

Ready, Set, Airlift! Ep. 14 Military and Family Readiness

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Julian Hernandez: Greetings, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to another episode of Ready, Set, Airlift, the official podcast of the ALMA Wing. I'm your host, Julian Hernandez from the Wing Public Affairs team. With the September UTA almost upon us, and that means Family Day almost upon us, we wanted to focus this month and on this episode on some of the resources available to our airmen and their families right here at the Wing, which means talking to military and family readiness.

My colleague, Master Sergeant Jacob Lewis sat down with two of the key members of military and family readiness here at the 433rd to find out a little bit more about exactly everything they have to offer for our airmen.

Master Sgt. Jacob Lewis: Hello, Alamo wing citizen airmen. Today, we have special guests from the military family readiness. I was gonna allow them to introduce themselves. We got a miss Nikki Evans over here. Hello.

Nakia Evans: Hi. So I am the financial counselor for the 433rd and also for the 9th 60th. as far as my background, I'm a military spouse.

My husband's been in for 24 years and we are army. but financially I've been doing this for over 13 years. Um, I did get a master's in finance, so this has definitely been my passion. I've been able to be. a financial counselor at pretty much every base we've been stationed at and this is our eighth base.

So you can do the math from that one. but I've been part of the 433rd for about four years now, starting in October.

Master Sgt. Jacob Lewis: Excellent. Perfect. Thank you, Ms. Evans. We also got another special guest. Would you please introduce yourself and your role here?

Leticia Gonzalez: Sure. My name is Leticia Gonzalez. I am the program manager for the military and family readiness. I started here back in, uh, 2004 and have been part of the, 433rd for, already 20 years now. prior to that though, I basically got my start, working in Misawa, Japan, Misawa Air Base. back in 2000 and, started on as a volunteer and then worked my way up. happy to be here.

Master Sgt. Jacob Lewis: Yes, thank you both so much for the invite today.

I really appreciate it. I see some of your hard work. I'm still relatively new here. I know recently you had done the donation from the Girl Scout Cookies and that. Benefited me, thank you. My PT test is coming soon, so extra thank you. No, you're perfect. Speaking of the food and all the donations, I know you have a new project rolling about, a food bank project.

Would you expand upon this, please?

Leticia Gonzalez: sure. in working with Ms. Nakia Evans, she basically does work with many of our families that are dealing with financial issues. And, come to find out one of our biggest one. It's called food insecurities. Many folks, don't let us know or just rather keep it to themselves in regards to what's happening within their homes and, in meeting with, Miss Nikki Evans as a financial counselor, she's finding more and more That need is here at the 433rd. I'd like to have her speak a little bit more about what she's seen here.

Nakia Evans: yeah, so I do a lot of private sessions for financial counseling and a lot of the things that get brought up is just not being able to afford food. Or having to choose between like an electric bill and a grocery bill or maybe something unexpected came up, like they have to pay for tires or maybe a family member passed away. so they don't necessarily have food insecurity, but it started me thinking, well, if I can help with a grocery bill, that alleviates a lot of stress for you to be able to take care of that tire or take care of that loved one that has passed away, just something to help. just because I just feel like it's a basic human right to have shelter and to have food and to have fresh, clean water. so I can't provide the shelter and I, and I can try my best with the water, but we figured the food pantry is definitely something that is needed. So once I brought it up to Miss Gonzalez and to our Commander at the time, which was

Colonel McClain. They were 100 percent on board with us starting a food pantry.

Master Sgt. Jacob Lewis: Excellent. so my understanding is that this, food pantry is going to be for the 433rd citizen airmen. Would you please explain how the food pantry works? How you go about collecting donations? How do you distribute?

Nakia Evans: Yeah, so, uh, we do have some blue bins that are located at various points around the 433rd, and will be extended over to the 960th on the Medina Air Force Base side. so we are just collecting non perishable items at the moment for that. Next to the bins, there are a list, if people are not clear what they should donate, it does give a list of some of the most wanted foods that the food bank has, provided us. but the way it's going to work is that you come on over.

We have a food pantry that's set there. It's still in the works. It doesn't start until October. but we're going to allow for at least five non perishable items to be taken per visit. or assess it by need, of course, because I, I don't want to say five and maybe there's a greater need for there. we are going to try to keep some kind of tracking for that because after the second visit, I do want to require that you do a financial counseling appointment with me.

