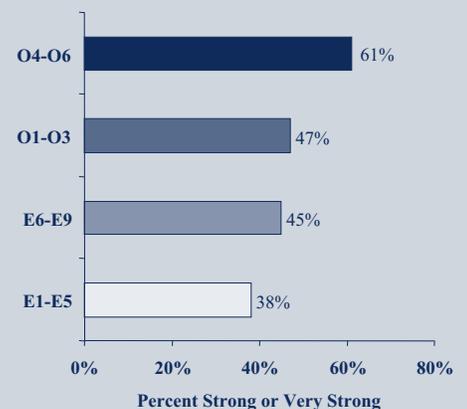
Sense of Community Strength



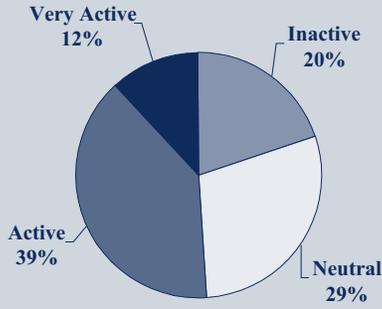
Sense of Community Strength by Respondent Group



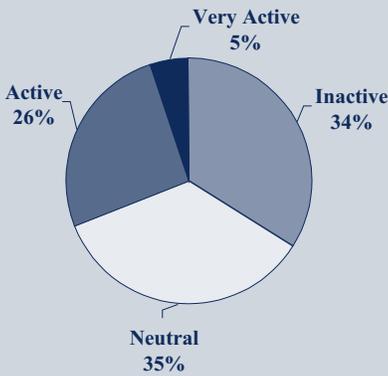
Sense of Community Strength by Pay Grade: Active Duty



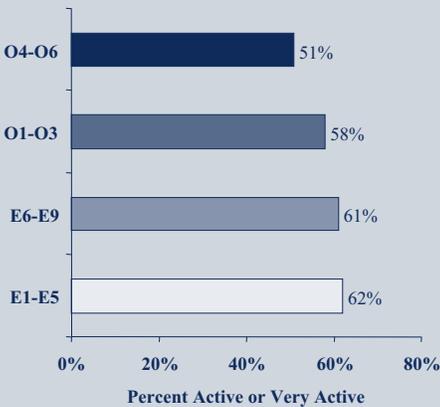
**Community Involvement
Service Members**



**Community Involvement
Family Members**



**Community Involvement
Service Members by
Pay Grade: Active Duty**



Behavioral Sense of Community: Overall

A higher proportion of respondents described service members (51%) as either *very active* or *active* in base-sponsored events and activities than family members (31%).

Approximately one in three respondents (34%) felt that family members were *inactive* in base-sponsored community events and activities; a smaller proportion of respondents (20%) reported service members as being *inactive*.

Behavioral Sense of Community: Subgroups

Fewer spouses (34%) than either service members (55%) or civilian and contract employees (48%) reported service members as being active in the community.

Perceptions of the level of community involvement of service members also varied by pay grade for active duty members. About one-half (51%) of senior officers viewed service members as *active* in their communities; 62% of junior enlisted members considered active duty members as involved.

No significant variation was found in respondents' perceptions about the community involvement of family members by respondent group or by pay grade for active duty members.

Respondents' perceptions about the community involvement of service members and family members did not vary either by their time present in the community or by the on-or-off base location of their residence.

Sense of Community: Source of Identification

Respondents were asked whether community members identify primarily with the base community, the civilian community, or both equally.

The responses suggested that in approximately equal proportions people identify primarily with the base or with the civilian community.

Most respondents identified residence as the primary factor determining community identification.

"If you live on base, you are more likely to be involved in base activities, especially in smaller, more remote areas."

"If you own a home in the community, you are more likely to be involved in local community activities."

Respondents believed that where the spouse works, where the children go to school, and where family members participate in social activities influenced community identification.

"If you work outside the home, you develop civilian friendships."

"If you have children, you identify with where they go to school."



Factors such as base size, base remoteness, and the perceived friendliness or pro-military attitudes of the local civilian community seemed to influence community identification. Smaller, more remote bases engendered more identification with the base.

Community Capacity

Respondents were asked two questions in an attempt to assess the two-dimensional concept of community capacity. **Shared responsibility** was assessed by asking respondents to rate on a 10-point continuum from *very unlikely* to *very likely* the likelihood that members and families would pull together and respond as a community to situations threatening the general welfare of the community and its members. **Collective competence** was assessed by asking respondents to rate on the same 10-point continuum the likelihood that members and families would pull off a response to such situations that would meet the challenge or solve the problem. In evaluating this second component, respondents were asked to assume that members and families would pull together and respond to situations as a community.

Community Capacity: Overall

Respondents felt strongly confident in their respective communities' ability to respond to both adversity (e.g., devastation from a flood or hurricane) and positive challenge (e.g., the stationing of a new unit at a base and the corresponding incorporation of these new members and families). More than four in five respondents rated the sense of shared responsibility and collective competence in their communities as either *very high* or *high*.

Very few respondents described either dimension of community capacity as functioning at a *low* level (less than five percent).

