



From left, Lt. Col. Stephanie Johnson, Staff Sgt. Jerry W. Shore, Master Sgt. Tisha Guliford, Lt. Col. Robert Stelle and CID special agent Jesse Moore describe how the SHARP Resource Center at Joint Base Lewis-McChord works. Some of the SHARP Resource Center staff members are in civilian clothing, which is part of the strategy to put military victims of sexual harassment and assault at ease. (Photo by Martha C. Koester)

JBLM's Sharp Resource Center Tries a New Approach

By Martha C. Koester

NCO Journal

The Sexual Harassment Assault Response and Prevention, or SHARP, Resource Center at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., is the first of its kind and is so new that no written document in the Army exists on how it should run. Instead, they look to civilian agencies and military victims of sexual assault and harassment for inspiration.

"We're operating outside of Army regulation because we don't have anything that tells us how this is supposed to be set up, which is why we reach out so much to civilian agencies," said Master Sgt. Tisha Guliford, SHARP Resource Center manager.

At the first-of-its-kind SHARP Resource Center within the Department of Defense, JBLM Sexual Assault

Response Team members are learning more and more each day as they assist military victims of sexual harassment and assault.

"But to say that we have an SOP on how we do things, we don't," said U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command, or CID, special agent Jesse Moore. "It's an everyday thing"

The lack of a definitive standard operating procedure at the SHARP Resource Center at JBLM doesn't faze the staff.

"It's all about dignity and respect. I mean, that's what it all boils down to," said Staff Sgt. Jerry W. Shore, a victim advocate.

As Shore describes it, JBLM's center is the "brainstorm" of Lt. Col. Robert Stelle, the I Corps judge



SHARP Resource Center staff members include (top row, from left) CID special agent Jesse Moore, Lt. Col. Robert Stelle and Staff Sgt. Jerry W. Shore; also (bottom row, from left) Staff Sgt. Cynthia Velarde, Lt. Col. Stephanie Johnson and Master Sgt. Tisha Guliford. (Photo by Martha C. Koester)

advocate general sexual assault response team officer-in-charge. Earlier this year, Stelle and other service members researched sexual assault centers and programs in the civilian community. What they found helped to shape Stelle's vision of the center's SART concept, which features collaboration between agencies — whether they are victim advocates, CID agents or JAG legal services specialists.

The result for military victims of sexual harassment and assault is a unique one-stop shop, where a victim may receive services after telling their story just once to the SART.

"Basically one of the things we hear from victims is, 'I have to tell my story here, then we go here and I have to tell my story, then we go here and I have to tell my story ...'" Shore said. "This is a one-stop shop and, not only that, it's without the fear of being judged. We are fully committed to helping people."

Comfort is key

At the SHARP Resource Center at JBLM, victims of sexual harassment and assault have a choice to make when telling their story. They choose whether to keep their case restricted — no one else will know and no investigation is initiated — versus unrestricted — sitting down with CID and filing a police report. A direct line, or drop, to nearby Madigan Army Medical Center's system in Tacoma, Wash., is available, as well as immediate access to attorneys and CID special agent Moore.

Moore works as part of the SART at the SHARP Resource Center and also serves as a liaison to the CID team, whose office is located a couple hundred yards away.

"[Victims] have said it's easier to report [at the center]. It's easier for a victim to come down here because the CID office is like a police station," Moore said. "This kind of gives you an environment where we can just sit back and have a conversation where [the victim] doesn't feel really nervous about it."

With the full support of Lt. Gen. Robert Brown, I Corps and JBLM's commanding general, and the rest of the chain of command, Stelle and the staff went about creating a comfortable environment at the SHARP Resource Center, where the furniture is new and toys are readily available for the children of victims of sexual harassment and assault.

"We have [stuff available] for kids because a lot of our victims are spouses, dependents," Shore said. "A lot of times they don't have day care, so this is a place they can bring their children to make a report. The children can be over [in the play area], and [victims] can make their report. We have three different meeting rooms that are private with white-noise machines, which keep it even more private."

"This is a comfortable place ... to meet, to unwind, to report, because some Soldiers are not comfortable with their chain of command, so that's one reason we are in civilians [clothing] because we don't wear our stripes and it can be intimidating to go in," Shore said. "There's no place in the Army for predators; they've got to go."

The people behind the program

Visitors to the center will also find a friendly, trained staff, which is a mix of commissioned officers and NCOs

who serve as sexual assault response coordinators. Employees at the center are carefully chosen through a hiring process, which includes an interview panel.

“We were hand selected to come here,” Shore said. “Everyone here is totally 100 percent dedicated to the success of this center.”

“I’ll tell you why I believe we’re able to work it; it’s because of the hand-picked [staff],” Shore said. “We’re not just the, ‘Hey you, can you pass a background check? You’re going to SHARP.’ So I know that I’m in SHARP, and I’m going to stay in my lane. I’m going to do what I do, and if I have questions I know that [Moore] is going to stay in his CID lane, and we’re all staying in our own lanes. But we’re working together at the same time.”

Staff members undergo intensive training to deal with victims of sexual harassment and assault because it takes a certain “personality-based set of skills” to be a victim advocate, Stelle said.

“The thing about being a victim advocate or anything dealing with a victim — they’re like snowflakes and every one is different,” Shore said. “A good victim advocate can adapt to whomever they are talking to, really. A victim advocate is going to bear that victim’s burden, because the victim can’t bear it all. You have to be stable to be a good advocate.”

The staff’s job doesn’t end once the workday is over. SART members also work with civilian agencies — which includes volunteering at rape centers — in an effort to bring in more information on community resources for survivors.