Just so we can assess that this is going to be more of a long term need and that way I can provide you with more long term care than we can provide because this is more for, temporary assistance just to kind of get you by for the month, but definitely not to pad someone's groceries or their pantry for the rest of the year.

So, no ranks or positions will be treated differently. I do want to make that very clear that you can be a colonel or you can be. an E one. It does not matter if you're coming in for food assistance. We are going to treat everybody accordingly. and not do any kind of judgment. We want to definitely take away that stigma.

Master Sgt. Jacob Lewis: Absolutely. So I just learned something. It sounds like this program started a few wing commanders ago. for this food pantry, how many airmen do you expect this to impact? How many in the past have been affected?

Nakia Evans: so when I brought it up to miss Gonzalez, I remember she had told me that I don't know how many years ago they used to have a share and

care type of program. so that's why they were saying, Oh, this would be very helpful. We used to have something like this. And then the airmen's attic kind of came about, but they're closed on the weekends. So I'm hoping, that it's going to help at least 25 percent of the wing to be able to come and get assistance. they say that one in five families, at least military families, need some kind of food assistance. and hopefully with us taking away the stigma of food insecurity, of people not wanting to ask for help. will generate even more, assistance being there and helping airmen be mission ready. Cause I mean, you can't possibly be mission ready if you're hungry or you're worried about what your family's going to eat. so I'm hoping that we're going to see at least 25 percent utilization by the end of the year and then increase from there.

Master Sgt. Jacob Lewis: Absolutely. So I know you all are rolling out the food pantry. Soon, you're planning on rolling it out in October, is that correct?

Nakia Evans: Yes, October UTA, that is correct.

Master Sgt. Jacob Lewis: Excellent. Again, I've been here for a short while, I see some of the stuff you all are rolling out.

I know that's not the only thing you all do at the Military and Family Readiness. what are some other programs would you like to highlight or bring attention to?

Leticia Gonzalez: we are going into the holiday season and, uh, with that being said, we also have a program that's been in place since, I've been here, it's called the, Angel Tree Program, Operation Angel Tree. for this program, basically you see these other locations, we just want to make sure that our 433rd members and 960th members are taken care of as well. So, we have to start early though, because with reserve units, we basically need to get the word out come September. getting with our leadership just to make sure they're aware that they have the applications and supervisors have the applications to find those families that are having a challenging, holiday season as they approach it financially. So, come, October, we gather them, but the tree is up by, the end of October, begin going into our November drill weekend.

Is when we invite our members to come to our center to, go ahead and pull the angels off the tree and this is all, done anonymous so it's not like, families are, basically picking a boy or a girl and the age of the child. And also a wish list could also be a part of that as well, of what the child is, is hoping to receive for that, holiday.

So, come December is when we do have our wrap party, and that's when we have our, sponsors come in to pick up the toys and, take them back to the families. And in a very discreet manner, give them over to the family members. And that way they could have a great holiday season. So that's one event that we are planning as we head into the season right now.

Master Sgt. Jacob Lewis: Absolutely. Super cool. I appreciate all the support you do. I know there's lots of different opportunities and things that you all offer. How can airmen find the full range and services of the military family readiness?

Leticia Gonzalez: we market it through, a road show, so we are going out to every unit and just to make sure that we can get face to face with our, with our airmen and let them know what sort of programs that we do offer.

So out there, um, entire team is going out there, so we are doing it as a package deal and speak about all the different programs that we do offer. Along with that, you can find us, basically a lot of emails that I put out, getting together with leadership, letting them know what programs there are, putting flyers out there, and just making sure people are aware of the different programs that are here to assist our military members and families.

Master Sgt. Jacob Lewis: Absolutely. Speaking of the different programs, is there a particular one that you would assess as being underutilized?

Leticia Gonzalez: Underutilized, I would guess, the volunteer program. we basically, have opportunities for folks to, come and volunteer and also give back to the units and also to our community.

So, if anyone is ever interested in, helping out fellow airmen, do keep an eye out for just different opportunities that are out there. If it's anything to do with possibly helping with, with the food pantry, if it's anything to do with, uh, Offering a skill that they might have, such as, the reservists helping reservists.

Yes,

Nakia Evans: that one. So, the commander at the 960th, Colonel Darden, he brought up in one of our community action meetings that maybe we can establish next year a kind of a career fair type of thing. where a lot of reservists, we have a lot of nuances, they do a lot of other things and just be here as reservists.