Community Capacity: Subgroups

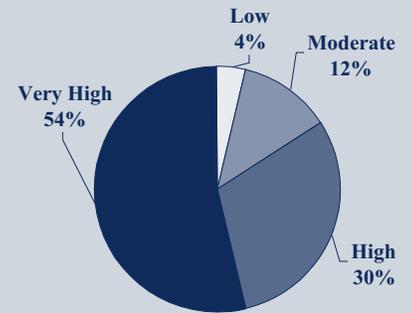
Confidence in the ability of the community to respond collectively and successfully to challenges was uniformly high across demographic subgroups.

Only small variations in responses were found either by length of time in the community or location of residence.

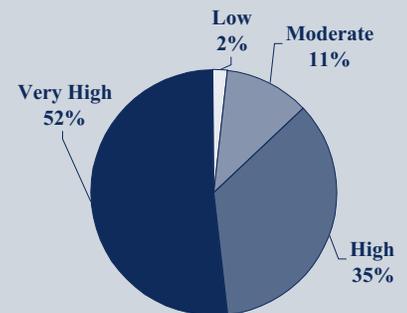
A higher proportion of civilian and contract employees (95%), than either active duty members (85%) or civilian spouses (75%), felt that the community would pull together in the context of adversity or positive challenge.

Perceptions toward the sense of shared responsibility and the level of collective competence varied by pay grade: senior officers felt most positive; junior enlisted members felt least positive.

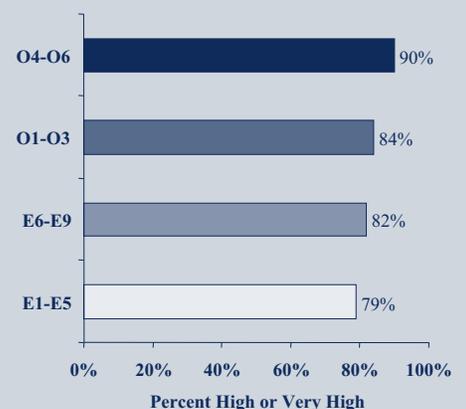
Community Capacity Shared Responsibility



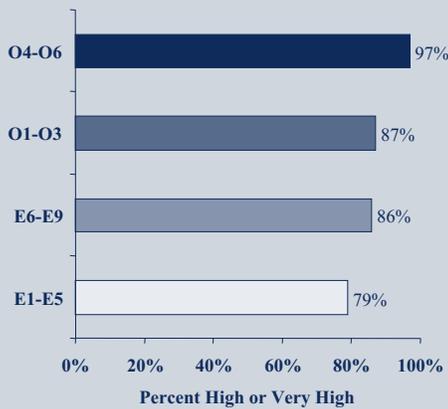
Community Capacity Collective Competence



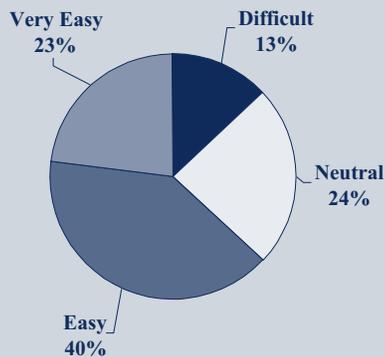
Community Capacity Shared Responsibility by Pay Grade: Active Duty



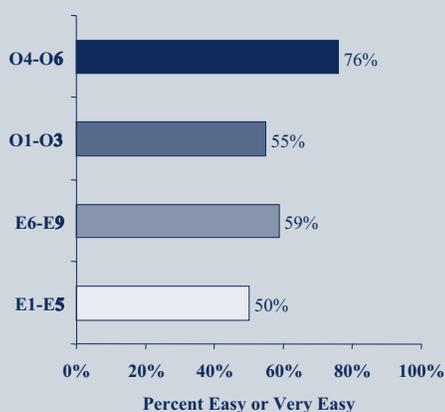
Community Capacity Collective Competence by Pay Grade: Active Duty



Community Connections



Community Connections by Pay Grade: Active Duty



Community Capacity: Examples

Examples varied from base to base, but all demonstrated people uniting to support those in need whether the crisis impacted an individual or the larger community.

Stories included neighbors helping a young enlisted mother who was struggling to cope with a sick premature infant and an ice storm where families with electricity shared their homes with neighbors who otherwise would have been in the cold and dark.

Respondents mentioned the death of an infant, an adolescent suicide, an abducted child, a house fire, a hurricane, and military accidents and air crashes as events where people came together.

One focus group described gang violence in a neighborhood just outside the base gate, and how residents began an informal community watch that helped eliminate the problem.

Numerous comments were heard about spouses pulling together and lending support to one another during deployments. Respondents described how neighbors were always available to help during these times.

Respondents suggested that the community is better at responding to the big, occasional problems than to those that are more a part of everyday life: *"In a big situation or crisis we pull together and become one."*

Community Connections

Respondents were asked to rate the level of difficulty with which service members and families made connections with other service members and families on their base. Respondents evaluated this item on a 10-point scale from *very difficult* to *very easy*.