“It’s not a 9-to-5 job, and the Army is not 9-to-5 anyway,” Guliford said. “We’re out there doing stuff with our community so that we know what resources are available to our victims. Like we said, hassle-free for our victims; we try to do as much as we can [for them] within this office.”

Part of the Army’s initiative on SHARP is training Soldiers to keep an eye out for each other and keeping the chain of command at the center of solutions.

“I think one of the best things about this center is we do not take away from a commander’s authority at all,” Shore said. “They still belong to that commander; he’s still responsible for that victim. This is just an extra asset.”

Helping to ease burdens

It’s all part of the effort to make the experience at the SHARP Resource Center as smooth as possible to military victims of sexual harassment and assault.

“We know that ‘hassle.’ That’s an important buzzword with us because we know historically from lots and lots of cases of other victims who reported,” Stelle said. “Having to go to all those other places and tell their story, the hassle factor can sometimes be so much they are going to give up.”

Since the SHARP Resource Center opened in June, it’s been all about easing the burdens for victims of sexual harassment and assault.

“We’re meeting somebody on probably the worst day of their life. We’re meeting some people on that day they thought could never happen to them, has happened to them,” Guliford said. “You have to be able to handle that situation, deal with that situation, and treat that person with dignity and respect. This one-stop shop really alleviates some of what they’re going through, some of that anxiety, retelling that story over and over again. You know, just that frustration.”

SART members of every discipline make caring for victims of abuse their “No. 1 priority,” Stelle said. The collaboration between agencies also helps to ease the process.

“The bottom line is that the legal system and the medical system when you are sexually assaulted can be trauma in itself. So when you are able to come here, if I don’t have an answer for victims if they ask me a question, somebody in this little area is going to have an answer for her,” Moore said. “[Collaboration] speeds this process. Victims don’t want to be here telling us this stuff day in and day out. If we can just limit it to very few occasions where we meet with them, the better.”

“That’s the whole, entire purpose of this, and it’s actually working. I know that it’s working because I talk to victims back here when they feel more comfortable because they don’t have to deal with a lot of the nonsense that comes along with this experience they are having.”

In progress

Little by little, JBLM’s SHARP Resource Center’s staff members are seeing the word get out about their services, whether it’s through word of mouth or the signs posted throughout JBLM. The center is also garnering Armywide attention, with requests for training and visits from politicians and Army Chief of Staff Gen. Raymond T. Odierno.

“We have senior leaders on this post who are dedicated to the success of the SHARP program; there’s no doubt about it,” Shore said. “We have support from all up. We’ve got Special Forces guys coming through here to see what we’re doing. This is how important it is.”

Staff members stress the SHARP Resource Center is a work in progress and that they meet every week to talk about kinks in the system and to try to work them out. SART members are open to suggestions.

“We learn as we go, and things pop up from time to time and we say, ‘We never thought of that,’” Stelle said.

“Coach, teach, mentor; we value everyone’s opinion,” Guliford said. “That’s the thing: All of us come together and each opinion is just as valuable as mine because, why wouldn’t it be?” They are victim advocates. They are dealing with victims on a daily basis. I would be a fool not to listen to NCOs who have proved they know what they are doing.

“Sometimes you get the best ideas from people regardless of the rank. It’s important that people feel empowered to give you their suggestions on what they think can improve a program, especially if you get good ideas.”

Suggestions for the center also come in from the survivors of sexual harassment and assault.

“We get good ideas from victims, victims who talk to us and say, ‘Hey, I wish we could do this,’” Shore said. “We’re in a position where we have the ear of the higher-ups. So we can contribute [and say], ‘What if this were to happen?’ and maybe it will go somewhere. So it works in every way.”

Into the future

Even after services are rendered, or if a Soldier transitions out of the Army, survivors of abuse are never dropped from JBLM’s SHARP Resource Center’s rolls. Everyone receives follow-up services.

“Part of our job is to make sure when you transition out (of the Army), that you’re still taken care of, that we’re not just going to [say], ‘Thanks for your service,’” Shore said. “We want to follow up forever.”

Above all else, taking care of the survivors of abuse takes precedence, Stelle said.

“You don’t want them to fall through the cracks because we know from long experience of the trauma [that victims endure]. Some of the effects that victims of sexual assault have to deal with are long term,” Stelle said. “Then there’s the short-term stuff. You have to go through the legal process. You’ve got the initial trauma, and several months later you have the increased trauma because you have the court-martial, [and you have to] face the offender in a courtroom and tell the story in front of a bunch of strangers.

“All that, there’s obviously trauma especially with that. But beyond, sometimes into the future, there are

still effects that many victims suffer from. So whether they stay in the Army or not, we want to make sure we take care of them or ensure they are taken care of. It’s a holistic sort of approach to make sure we can take care of all the victims as much as possible.”

With the enthusiastic response the SHARP Resource Center has received, staff members see growth on the horizon.

“What you see here is just the building block,” Moore said. “This is the first step. If you come back next year, it’s not going to look like this; it’s going to be completely different. ... This is going to catch on; I guarantee it.”

And the word about JBLM’s SHARP Resource Center’s unique approach continues to spread.

“I get calls and emails on a regular basis from other bases who have heard about this,” Stelle said. “It can work anywhere — big place, small place, training post, [Forces Command]-type post. It doesn’t matter. If you have the commitment from the providers, it will work, because the concept has the flexibility to be shaped any way you want to shape it. So it can’t not work, honestly, if everyone is committed; it can’t not work because you figure it out.”

Shore also added that it’s the people behind SHARP Resource Center who make it successful.

“You have to get the right people,” Shore said. “But it can work anywhere as long as you get the right people in place.” ■

Where to get help

Sexual assault support for the DOD community is offered online at <https://safehelpline.org> or by calling 877-995-5247. Help is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.



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