So we want them to come in and talk about what they do as far as their career. Maybe that can jumpstart something for someone else. Talk about companies that are hiring and hiring specifically those who are reservists and wanting that. and then like Ms. Gonzalez said, having a skill, if you're good at resume writing, if you're good at car buying, if you're good at things that You do everyday life or do professionally we can have that as a resource here so we can start helping each other just like the pantry like the whole share and care program I'm thinking is a more broad thing.

It's not just the food pantry is not just donations. It's. Helping each other because, reservists are a very different type of military member and we only understand each other. So, to be able to come out and help each other in that way would definitely be a resource we would love to explore next year.

Leticia Gonzalez: We also, want to bring back a directory that we had. So we would ask folks if they themselves have their own business and market it to our members here saying, Hey, did you know that, you know, Joe next to you actually runs a, runs a shop who does auto parts. You know, or, just different businesses that are out there.

So we do have that directory. We had it going for a long time there, but then it just kind of died off. But we do want to bring that back just so that we can find out the talent that we have here on the reserve side.

Master Sgt. Jacob Lewis: Yeah. Bet the pandemic stuck a little bit. Yes.

Leticia Gonzalez: We had to restart and rejump everything after that.

Master Sgt. Jacob Lewis: so speaking of the resources and the things you offer, my understanding is. That not only are you there for the military members, but you're there for the spouses. You're there for the extended family. Would you want to expand upon that? Perhaps discuss about support during a deployment?

Leticia Gonzalez: Sure. right now we are actually just went under, a rebranding of a program that's been around for a while now. it used to be called the key spouse program. It's now called the key support program that's in place right now. And, what this program is all about is, basically finding, not just a spouse, but an individual within a squadron that really has a passion for looking after families. there's a training that entails in there thereafter, once they've been appointed by the commander, by the leadership, and, they then are there to assist as peer to peer in helping family members that are, are dealing with, a

deployment throughout the entire deployment cycle. So. Pre deployment and preparation, sustainment period, and the reintegration piece as well.

So, right now, we, don't just want to have just one individual. It could be more than one individual if it's, if it's a group of two or three who want to collaborate and work with their unit. And assisting the family members during deployment, during that cycle, we definitely welcome that within each of our squadrons.

So it's, it's a great program, just knowing that we can reach out, so, the extensions we can do by just having additional folks that are out there within the units knowing what's going on. And keeping that, communication up with the leadership as well to let them know there's issues that are going on in the home.

During a deployment cycle, if it could be something such as a. What do you call it when it's the home?

Nakia Evans: So if they need like family advocacy and support, if they need, chaplains assistance, they need mental health. I'm not sure. Homeowners associations

Leticia Gonzalez: that require them to mow the lawn and they themselves can't do that, uh, for, for whatever reason.

We've had members go out there and take care of issues such as that. When we find out what issues there are, somebody who may have a plumbing issue come to find out. CE may have somebody who's like, Hey. Let me go ahead and send somebody out there to help them. So, we basically try and help each other out, but we need to know what those issues are.

And having that key, support within the units, it gives us that information, we can go out there and help.

Master Sgt. Jacob Lewis: That's awesome. I know when I leave TDY or Go on mission for a while. That's when the car breaks down. That's when exactly everything. I get every phone call from my wife. She takes care of business.

So

Leticia Gonzalez: in San Antonio is somewhat of a military oriented type of town. There's so many resources that are out there that they basically reach out to us as well. Said, How can we help? What can we do for you? So, having those resources at our, at our fingertips, we just want to know what families

need what so that we can go ahead and make sure that we get the right resources to them.

Master Sgt. Jacob Lewis: Absolutely. Speaking of all the volunteerism, the outreach you all do, how can a member or a family person find you all, contact you all? Where are you located?

Leticia Gonzalez: Oh, sure. We're, we're located in building 909, here within the compound, the 433rd compound. we have our phone number out there, 210 925 3650.

And, definitely look out for emails when they come out about the military family resource, a lot of our programs are marketed, especially right before drill weekend, we try and get the information out there. So as people are coming in, they won't find that our emails have been buried within their, outlooks.

So, definitely keep an eye out for our information and hopefully we'll make a trip out to you guys during our road show and you can see us firsthand.

Master Sgt. Jacob Lewis: Absolutely. Perfect. Ms. Evans, Ms. Gonzalez, is there anything you want to add? Something you want to highlight more? Something I forgot.