Community Connections: Overall

Nearly two in three respondents (63%) felt that it was *very easy* or *easy* to make connections with other service members and families in the base community.

Relatively few respondents (13%) felt that making such connections was difficult, although nearly one in four (24%) gave a neutral response to this question (a rating of 5-6 on the ten-point scale).

Community Connections: Subgroups

Civilian and contract employees (72%) and senior officers (76%) were most likely to say that it was *very easy* or *easy* to make connections.

Less than two-thirds of active duty members (62%) and spouses (63%) reported that service members and families found making connections *very easy* or *easy*.



More than one in ten active duty members (14%) and spouses (11%) rated the experience of making connections with other service members and families as *difficult*; only 5% of civilian and contract employees felt this way.

Among active duty members, nearly one-quarter of junior enlisted members (24%) and one-fifth of junior officers (20%) felt that service members and families experienced *difficulty* in making such connections.

Only 12% of senior enlisted respondents and 7% of senior officers felt that members and families experienced *difficulty* making connections.

The relative *ease* or *difficulty* in making connections did not vary by either the respondents' length of time in the base community, or by whether they lived on-or-off base.

Community Connections: Clarifying Respondent Perceptions

Respondents were asked a number of open-ended questions in an attempt to understand better their perceptions about the relative ease or difficulty that members and families experienced in making connections with other members and families at their base.

What are the barriers to making connections?

Most respondents felt that if people want to make connections, they can: *"Ultimately it is up to each individual."*

Many respondents, however, suggested that the level of OPSTEMPO in the AF and the increasing number of deployments make it hard to get settled in a base community and meet neighbors.

Time seemed to become a critical family commodity when both spouses worked and can be a barrier.

"These couples have little left at the end of the day."

"Duty schedules are very hectic; some people are gone more than they are home."

The idea of not being identified with the military came up in comments like the following: *"People want privacy after hours because the AF demands so much,"* and *"Everyone has developed a civilian mentality."* Others suggested that the AF operates more like a corporation than a branch of the military, and that this contributes to wanting distance once the workday is over.

A unit leader stated the feeling of many: *"Fewer people are looking to the AF as a career. There is less interest in establishing connections because there is less long term investment."*

What facilitates connections?

Many respondents commented on the size and remoteness of the base as a factor in making connections: *"People have more motivation and opportunity to connect with one another at small bases, in more remote locations, and overseas."*

Most respondents felt that if people want to make connections, they can: "Ultimately it is up to each individual."

Many respondents, however, suggested that the level of OPSTEMPO in the AF and the increasing number of deployments make it hard to get settled in a base community and meet neighbors.

A unit leader stated the feeling of many: "Fewer people are looking to the AF as a career. There is less interest in establishing connections because there is less long term investment."



Respondents noted that Flying Squadrons seem to have more cohesion.

A number of respondents suggested that those who have good first experiences with others in the base community do better at making connections: "First impressions count a lot."

Respondents said that those living off base, those families where both spouses work and time is scarce, those assigned to units that are not cohesive, and those not committed to a career have the most difficulty making connections.

Base leadership and unit-based activities were consistently seen as linked with how people connect with one another and with the base community in general.

"What is most important is the commander's attitude--he cares."

"What works is squadron activities that include families--but it depends on leadership."

Who is most likely to make connections?

Living on base was seen as an advantage both for those living in base housing, as well as singles living in the dorms: *"They just have more opportunity to interact."*

Respondents noted that Flying Squadrons seem to have more cohesion.

"Spouses tend to stick together, especially pilot spouses."

"People are tight within their unit--not base-wide."

One respondent said: *"Many get involved on base through the unit, not through base activities. The unit is critical."*

Individual personalities were seen as critical to making connections: *"People who are gregarious, those who are outgoing, and people who make the effort and try."*

Others commented on the importance of community participation as a conduit to making connections. Common examples included church or synagogue attendance and participation in religious-oriented programs.

A number of respondents suggested that those who have good first experiences with others in the base community do better at making connections: *"First impressions count a lot."*

Who is least likely to make connections?

Respondents said that those living off base, those families where both spouses work and time is scarce, those assigned to units that are not cohesive, and those not committed to a career have the most difficulty making connections.

Personality factors were described as influencing the ability to make connections: *"Those who are shy, non-social, interested only in doing their thing experience the most difficulty."*

Newly married, junior enlisted couples (especially those with very young children) were described as least likely to make connections. A number of respondents suggested that the lack of money was a major factor for these families: *"They can't afford a babysitter so how can they get involved in activities?"*

Others suggested that singles might experience difficulty making connections, especially when so many unit and base activities are family-focused.

Male spouses of active duty women and foreign-born spouses were mentioned as being at risk for isolation.



A number of respondents used this question to reinforce the point that they see operational demands as an increasingly important factor in reducing community connections. *"Generally the work pace is so demanding that people just want to go back home to their family. No one has time or energy to get involved."*

Where do people gather to make connections?

Respondents most frequently mentioned chapels, community centers, base libraries, and various facilities like the base theater, bowling alley, ball fields, and the base golf course.

