



Exceptional Family Member Program Launches 2011 Awareness Campaign

By Marci Keck and Eric Kowal

With the overwhelming positive response to last year's Autism Awareness Campaign, Army Community Service's Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) and the Public Affairs Office have organized a full year of campaigns for 2011.

Each month will feature a *Picatinny Voice* and *Picatinny Express* article and information, along with resources on the EFMP Web page focused on different special needs awareness, starting with January recognizing Birth Defects Prevention Month.

The Department of Defense EFMP is a mandatory enrollment program that works with other military and civilian agencies to provide comprehensive and coordinated community support, housing, and educational, medical, and personnel services to families with special/exceptional needs.

Approximately 150,000 children born every year in the United States are affected by one or more birth defects. Although the cause of more than 60 percent of birth defects are unknown, there are several preventive measures that a mother can take regarding the well being of a developing baby. Awareness and education are the first steps to preventing birth defects, followed by action. There are a number of things mothers can do to increase the probability of having a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby.

Here are tips to prevent birth defects as mothers contemplate starting or adding to a family:

- The first and foremost tip is maintaining preconception health; eating well balanced and nutritional meals, and taking a multivitamin daily that includes the recommended 400 mcg of folic acid.
- Avoid all activities that could potentially lead to birth defects including the consumption of alcohol, use of tobacco, illicit drugs, and/or caffeine.
- Get an annual gynecological and wellness exam.
- Obtain genetic counseling and birth defect screening, particularly if you have a family history of birth defects or if you are 35 years of age or older.
- Help your family and/or friends who might be considering parenthood by informing them that January is Birth Defects Prevention Month.

For more information on birth defects, please visit the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) webpage at <http://www.pica.army.mil/mwr/ACS/EFMP.htm> or contact the EFMP Manager, Marci Keck, at 973-724-2145 or marci.keck@us.army.mil.