



**SPECIAL NEEDS RESOURCE PROJECT**

*e-newsletter*

# Things to Think About!



By Brandan Atkin

Military members are able to keep up with the rapid changes being made to the TriCare program via newsletters, bulletins, announcements, new handbook editions, etc. as changes are made and published via the TriCare website:

<http://www.tricare.mil/tricaresmart/default.aspx>

If there is anything that is not discussed in our newsletters and you would like to see it discussed, or you would like to be added to our newsletter mailing list, please contact us at [snrproject@hotmail.com](mailto:snrproject@hotmail.com)

## Special Needs Family Readiness for National Guard and Reserve Part I

By Linda Jorgensen

I enlisted in the Utah Army National Guard in 1979. Five years later I married my husband, also a Utah Army National Guard member. He retired last year after 33 years of active National Guard and Reserve service. We have 4 children, one of whom has chronic medical needs and is considered a high acuity special needs child. Over the years we have gained a great deal of personal experience with regards to family readiness and preparedness as required by our military status and the continuing medical needs of our daughter. We have learned a great many lessons first hand in navigation of military regulations and requirements while keeping disruptions to medical services, civilian assistance programs, and our general family life to a minimum while one (or both) parents are serving on active duty orders.

Our family goal has always been to ensure that military service required by either parent will not have a negative impact on daily family life. Our family readiness goals and skills have kept activation and mobilization stress and disruptions to a minimum. We work hard to keep family routines, medical services and other benefits uninterrupted. A mobilization which may, or may not, put our family member in harm's way is NOT the time to be changing up a medical care routine due to insurance changes to TriCare, adjusting services received through various civilian assistance programs or anything else, for that matter.

Over the last 31 years we have learned some very specific lessons.

### Preparing For Mobilization and Deployments

National Guard and Reserve families with special needs dependents have the ability and direct responsibility to access all civilian supports within their local community *BEFORE* a deployment or mobility mission arrives for their military family member. Since most Guard/Reserve families do not frequently change their place of residence or duty station they have a leg up on their Active Duty counterparts. National Guard and Reserve families are able to obtain and maintain placement in civilian programs, access civilian organizations specific to their unique family needs, build neighborhood social networks and supports, access local medical care provided by specialized physicians and facilities of their choosing and maintain continuity of that care while still

able to perform their assigned military mission. Families are able to do this **ONLY** if the Military does not interfere with civilian eligibility requirements by attempting to enroll individuals in military assistance programs that will not be readily available.

Activation for deployments should be a seamless process with no loss of benefit to the military member or their dependents. In many cases activation allows families who may be on a waiting list to move up to receiving services or to **INCREASE** the amount of respite time and other services already received. Generally this simply involves providing a copy of the military order to your case worker.

De-activation should also be a seamless process with little change or disruption to services received from organizations within local communities. This includes existing employer provided medical insurance programs.

#### **Four Basic Programs Every Special Needs Family Should Know About**

- 1. Social Security Income (SSI).** Every special needs individual should apply for SSI and then update their status with the Social Security office whenever a mobilization occurs. Why? Individuals may be medically qualified for SSI but **NOT** qualified financially during civilian down time but that circumstance may change with a military call out and a possible decrease in family income. Individuals can also use that documentation to apply for other programs in the civilian sector as well. **EVERY** special needs individual should apply for SSI benefits and keep that application updated, regardless of status.
- 2. Medicaid or a Medicaid Waiver.** Medicaid programs directly impact the ability of families to obtain medical services for disabled dependents. If your family does not qualify for traditional Medicaid programs contact your state's Health and Human Services Department and apply for a waiver sighting medical necessity. Again, this will allow for application and acceptance for other assistance programs in your community.

- 3. Department of Services for People with Disabilities or Disability Services.** Every state has a specific title for this agency within their Health and Human Services Department but this is the most important agency to apply to. This is the place to apply for services, get on waiting lists and receive a case manager assignment. These case managers will be able to assist you in obtaining an increase in services (if you are already receiving them), apply for additional services should you need them and help you find other appropriate programs and supports within your community.

- 4. Find a Disability Specific Organization**  
This can be one of the most valuable resources you have. Networking with other families and individuals with the same problems and difficulties will not only allow you to access other services in your community but provide morale and family support. Find the association appropriate for you. If you have an autistic family member find your local State Autism Association chapter. United Cerebral Palsy, Easter Seals, The United Way are all excellent places to start. These organizations can often help you find services when others cannot.

Need to know where to get started in your state? Are you on Active Duty and looking to PCS? SNRP has recently added a new resource feature specifically for military families. Simply click on [Resource Links](#), go to your state and at the top of the Resource list is a [Military Quick Links \(National Guard, Reserve and Active Duty\)](#) section for your state. Go to the same links and make some phone calls. Find out what services are available in the areas you are looking to relocate. Ask about waiting lists, services available and medical facilities in your area. These are the priority agencies and organizations every family should contact first.