One of the most common locations reported was the base gym or fitness center. Fitness centers now serve many of the social functions that Officer and NCO clubs once served.

Respondents said that they use base facilities because of lower costs and/or because of their convenience to base housing: *"They are convenient, accessible, centrally located, and inexpensive."*

Other respondents complained about limited hours of base facilities, while others remarked on the poor conditions of the facilities.

A notable common concern about base gyms and fitness centers was the frequent absence of walk-in child care, making it very difficult for parents with young children to take advantage of these facilities.

Who are keystone people, and what are their characteristics?

Respondents identified a number of people thought of as "keystones" of the community--people who are able to motivate others and who are known to get things done. Often these were first sergeants or senior officers on the base; some were highly committed volunteers; others were military or civilian base service providers; occasionally retirees were mentioned, particularly in the context of public service accomplishments supporting the AF and base activities.

Terms and phrases like *"caring, willing to step forward, approachable, knows how to listen, follows through, takes charge, proactive, has spirit, can motivate, honest, well organized, good communicator, does not micro-manage, can listen and takes advice, has guts, has compassion, and flexible"* were used to describe the keystone people in their community.

Descriptions of keystone people often included comments like the following:

"They do whatever it takes to make things work."

"They are inclusive, they incorporate everyone in the process, they make others feel important."

"They are someone who is there when you need them."

One respondent mentioned two young airmen who--on their own--organized a big brother/big sister program on the base to support the sons and daughters of deployed personnel.

Repeatedly, respondents commented on the importance of the base commander as a keystone person if things on base seem to be working well.

One of the most common locations reported was the base gym or fitness center. Fitness centers now serve many of the social functions that Officer and NCO clubs once served.



Respondents identified a number of people thought of as "keystones" of the community--people who are able to motivate others and who are known to get things done.



Repeatedly, helping one another during deployments was mentioned as a critical aspect of coming together as a military community.



Most respondents seemed to feel that the critical path involved unit-based activities and efforts. Sponsorship for new people was seen as particularly important.



Strategies for Fostering Community Connections

Respondents were asked a series of open-ended questions about how various types of community members could foster community connections. Responses included both recommended strategies and descriptions of current activities.

Members and Spouses

Respondents offered a number of ideas about how members and spouses can help one another get connected:

"Organizing a neighborhood block party"

"Trading-off child care"

"Helping each other find jobs"

"Greeting new neighbors."

Repeatedly, helping one another during deployments was mentioned as a critical aspect of coming together as a military community: *"When the member is away, deployed or TDY, we help with each others' kids. Neighbors will mow the lawn; there is always someone who will come by and help with a house repair."*

Considerable concern was expressed about those new to the AF: *"Many young families have not had (in their civilian life) good role models for giving back to the community."*

Concern was also expressed for those AF families who have been around a long time:

"Involvement by leaders' spouses is not what it once was. It is needed, however."

"The chain of concern is not as strong as it once was."

Respondents pointed out roadblocks that limit efforts by members and spouses to help each other. These included:

"Being over worked"

"Too much operational stress"

"Too many deployments"

"Just not having enough energy to do one more thing."

Although a number of comments suggested the need for more neighborhood-based efforts to get people connected to one another, most respondents seemed to feel that the critical path involved unit-based activities and efforts. Sponsorship for new people was seen as particularly important.

Base Agencies

Respondents offered a number of thoughts on how base agencies can help people get connected, particularly by sponsoring community activities, orientations for new community members, and activities for special groups like parents of newborns, young single airmen, and teens.

Comments generally suggested the need for agencies to work more closely with units and stressed the importance of agency coordination and resource sharing with each other. As one agency director commented: *"We are still operating as stovepipes."* In general, respondents felt that coordination between agencies in delivering services and programs was still the exception rather than the rule.

Respondents repeatedly suggested the importance of agency representatives:

"Extending themselves past the gate."

"Reaching out and connecting with families who live in the civilian community."

One service provider commented: *"We need to get out of the trenches and make the time to visit service members where they work and live."* Several respondents mentioned the importance of recognizing the work schedules of working wives and young families in designing outreach services.

Chapel programs along with a variety of health and wellness programs were mentioned frequently by respondents as a means to foster community connections.

For a few bases, the concept of a "Community Calendar" seems to have caught on and become an important source of information for residents.

Agency representatives described many examples of base agencies working together to facilitate connections among members, such as health fairs and newcomers orientations. In this context, they described their efforts to coordinate services and programs around specific needs (i.e., support to new mothers, and coordination on suicide and substance abuse prevention efforts).

Some bases seemed more advanced in efforts to promote coordination among agencies. As one respondent noted: *"Here program directors have a lot of contact, so there is more sharing of resources, and correspondingly more programs can be offered."* This level of coordination and sharing was not the norm across the study bases.

Unit Leaders

The unit commander and the first sergeant were seen as central to helping build and sustain connections among unit members and their families.

"The first sergeant is critical!"

"The leader sets the tone. If they personally get involved, it works!"

The most frequent comments about the role of unit leaders in fostering community connections were descriptions of unit leaders' personal involvement in both unit and community activities.

"They are present and involved in a personal way."

