



*Mainland BC*

# **Military Family Resource Centre**

## **News release**

Oct. 25, 2017

### **Fernie volunteer lauds importance of emergency preparedness pilot program for military and first responder families**

Vancouver, BC – Nancy Szastkiw, a registered clinical counsellor with the Mainland BC Military Family Resource Centre (BCMFRFC), knows the importance of a pilot program launching this weekend which offers emergency preparedness training for families of military members and first responders. Not only does her daily work include counselling military family members for deployment, she recently volunteered during Fernie’s ammonia leak crisis.

The lives of military and first responder families are unique in light of the combination of stressors they face that may include frequent relocations, persistent short and long-term separation, and the constant risk involved in training and deployed operations. A research study concluded that personal and family disaster preparedness and planning were found to significantly reduce the professional’s perceived role strain and conflict.

“The emergency preparedness sessions remind family to have quality conversations around what to do if and when crisis strikes. I’ve seen first-hand what happens to people – military or civilian – in these situations and how advance access to a strategy can improve their ability to cope and have a positive outcome,” said Szastkiw.

When counselling families preparing for the deployment of loved ones to disaster zones, she reassures them that the deployments themselves are extremely well organized and involve highly trained professionals. Families feel better knowing there are safety protocols in place at all levels.

“There are a lot of moving parts in the lives of military and first responder families, so having someone to talk to who innately understands the lifestyle is a great help. That’s the genesis behind our upcoming emergency preparedness sessions. We’re giving families tools to enable them to reinforce their resilience and prepare them for those times when they are apart,” said Tracy Cromwell, BCMFRFC executive director.

Fernie – where Szastkiw was team lead in providing emotional support to families affected by the deadly arena ammonia leak – was just one of several volunteer tours she participated in over the last four years as part of Health Emergency Management BC’s Disaster Psychosocial Program. She also volunteered during natural disasters in Williams Lake, Kamloops, Trail, High River, and Fort McMurray.

The emergency preparedness sessions for families of military members and first responders take place in Kelowna on Oct. 28 and Vernon on Oct. 29 respectively. Additional sessions are planned for Trail and

Chilliwack in the New Year. To find out more and/or sign up, go to [www.bcmfrc.com](http://www.bcmfrc.com).

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