



Things to Think About!



By Brandan Atkin

Recommended Reading:

The National Center for Learning Disabilities, Inc. Special Education Laws and Rights for the Military Child
<http://www.nclld.org/at-school/your-childs-rights/advocacy-self-advocacy/special-education-laws-and-rights-for-the-military-child>

Military Child education Coalition
<http://www.militarychild.org/education-resource-center/>

Military Community & Family Policy Office of Special Needs Education Directory for Children with Special Needs

(Currently includes information related to children with Autism Spectrum Disorders)

http://apps.mhf.dod.mil/pls/psgprod/f?p=EFMP_DIRECTORY:HOME:0:::EK:MT:19.10.10.0.0.0.0.0

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Permanent Change of Station (PCS) Moves:

Finding Civilian Services

By Linda Jorgensen

Military families face many unique challenges. One of the most common is a Permanent Change of Station (PCS) move. Frequent relocations every few years are the norm for any active duty military family. These moves can be challenging for anyone but even more so for families with a special needs family member.

New emphasis on using available local civilian social services programs when possible creates a whole different dimension to a special needs family PCS. Along with a myriad of other chores required by such a move, parents are now faced with finding locations which also have available needed social services within nearby civilian communities. Knowing what programs and services are available and making the best, educated decision about where to relocate helps maintain continuity with special needs programs when possible. But this can also be the service members' biggest headache as not all communities have civilian services available.

Finding the Community Services You Need

Once a short list of possible duty stations is presented it is important to get right to work. Finding services available near the bases on that short list will be vital in not only making a final decision but in obtaining required special needs services in a timely manner once a family arrives on station. Not every state and community is the same and it is important to find needed services within a reasonable distance of your new location. It's time to get on the phone and find out which state has what programs available and where they are located in relation to the base.

State Services

One of the first programs to contact is the State Health and Human Services Department in the new state. Be sure to ask the following:

1. Is there a waiting list for state Medicaid Waiver programs and if so, how long is the wait? Can we apply?
2. Which government agency provides or oversees services for the disabled in this state?
3. Is my child eligible for services? Can we apply?
4. My child has been diagnosed with _____. What is the best local organization to contact for further information?

Expect that waiting lists for government services will be long and not all states will have programs available to you and your dependent. The majority of programs are not transferable between states and must be applied for once a family has taken up residency in their new location. For example, families moving to Utah who are utilizing a Medicaid Waiver program in their current state must reapply for that program upon arrival in Utah. As of this writing the Medicaid Waiver waiting list in Utah is 3 years long. Unfortunately many military families are PCSing out of the state of Utah before they get anywhere near the top of the wait list and will not be able to utilize the program while they are here.

Don't know where to start? Go to [SNRPs Resource Links](#), click on the state you need and find the Military Quick Links. This section provided at the top of each state list is the short list of needed contact resources for Health and Human Services programs in that state. We recommend you start your search there.

School Districts and Special Education Programs

A PCS move can be an excellent opportunity to improve your child's Individual Education Plan (IEP). Do a review of your child's current school program and IEP goals. Identify what works, what isn't working and any changes that you, the parent, think could be made to improve your child's education. Be sure to write these down as you'll need this information when talking to prospective new schools.

One you've reviewed the situation write down questions you'd like to ask and information you want to be sure and get. Be sure to document your phone calls. Document the date, time, person to whom you spoke, and their contact information. You will most likely need to call more than once. For phone call notes I use the Call Form in SNRPs form section found here:

<http://www.snrproject.com/forms.html>

Once you've reviewed your child's IEP, have your questions written down and call forms ready it is time to begin making your phone calls. One of your first base contacts should be the Educational Liaison for the base. These individuals should have information regarding the various school districts serving the base population. Finding a school district is most important as there may be several available, depending on the size and population of the base, and the communities it serves. Should your family need housing off base you'll need to relocate within the right school district boundaries.

When contacting new school districts it is important for parents to avoid becoming overly frustrated or emotional. By keeping the conversation positive, asking questions and requesting assistance you'll be able to obtain much needed information from school district staff. Knowing that information beforehand will assist you

in locating to housing areas you'll need to be in.

Housing ~ On Base or Off?

Many US military bases provide at least a small number of houses which should meet ADA accessibility standards on base. However, each base has a limited number of these homes available with many having a lengthy wait list. It is not unusual for military families to maintain placement on a wait list for housing only to PCS before housing becomes available for them. If your family member uses a mobility aid such as a wheelchair or a walker, you need a ramp or other accommodations made to your home and base housing is not readily available, consider a move outside the base to a nearby civilian community. Such a move will allow military families to immediately utilize community accessible technology and housing programs. Independent Living and Assistive Technology Programs, which would not be readily available on a military base due to specific restrictions placed on military base access and military housing programs, are readily available in the civilian community. My suggestion? Move off base to a nearby civilian community where these programs are readily accessible.

Civilian Medical Services

Military families with medically fragile special needs children will also want to find specialized civilian medical services near their newly assigned military installation. It is important for services members to understand that while US Military Medical Facilities do provide medical care for spouses and dependents they have a very specific mission which is to preserve the US military fighting force. That means these medical facilities, while trying their best, are not set up to care for special needs military dependents. Military medical personnel are subject to the same training (TDY), deployment and transfer/PCS standards and requirements as all other members of the US Military. Speaking from over 30 years of personal military medical experience both as a military care provider and the parent of a dependent with special needs, continuity of care with proper specialized staff at a military medical facility is difficult to maintain for any length of time. Most often the best special needs care is received off base in the civilian community. If you need care requiring more than the occasional well-child check or sick call visit for a minor illness or injury be sure to find out what medical facilities are in the nearby community before you move.

Moving is never a simple process but working closely with military installation personnel, education liaisons and civilian program administrators, military families will gain valuable information that will help make the transition to a new location a bit easier.