"If leaders attend, it encourages others to attend."

A variety of unit-based informational and social activities were described: orientations for new unit members, pre-deployment briefings, award ceremonies, unit picnics, and holiday social functions.

Comments generally suggested the need for agencies to work more closely with units and stressed the importance of agency coordination and resource sharing with each other.



The unit commander and the first sergeant were seen as central to helping build and sustain connections among unit members and their families.



Respondents saw having a rich assortment of unit activities and frequent opportunities for social interaction (including family events) as positive.

Typically, the language used by unit leaders was a language of the unit as a family.

Respondents had a number of comments about the role of base leaders in helping people get connected with one another. As one respondent expressed it: "They give the blessing, they set the tone."

Respondents saw having a rich assortment of unit activities and frequent opportunities for social interaction (including family events) as positive. A unit commander commented: *"It is important to build a unit identity; I want people to identify with the squadron."*

Typically, the language used by unit leaders was a language of *the unit as a family*.

There was a recognition that many spouses of unit commanders are employed and are not as available (and in some cases not as interested) to fill the traditional role of leading the unit's family support efforts.

There were some negative comments about *"mandatory"* unit social events. One respondent noted, *"This typically reflects (and sometimes results in) low morale in the unit."*

A number of enlisted respondents stressed the need for commanders to respect and protect personal time.

"It is hard to be involved in either unit or community activities when you feel you have no free time."

"Commanders have to be careful not to force people to get together. Some people want a separation of work and family; the AF has changed."

Base Leaders

Respondents had a number of comments about the role of base leaders in helping people get connected with one another. As one respondent expressed it: *"They give the blessing, they set the tone."*

Like unit leaders, successful base leaders were described as personally involved.

Overall, many base initiatives were mentioned, with specific praise for many base leaders. A unit commander commented:

"The Vice Wing is very visible and puts into practice what he says."

"The support guys are doing a good job."

"The leadership is accessible."

Many respondents talked about the value of town meetings and similar base-sponsored gatherings that seemed to empower members.

Negative comments centered on *"unrealistic expectations,"* especially *"doing too much with too little,"* and *"unrealistic time constraints."* Most saw this as a larger AF problem, not just a problem at their base.

At a few locations, respondents felt that leaders could be more visible and involved in community programs, taking a more personal interest in people.

Respondents made similar comments about ways that base leaders could promote connections. *"Attending functions," "being present,"* and *"getting out and talking with people"* were at the top of most lists.



A number of military respondents pointed out that base leadership might provide support for community initiatives but they don't lead the effort. Still, these same respondents stressed that command attitude makes a difference: *"Building connections still must occur at the unit level."*

Air Force Leaders

Respondents suggested how AF leaders might foster connections:

*"Trying to reduce the deployment frequency."
"Adequately financing family and community programs."
"Helping stem the trend of privatization of services."*

Many respondents (service members, family members, and agency representatives) viewed senior AF leaders as having primary responsibility for buffering the units and families from unrealistic demands. Most seemed to feel that success at this task is critical to the AF's future ability to attract and retain quality people.

Additional Observations on Community

Members of the research team made a number of additional observations grounded in visits to base facilities, tours through the local civilian communities surrounding the installations, as well as from comments from respondents.

While the "instinct of community" is present in AF communities, especially in situations of adversity and positive challenge, many AF members and families perceive a decline in the military norm of "taking care of our own," and an attitudinal and behavioral shift toward individual identity, autonomy, and self-reliance.

Many family members have few concrete ties to the AF community that distinguish them from their civilian counterparts. They live off the base, shop at local supermarkets, secure their medical care from civilian doctors, use recreational outlets in the civilian community, and participate more in local community events and activities than in base events and activities. Respondents, even senior officers, often described the AF as a job. In many cases, they wanted little to do with the AF in their free time.

Privatization and outsourcing may have economic benefits for the AF, but respondents worry that these cost-saving actions may diminish an individual's or family's identification with the AF as an institution and a way of life.

All subgroups view identification with the AF as critical in recruiting, sustaining, and retaining members and their families.

Significant variations are present in the functioning of formal and informal networks across bases. This variability seems to be due to the primary mission of the base, remoteness of the base, the degree of collaboration across human service agencies, and the role of leadership in modeling connections.

Many respondents (service members, family members, and agency representatives) viewed senior AF leaders as having primary responsibility for buffering the units and families from unrealistic demands.

Many AF members and families perceive a decline in the military norm of "taking care of our own."

Many family members have few concrete ties to the AF community that distinguish them from their civilian counterparts.



Considerable untapped opportunities are present for base agencies to build informal networks.

The AF Integrated Delivery System (IDS) is showing promise as a mechanism for facilitating greater interagency collaboration.

Community-centered initiatives in the AF that are designed to strengthen community connections and to foster a greater sense of community have greater potential than has been achieved to date.

Few human service providers focus on building informal networks as a program result.

Even though data are available from many base agencies to monitor community functioning and the well being of members and families, these data are not used in any systematic way to inform and evaluate community initiatives.

Great variation is present from base to base, and even within bases, in how much human service providers and unit leadership interact and collaborate.

