

## Families in good hands (Video interview)

Written by AG

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**Through national or multinational channels? From a friend of the family? There are different ways the assistance can reach a family of the deployed serviceman of the Multinational Corps Northeast (MNC NE). One idea joins all of them: to be as helpful as possible.**

### **Multinational assistance**

The Family Care Centre is all about assisting the families of those servicemen who have gone for a six-month mission in Afghanistan. The Centre was launched already in November 2009 to establish necessary contacts to the families and prepare a detailed programme of activities. It is not a brand new element within the Headquarters' structure: a similar centre was created for families during the Corps' last deployment to Afghanistan in 2007. The need to provide assistance has not changed, though.

The Family Care Centre offers assistance in solving everyday problems, like a car breakdown or failure in the power supply; it employs nannies to take care of the children and provides pastoral care or psychologist's attention. Moreover, it activates the families through common events, such as monthly brunches or trips. *'We have a nice playground for children, a little coffee corner for ladies and an internet café where the ladies can get in contact with their husbands on a mission,'* adds Lieutenant Colonel Siegmund Plonka,

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Chairman of the Family Care Centre. If needed, the Centre can operate 24 hours 7 days a week. Since each family has to give a green light to the Centre and simply sign in, Lieutenant Colonel Plonka appeals:

□□□□ *'Dear families, join us as often as you can, come to us, visit us and be a part of it.'*

### **A friend in need is a friend in deed**

The Family Care Centre provides patronage for two programmes: 'the trusted friend' and 'the absence from home quarters.' As Lieutenant Colonel Plonka explained, each woman can provide names of trusted friends who, in case of emergency, are authorized to, for instance, pick up her children from school. The second programme ensures attention over flats or houses in case of longer absence of household members.

### **National assistance**

The Family Care Centre is in fact only one of the pillars of the overall assistance offered to families of the deployed personnel. A great deal of support is provided by the National Support Elements and Senior National Officers. Effective means of supporting families, especially those coming from other than Poland countries and living in Poland, had been developed long before the mission in Afghanistan started and would be continued throughout the deployment time, too.

It also needs to be underlined that each nation has its own regulations to follow in terms of supporting the families. A respective Senior National Officer takes the overall responsibility for the families living in Szczecin, and, in case of emergency, the final word always belongs to him.

*'The Family Care Centre is a multinational instrument in our Headquarters and we will not step into the responsibilities of the National Support Elements or the National Senior Officers,'* Lieutenant Colonel Plonka clearly states. Consequently, the Family Care Centre serves as a link among the families, Senior National Officers and National Support Elements.

*'The families can choose the way over us or with us, and we are here to support them,'* Colonel Plonka stresses.

An additional element of the whole jigsaw is the Operations Centre, which facilitates the flow of information among the servicemen in Kabul, Szczecin and the families.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-BA7-agYvl>