Nakia Evans: I would like to highlight that I am having a money mindfulness workshop starting October 15th through November 5th.

It will be every Tuesday and it starts at 7 o'clock via zoom. this is going to explore both things that I love, which is financial therapy. because I am studying to be a social worker as well. So I want to explore the behaviors and the mental health, stigma behind financial anxiety. so I'm hoping this workshop, which is just a four week workshop, would be beneficial for those that want to attend.

So look out for the flyers for that. we still have Lunch and Learns as we try to every UTA part of the PDC. so I tried to do a financial topic, usually every UTA Saturday or so, maybe not this Saturday just because we have family day, but, you know, come out because I know that the weekend is super busy.

So I tried to offer to buy you lunch and come and talk to me about a financial topic. and we do have other things that are coming up. We still have the TAP program.

Leticia Gonzalez: Yes, um, the TAP program is one of the programs that we do have, uh, basically when we have any individual who hits 180 day set of orders. we do have a TAP team that's located in here, Monday through Friday, and they do reach out to those members that, have been highlighted, stated that they had the 180 days, to just make sure that they do have things in order, such as they do have, a job, they do have a vehicle, they do have a place to stay, so we do have those resources in place.

So, if ever they reach out to you, you know what they're doing, trying to take care of you through that TAP program. Other programs that we just want to mention is our Retirement Workshop. It's a quarterly class that we offer and this next upcoming one is going to be October. But thereafter we'll be having another one in January.

So, basically this is for the traditional reservist who is contemplating heading out the door. And it gives them an opportunity to talk to the subject matter experts in different areas as they make that decision, that jump into the retirement room. another one that I want to mention is our Four Lenses class. Four Lenses is offered to, different offices that are looking to improve communication amongst each other. this is based upon a personality called the Myers Briggs where it just kind of identifies what type of personalities you have around you and how best to work with them. we did purchase the books in advance.

So at one time it used to be where your unit has to purchase the books and we'll come out and facilitate. But at this time we come out to facilitate with our books. So all we need to do is just book a time to come out to speak with you all.

Master Sgt. Jacob Lewis: Excellent. Awesome. A lot of very interesting topics, I'm sure.

Finances and family support. All this is super important to our airmen and our leadership. is there anything else you think we should add or are you ready to close out? Stop by

Nakia Evans: our table on family day. We're going to have a lot of this information on our table. We're also going to have a scavenger hunt for the kids, which was a hit last family day. we're going to have a bingo so that way you can see all the vendors that we are going to have there, especially, some of our partners like Military OneSource and Soldiers Angels, which provides a lot of

those Girl Scout cookies and all those different things that we get to take advantage of. So definitely.

Stop by our table because I think we're gonna have a lot of great information and great stuff for you guys.

Master Sgt. Jacob Lewis: Excellent. Perfect. Ladies. Thank you so much. I appreciate you being there for the airmen. Appreciate you being there for the family We're gonna go ahead and wrap it up. Okay. I appreciate your time.

Thank you for having us. Take care

Julian Hernandez: And we do want to again hammer home that, this Sunday of the UTA will be the Wings Family Day.

It is free admission, free food and drinks for our airmen and their family members. Some of the highlights include a cornhole and a kickball tournament. There'll also be a fun run. There's going to be a motorcycle ride. All that great information has been emailed out, with the flyer, remember it's going to be from 11 to 1500 at hangar eight 26 on the wing footprint on Sunday.

The Alamo wing is happy to welcome a new command chief, Chief Master Sergeant Jonathan Burke, takes over as the senior enlisted leader for the Alamo wing after Chief Williams moved on to her new assignment after the last UTA. Please extend a warm welcome to Chief Burke if you see him around the wing this upcoming UTA.

For any wing members needing to fulfill their SAPR annual training requirement, there will be a mass training event Saturday of the upcoming UTA. for joining. It's going to be from 10 to noon at the IAFA auditorium.

Julian Hernandez: On that note, we're going to wrap up this episode of Ready, Set, Airlift. Don't forget, you can always find the latest ALMA Wing news on our website and Facebook page. Just google 433rd Airlift Wing. And don't forget to subscribe, follow, leave a like for the podcast on whichever platform you like to listen to us on.

You can also leave us a review, let us know what you think about the show so far. Until next time, I've been your host, Julian Hernandez. Make it a great UTA.