Considerable untapped opportunities are present for base agencies to build informal networks. Yet base agencies more often look at AF members and families as needing services than as possessing assets and strengths that they can use to support one another and as cornerstones for building community capacity.

The AF Integrated Delivery System (IDS) is showing promise as a mechanism for facilitating greater interagency collaboration. Regular meetings were being held at some of the bases visited and members were distinguishing their efforts from the work of other coordinating bodies, such as the Community Action and Information Board (CAIB). The work of the IDS is facilitated in situations in which agency representatives work from a results perspective rather than an activity perspective.

More attention needs to be given by agencies in the human services network to developing partnerships and micro-collaborations around specific issues and needs in the base community.

Community-centered initiatives in the AF that are designed to strengthen community connections and to foster a greater sense of community have greater potential than has been achieved to date.



Conclusions: Future Directions

Communities in Blue for the 21st Century provides a glimpse into the nature of community life in the United States Air Force. A model of community capacity has been advanced that focuses on how formal networks (community agencies and unit leaders) can work independently and collectively to strengthen informal connections. The aim is to increase community capacity and a sense of community among members and families. This model and the findings from site visits to nine AF bases provide an anchor for informing prevention efforts at the community level.

A community-centered approach to prevention services diverges somewhat from the remedial, highly specialized, psychoeducational approach that has dominated human services in the AF. According to this more traditional approach, the problems members and families experience in adapting to military life arise more from deficits they bring to the situation than from deficiencies in the situation itself. Interventions are directed primarily at correcting these individual and family deficits.

As an alternative, a community-centered approach is grounded in a strengths and assets perspective. Actions that are consistent with this approach attempt to promote members' and families' successful adaptation to military life by focusing on both asset development and risk reduction, and by increasing the informal connections members and families have with one another. A community-centered approach focuses on development of the community as a whole rather than one that gives only select groups attention, the mobilization of resources from all sectors of the community, and action on issues taken as a community collective. In short, interventions include advocacy and social change, citizen participation, community development, resource mobilization, and collective action.

The Role of Unit Leaders as Community Builders

A consistent theme in the research findings is the importance of unit leaders as community builders. The unit is the primary basis for one's sense of community in the AF--a conduit by which members and families establish connections with one another and gain access to agency-based services and programs. Installation leaders play a key role in setting the tone for the culture of support that develops in units. Agency personnel interested in promoting the sense of community in the AF are encouraged to collaborate in strengthening their partnerships with unit leaders. Unit leaders are encouraged to fully recognize the pivotal role they play in promoting community life, which is a role that goes well beyond the boundaries of the workplace. The unit is positioned to be a powerful ally for both community agencies and for people themselves to further community connections.

The Uniqueness of Air Force Communities

An additional theme seems to involve the uniqueness of community in the AF. The AF is comprised of many communities, and people have varying experiences with being connected to other AF members and families. Consequently, human service providers and leadership alike must focus their efforts to account for the special character of their community. From both a prevention and intervention perspective, boilerplate approaches to enhancing community will be less than adequate, as well as approaches

This model and the findings from site visits to nine AF bases provide an anchor for informing prevention efforts at the community level.

A community-centered approach focuses on development of the community as a whole rather than one that gives only select groups attention, the mobilization of resources from all sectors of the community, and action on issues taken as a community collective.

A consistent theme in the research findings is the importance of unit leaders as community builders.



Boilerplate approaches to enhancing community will be less than adequate, as well as approaches that fail to build collaborative and integrative partnerships between formal and informal networks.

A sense of "not enough hours in a day" poses a great challenge for enhancing community in an era where many people feel that they just do not have the luxury of time.

The task for formal and informal networks alike at the base level is to seek ways to deepen the sense and practice of community so that community is felt and valued in times other than crisis.

that fail to build collaborative and integrative partnerships between formal and informal networks. Approaches are required that reflect the variation within and across installations, including differences found in local civilian communities.

The Pace of Life

A sense of "not enough hours in a day" poses a great challenge for enhancing community in an era where many people feel that they just do not have the luxury of time. In today's downsized military, the demands of work may undermine community because of the perception that more is expected of members. Their interest in making community connections may be compromised by the amount of effort required at the workplace. The spouses of married members may feel a sense of reluctance to embrace the notion of community because the demands on members spill over to influence family roles and dynamics. In cases where the member is frequently deployed, these spouses may function essentially as single parents. Like their member spouses, they too may feel that community is a luxury rather than something that is a building block for quality of life.

Formal networks must be more intentional about fostering community, as well as more committed to creating favorable opportunities for the development of community. Discussions on enhancing a sense of community must account for the realities of a fast-paced life.

The Status of Community Life in the Air Force

Is community alive and well in the AF? The findings from this study clearly indicate that AF members and families have confidence that community members would come together in a time of crisis. Less clear is how well they would pull together and pull off a response to issues that are more a part of everyday life. Only about two-thirds of respondents felt that it was easy for members and families to make connections with other members and families. Just half viewed members as active in community events and activities; fewer than one-third saw family members as active in community events and activities. Finally, respondents were as likely to rate the sense of community at their base as weak as they were to rate it as very strong. The task for formal and informal networks alike at the base level is to seek ways to deepen the sense and practice of community so that community is felt and valued in times other than crisis.

