

Army Offers Multiple Centers That Ensure Personal Readiness

By Antonieta Rico, Directorate of Prevention, Resilience and Readiness

What makes strong Soldiers who can meet the demands of combat? Traditionally, strength has been equated to physical fitness only, but over time the Army's understanding of what it means to be a strong Soldier has evolved. This has created a greater recognition of mental, emotional and relational well-being as significant components of Soldier strength, while still maintaining a focus on physical fitness. With this comprehensive understanding in mind, the Army has multiple facilities on installations that work collaboratively and are dedicated to strengthening the whole Soldier.

Through the combined use of three assets—the R2 Performance Centers, the Armed Forces Wellness Centers and the Holistic Health and Fitness Soldier Performance Readiness Centers—Soldiers and units have similar capabilities on hand as big college Division 1 athletic teams, said Carlos Medina, a Master Resilience Trainer-Performance Expert with the R2 Performance Center at Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Virginia.

Division 1 athletics department staff can include athletic trainers, team physicians, nutritionists, sports performance specialists, mental health specialists and even academic support services.

Similarly, the R2PCs, AFWCs, and H2F SPRCs offer units and individual Soldiers the staff, equipment and training to build each aspect of Soldier strength and, combined, ensure Soldiers are ready—and stay ready—for combat.

“It allows (a) Soldier to have all of the necessary resources to be as great as they can be, or be as prepared as they can be, for their jobs, for combat, for any situation that they're in,” Medina said.

Dr. Michael Jarka, Program Manager, Armed Forces Wellness Centers, said he sees each center as filling different needs at different stages of Soldier well-being, creating and sustaining “a seamless support network” for the Soldier that improves readiness for the Army.

“We all have an equal part to play in that continuum of lethality,” Jarka said.

BUILDING STRONG SOLDIERS

R2 Performance Centers

The skills taught at the R2PCs were first fielded by the Army in 2009 to [build resilience in Soldiers and the Army community amid the strain caused by the high operational tempo of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars](#). Working to strengthen Soldiers' Five Dimensions of Personal Readiness and Resilience—[physical, emotional, social, spiritual and Family](#)—R2PCs continue the core mission of building resilience and improving performance, along with building team cohesion. The centers are staffed by Master Resilience Trainer-Performance Experts, who are certified MRTs and additionally have degrees in sports psychology or a similar field.

Besides teaching Soldiers the six core resilience competencies—[self-awareness, self-regulation, optimism, mental agility, strengths of character and connection](#)—MRT-PEs help improve Soldier

performance by training the [mental aspect involved in the physical, technical and tactical components](#) of a Soldier's job. They can work with NCOs on how to conduct better counseling sessions with their Soldiers, help squad leaders build team cohesion, and even go to the field or the range with a unit to coach performance skills and improve Soldier marksmanship.

"We teach our performance curriculum to Soldiers to help either take their game—from a mental perspective—to the next level, or if they're already doing well and are succeeding in their careers to enhance their performance," Medina said.

R2PCs also emphasize helping the Army community build strong, supportive relationships that create strong, resilient Soldiers. In an American Psychologist article "The Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program: Family Skills Component," noted relationship experts, Drs. John and Julie Gottman, from the Gottman Relationship Institute, wrote about how relationship stressors have a negative impact on Soldier mental health which affects their performance when deployed. The staff at R2PCs build the social and Family dimensions of Soldier strength, and can teach communication skills—some based on the Gottman's research, like [responding to bids for connection](#) or [avoiding the "the four horsemen of the apocalypse"](#)—to strengthen a Soldier's relationships with their spouse, children, Family or friends.

Family members and Army Civilians can also use the services of the R2PCs.

Armed Forces Wellness Centers (formerly Army Wellness Centers)

Initially created as the Army Wellness Centers under the auspices of the Army Public Health Center, the AWCs were the community arm of military treatment facilities, Jarka said.

Now part of the Defense Health Agency—Public Health, and rebranded as Armed Forces Wellness Centers, these facilities are not only open to Soldiers, but also service members from other military branches, as well as Family members, Army and DOD Civilians and retirees.

Soldiers who are at risk health-wise would benefit the most from the services offered by the AFWCs, Jarka said.

"We're not looking for the super Soldier," he said. "We want to help people who are struggling, we want to help those who are at critical points in their health and wellness journey and need an intervention."

Staffed by health educators and filled with state-of-the-art equipment, AFWCs can help Soldiers who are placed on the Army Body Composition Program, Family members who need to lose weight or Army Civilians who need to manage stress, get back to a healthier baseline.

Staff at the AFWCs have a few core approaches—health, physical fitness, nutrition, stress management and general wellness education. To assess the health and fitness status of Soldiers, AFWCs use advanced health and fitness testing technology, Jarka said. This includes equipment such as the BodPod, which can assess body fat composition with about 99% accuracy; cutting edge analyzers to measure VO₂ max; metabolic testing equipment to measure people's calorie intake and needs, and biofeedback techniques for regulating stress.

"Through these different assessments and technologies, along with health coaching, we're able to move people through their health and wellness goals towards what they need," Jarka said.

H2F Soldier Performance Readiness Centers

H2F doctrine focuses on five domains—physical, mental, spiritual, nutrition and sleep. Located within a brigade’s footprint, the H2F Soldier Performance Readiness Centers are the physical embodiment of the Holistic Health and Fitness System, said Francesca Singhas, H2F Engineer at the U.S. Army Center for Initial Military Training.

The SPRCs (pronounced “sparks”) facilities include cardio and strength training stations, along with classrooms and a staff of multiple experts—including physical and occupational therapists, athletic trainers, strength coaches, registered dietitians and cognitive performance specialists—to guide units (usually platoons or companies) through training and provide feedback to Soldiers.

“It’s NCO led, expert advised,” Singhas said. “Soldiers still lead physical training for their unit, but now they’re expertly advised by certified strength and conditioning coaches who have degrees in exercise science and are well versed in programming, especially when it comes down to Mission Essential Task List-driven unit training.”

Staff within the SPRCs can also help Soldiers who may be recovering from injury or illness, or on the Pregnancy and Postpartum Performance Training program, to identify the best routine to continue to train with their units within the parameters of their physical restrictions.

“H2F is for the Soldier,” Singhas said. “We are here to support the brigade...we consider this team like special staff to the brigade commander.”

Although currently Brigade Combat Team-centric, positive results from H2F at the BCT level means the Army is looking at expanding access to these H2F resources to all Soldiers across the Army.

Through preventive work, SPRCs can also help take some of the nonclinical load from the behavioral health system or from the other facilities, Singhas said. At different stages of Soldier wellness, the three centers can work in tandem facilitating warm hand offs depending on the stage of Soldier need.

“In the wellness space, there is more than enough work to go around,” said Jarka. “When there’s so much work to go around, you need multiple different ways of attacking certain problems.”

“We’re all here for the same purpose and that’s to enhance Soldier readiness and get them to be at the top of their game at all times,” Medina said. “We try our best to collaborate with each other and work together for the overall goal of helping Soldiers ... helping them become as prepared and ready as they can be—for their schools, for combat and all the other challenges and stressors they may have down the road,” he said.