



Sgt. 1st Class Charles Daniels, the installation sexual assault response coordinator at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., presents his small group's work to the rest of the class during the new SHARP pilot course at Fort Belvoir, Va., in March. (Photo by Michael L. Lewis)

# Graduates of New SHARP Pilot Course Ready to Train Advocates, Care for Victims

By Michael L. Lewis

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As the Army works to combat sexual harassment and sexual assault within its ranks, it now has more than 30 new weapons at its disposal — the graduates of the Sexual Harassment/Assault Response and Prevention schoolhouse pilot course, who completed their two-month program at Fort Belvoir, Va., last month.

A mix of NCOs and Department of the Army civilians, the students studied how to build resilience, identify signs of prejudice and discrimination, investigate incidents, navigate the legal process, take care

of victims, and foster a culture of prevention within a command. Thus, they are now the Army's subject-matter experts in all things SHARP-related and will train sexual assault response coordinators, or SARC, and victim advocates, or VAs, throughout the Army as part of mobile training teams.

"The intent was to get our experience to assist the development of this two-month course, which will be for newly or less-experienced brigade-level SARC and program managers, in addition to getting us certified to become MTT trainers," said Sgt. 1st Class Rena Key, the



An instructor teaches a class on facilitation techniques during the SHARP pilot course in April. (Photo by Michael L. Lewis)

SHARP program manager for the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, at Fort Bliss, Texas. “It was a double whammy for us. The course content expanded on what we already knew, but then we were provided more information from the higher-level echelons that gave us more technical, in-depth training.”

That people from the highest levels of the Army participated in the training shows how seriously the Army takes the SHARP program, said Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, the Army’s chief of staff, who spoke to the students at their graduation.

“We need to hold people accountable — not just those who committed the crime, but those who do not create [an] environment” of trust, Odierno said. “That’s one of the things we have to work on. That’s one of the things I have to work on. ... We have to keep this momentum going and train others.”

In addition to hearing from representatives from the Office of the Surgeon General, U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command and the Office of the Judge Advocate General, the course’s students also benefited from hearing each other’s experiences and ideas, said Sgt. 1st Class Corey Cooley, the SHARP program manager for the 15th Sustainment Brigade at Fort Bliss.

“Even though I’ve been a SARC for two years, I’ve grown from this class,” Cooley said. “The lessons learned that have been brought forth have really taught me. I might not ever be in the situations they described, but being able to hear people share those things has been great for me.”

Key also appreciated hearing best practices from her colleagues.

“The nuggets of information we learned when we had conversations about what different people did about training and building awareness at their units, I can take that back and implement it at Fort Bliss, because someone has already done it successfully elsewhere,” she said.

The overarching goal for the course was to give students the tools and resources they need to help a victim of sexual assault or sexual harassment, said Master Sgt. Ronald Henry, the SHARP program manager for U.S. Army Europe in Wiesbaden, Germany.

“Some of the classes, initially I thought, ‘I don’t understand how this ties into SHARP,’” Henry said. “My thinking was a little narrow until I refocused on what SHARP is all about in the first place: How can I help a victim? So all the stuff we learned about behavior, personality characteristics — if any of that stuff helps me or enhances me in any way in how I relate to helping a victim, then that was [worthwhile] for me.”

Though the graduates will now train SARCs and VAs throughout the Army, working to eliminate sexual assault and sexual harassment in the Army is everyone’s responsibility, they said.

“Some people think that if you’re a SHARP person, if you’re a VA, if you’re a SARC, or if you’re a trainer, the responsibility for SHARP only lies in that group of people,” Henry said. “But when we talk about building a culture of change, the responsibility has to be on everybody. There are only about 30 in this class, and even if you include all the VAs and SARCs in the Army, we alone won’t effect culture change in the military. It’s

going to require every single individual — from Gen. Odierno all the way down to the private who came into the Army yesterday. It's going to require everybody.”

“It takes all leaders to make it their duty to understand that SHARP violations can happen to anybody,” Key said. “It's our duty — our *duty* — to support SHARP. It's not an option. The well-being of every Soldier is everybody's responsibility. You don't have to have a title to take care of people.

“As noncommissioned officers, when you put those chevrons on, you were placed in a leadership position; you were given the authority to lead. With that, you have to expand yourself to understand there are things outside your [military occupational specialty], outside your squad, outside your platoon. We affect the organization as a whole, and so many of us as noncommissioned officers can be the initial change agents. We're in the middle to help implement the change to take care of Soldiers in reference to sexual harassment and sexual

assault, and support those who [are victims]. That's what we do as noncommissioned officers — we *support* in every aspect of the word.”

Indeed, the training they've gained in the pilot course only augments what NCOs do every day, Henry said.

“One of the things that I was taught when I became a noncommissioned officer was that my primary duty was to take care of Soldiers. I don't think that message has changed today for young E-5s,” he said. “If, as leaders, it is our job to take care of Soldiers, that just doesn't mean the Soldiers beneath me, it means all the Soldiers around me. So that means you have to be engaged. Don't wait for annual training or quarterly training. Educate yourself about trends, tactics, the behaviors of offenders and all those things so you know what to look for in order to take care of your Soldiers.” ■

*David Vergun of the Army News Service contributed to this report.*



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