Deficits in community capacity and a sense of community at a base level are not likely to have the same consequences for all members and families. The groups that are most vulnerable to community deficits are those who have the greatest challenges in connecting with other members and families. In the present study, junior enlisted members expressed the most concern about the ability of members and families to establish connections in their communities. Community building efforts may need to be targeted to units and neighborhoods with high concentrations of junior enlisted personnel. The civilian spouses and children of junior enlisted members who are isolated in civilian communities away from the base community may require special outreach efforts by unit leaders and agency representatives to draw them into the life of the base community.



Next Steps

The findings from the site visits reported here will hopefully stimulate discussion among military and civilian leaders and generate further interest in developing community-level prevention efforts. Additional conversations are needed to address how formal networks can help strengthen informal connections among AF members and their families. In general, the informal community remains an untapped resource for many AF communities.

A beginning framework for this discussion should include identifying how strongly people feel about being part of the AF community, discerning the formal and informal network assets in the base community that could be directed toward bringing people together, specifying the community results that are desired, elaborating the local facilitating factors and barriers that effect community, and developing an action plan for enhancing community capacity. As the discussion and framework are clarified, the next step in the process may be to expand data collection efforts to include a representative sample of AF members and civilian spouses for identifying for whom and under what circumstances community connections are most critical. Sustaining healthy, well functioning AF members and families in a 21st-century military requires a strong and resilient community support system.

Sustaining healthy, well functioning AF members and families in a 21st-century military requires a strong and resilient community support system.



Appendix: Methodology

Source of Data

Nine AF bases in the continental United States were purposively selected to participate in the study. These bases were selected in consultation with program staff in the AF Family Advocacy Division. Selection criteria included mission, size, location, major command, operation of family advocacy prevention efforts, and levels of family adaptation as reported by active duty members in the 1997-1998 AF Needs Assessment. Given the exploratory nature of this study, special attention was given to ensuring variation in the targeted bases. The Family Advocacy Office at each installation served as the point of contact for each site visit and had responsibility for recruiting respondents and for scheduling interviews and focus groups.

Respondents

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with a broad range of respondents at each base. Although the number of interviews varied across installations, project staff attempted to interview all chiefs or directors of agencies who are members of the Integrated Delivery System (IDS). In addition, interviews were conducted with a sample of squadron commanders, first sergeants, active duty officers and enlisted members, and civilian spouses of active duty members. At some bases, interviews also were conducted with wing and support group commanders.

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of respondents were active duty members. More than half (52%) of these active duty members were officers; only 15% were junior enlisted members. Most respondents were married (84%) and lived off base (60%). Approximately one-third (34%) had lived in the community for more than three years.

Data Collection

Site visits were conducted during the months of March, April and May of 1999. A site visit team of two project members conducted interviews and focus groups for two and one-half days at each sample base. A community capacity interview guide provided structure and consistency in interviews and focus groups across bases. This interview guide was organized around the three central concepts in the community capacity model: sense of community, community capacity, and formal and informal networks. Interviews and focus groups were scheduled for one hour.

Respondents completed a six-item community capacity rating form that was collected at the end of the interview or focus group. On this same rating form, respondents provided some demographic information about themselves, including gender, marital status, length of residence in the community, current association with the military, location of residence, and pay grade for active duty and for the civilian spouses of active duty. This information was collected anonymously from respondents; no identification codes were used.

Sample Profile: Bases

Base	% of Sample (N = 433)
Cannon (NM)	09% (41)
Charleston (SC)	16% (68)
Dyess (TX)	13% (55)
Eglin (FL)	05% (22)
Fairchild (WA)	12% (51)
McChord (WA)	11% (48)
Mountain Home (ID)	05% (20)
Travis (CA)	13% (57)
Tyndall (FL)	16% (71)

Sample Profile: Respondents

Respondent Group	
Active duty	74%
Civilian employee	09%
Civilian spouse	17%

Pay Grade: Active Duty

E1 - E5	15%
E6 - E9	33%
O1 - O3	25%
O4 - O6	27%

Residence Location

On base	40%
Off base	60%

Gender

Male	59%
Female	41%

Marital Status

Married	84%
Previously married	09%
Never married	07%

Time in Community

1 year or less	36%
2 or 3 years	30%
More than 3 years	34%



Site visit teams were instructed to learn as much as possible about the base and surrounding civilian community during their visit. Consequently--where and when possible--site teams visited base facilities, toured the flight line, drove through housing areas, read local newspapers, visited adjacent towns and areas near the base community, and attended community events to get a feel for the community.

Analysis

Quantitative Analysis: The six-item community capacity rating form was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies were run on all variables, including the demographic profile characteristics of respondents. After receiving input from the study's sponsor, the ten-point rating scales were divided into four ordinal categories for analysis. Although value labels differed by item, ratings between 1 and 4 were assigned a low; ratings of 5 and 6 were assigned a moderate or neutral; ratings of 7 and 8 were assigned a high; and ratings of 9 and 10 were assigned a very high. Treating the center ratings (5 and 6) as moderate or neutral prevents overstating findings as either negative or positive. Crosstabulations were run between each four-category rating scale and four demographic variables: respondent group (active duty, employee, civilian spouse), pay grade for active duty members (E1-E5, E6-E9, O1-O3, O4-O6), time in community (1 year or less, 2 or 3 years, more than 3 years), and location of residence (on base, off base). Because of sample size limitations at some bases and the nonrandom nature of sample selection, results are not presented by base. As a general rule, differences between groups of less than 10 percent should be interpreted cautiously.

Qualitative Analysis: Site visit teams recorded individual interview comments and summary information from focus group sessions. Two one-day meetings among team members in which observations and experiences during the site visits were shared preceded the analysis of the interview and focus group data. This was an important process since site visit teams involved a number of different individuals. The interview data were subsequently coded and analyzed using qualitative software to identify major themes and frequency information for each question. A subject matter expert reviewed the resulting summary data for each question to identify statements and quotes that best seemed to corroborate important quantitative findings.

The six-item community capacity rating form was analyzed using descriptive statistics.



Site visit teams recorded individual interview comments and summary information from focus group sessions.



About the Authors⁴

Gary L. Bowen, Ph.D., ACSW, is Kenan Distinguished Professor in the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He also holds a joint appointment in the Department of Communication Studies. Dr. Bowen is co-author of the *Families in Blue* series that led to the development of Family Support Centers in the U.S. Air Force.

James A. Martin, Ph.D., BCD, is Associate Professor of Social Work and Social Research at Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. A retired Colonel in the Army Medical Department, Dr. Martin's military career includes a variety of clinical, research, and policy assignments.

Jay A. Mancini, Ph.D. is Professor of Human Development at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg and Falls Church, Virginia. He is also a Human Development Extension Specialist with the Virginia Cooperative Extension. Dr. Mancini has consulted the Air Force on its family support and recreation programs, and the U.S. Army on its family advocacy and Army Community Center programs.

⁴The authors served as consultants to Caliber Associates in the design and execution of the research and in the writing of the report.



Acknowledgments

This report represents the contributions of many people whose insights and efforts contributed to the development of the community capacity model and to the design and execution of the study that examined the core concepts that anchor the model. In particular, the authors wish to thank Colonel John Nelson, Chief, Family Advocacy Division, and Lieutenant Colonel Carla Monroe-Posey, Director of Research, Family Advocacy Division, for their ideas regarding the concept of community resilience that framed early discussions of the community capacity model. Colonel Nelson and Lieutenant Colonel Monroe-Posey provided input and critique throughout this project that significantly improved the quality of the research and the presentation of the findings. In addition, the authors were assisted in all aspects of the study by a capable research team from Caliber Associates: Dr. Barbara Rudin, who served as Project Director, Dr. David Wolpert, Dr. Heather Clawson, Ms. Deborah Levin, Mr. Dave Thomas, Ms. Patricia Hiesener, and Ms. Kathleen Coolbaugh. The contributions of Dr. David Wolpert to the analysis of the qualitative data and to the editing of earlier drafts of the report are noted in particular.

Appreciation is expressed to members of the Family Advocacy Division Research Advisory Group who consulted with the senior author in a two-day meeting in January 1998 to explore community concepts that could be used as potential organizing themes for informing prevention efforts in the U.S. Air Force: Colonel John Nelson, Lieutenant Colonel Carla Monroe-Posey, Mr. Les Besetsny, Ms. Martha Salas, Ms. Betty Williams, Dr. Joel Milner, Colonel Bill Black, Colonel Alice Tarpley, Colonel Bill Mollerstrom, Lieutenant Colonel Jeff Paddock, Lieutenant Colonel Wayne Talcott, and Major Dari Tritt. Thanks are also offered to other Air Force and civilian sector researchers who participated in a workshop at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in February 1998 to develop a research agenda for informing community practice: Lieutenant Colonel James Dixon, Lieutenant Colonel Warren Drew, Lieutenant Colonel James Fraser, Dr. Beverly Schmalzried, Ms. Barbara Murray, Dr. Dennis Orthner, Dr. Jesse Harris, Dr. Joe Pittman, Dr. Sandi Stith, Ms. Kathleen Coolbaugh, Dr. Marie Weil, Dr. Steve Walsh, and Dr. Natasha Bowen. Chaired by the senior author, the research agenda developed by workshop participants greatly informed the research design used in the present investigation. In addition, support from the Family Matters Office, Air Mobility Command (AMC), is acknowledged. Ms. CeCe Medford, Chief, and the directors of Family Support Centers in AMC have field tested many of the concepts from the community capacity model over the past year and worked with the senior author in developing strategies for monitoring community functioning at the base level.

The authors are most appreciative of the cooperation that they received from the base points of contact that recruited respondents for the interviews and focus groups. The authors also wish to acknowledge the respondents who participated in the interviews and the focus groups at the sample bases. Their views and insights are the cornerstones of this report, and we sincerely appreciate their willingness to participate.

