



by Chad R. Foster

The Fort Hood People First Center is a unique initiative with the potential to have a significant impact on individual leaders, units, and organizations across the entire Army. This effort is not simply putting a new sign in front of an old building. Instead, the People First Center is an important part of Fort Hood's investment in our men and women in uniform. As a centralized, installation-level leader certification and education facility, this center aims to positively shape organizational culture so that we can get closer to eradicating the harmful factors that undermine trust within units and organizations. Although not a panacea for all the challenges that the Army faces, it is an enormous opportunity to bolster the trust which is so critical in the doctrine of Mission Command. What separates the Fort Hood People First Center from existing programs is its innovative developmental model that focuses on prevention through the delivery of immersive, scenario-based developmental experiences. The aim is to assist Soldiers and Leaders in identifying harmful behaviors and to provide a proactive approach to eradicating those behaviors from our formations.

Resources and expertise have been available for years across the Army's installations. Family Advocacy Programs, Sexual Assault and Harassment Prevention (SHARP) offices, and many other agencies have worked diligently for years. However, the majority of the focus has been on response and victim services. The Army has not yet made sufficient progress in rooting out the thinking and attitudes that enable harmful behaviors. To change this reality, we must bring resources to bear in new ways to shape the basic, taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions that constitute the deepest level of organizational culture.

The Fort Hood People First Center: A Prevention-Focused Developmental Model

PowerPoint briefings and online training will not suffice. Prevention demands something more.



The Fort Hood People First Center aims to prevent harmful behaviors through a developmental model that relies on the scientifically proven value of experiential learning. The focus in this learning model moves from “instructor-centric” to “student-centric” learning. Personal experiences shape thinking and behavior in a fundamental way. With this in mind, the People First Center immerses units in a series of specially designed exercises that provide learning experiences in a safe, structured environment under the tutelage of certified experts and their own unit leadership. Those experiences impact individual thinking and attitudes in a way that lectures and PowerPoint briefings cannot match. The People First Center’s three-day Transformation Course delivers this developmental experience directly to company-level organizations, reinforcing trust, cohesion, and inclusiveness. By doing so, it contributes directly to the readiness and lethality of our Soldiers and units.

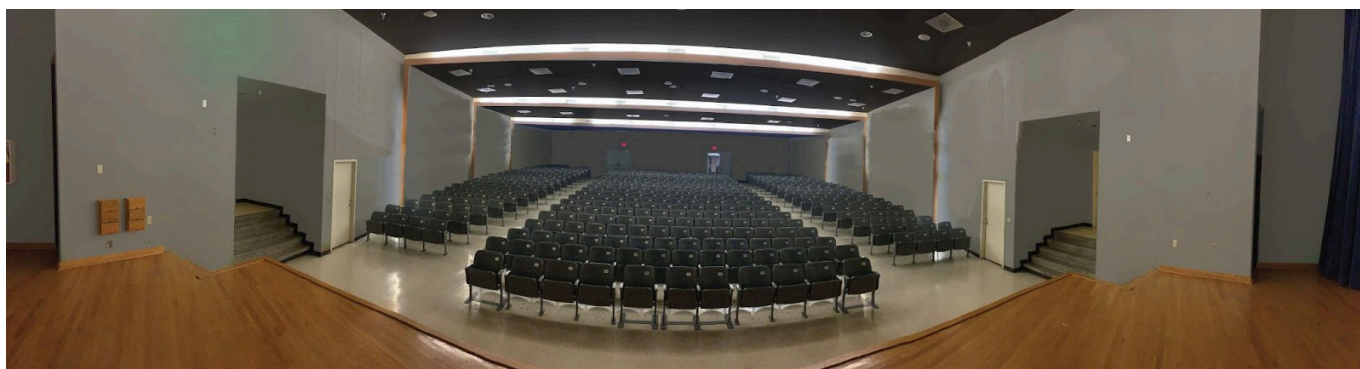
An interdisciplinary team of subject matter experts from Family Advocacy, SHARP, Equal Opportunity (EO), Master Resilience Training (MRT), Army Substance Abuse Program (ASAP), Suicide Awareness, and Spiritual Readiness Team (SRT) collaborate with the People First Center cadre to build scenarios that link experience to outcomes. The first step is developing a clear, succinct description of the behaviors, knowledge, and attributes that the exercise aims to instill in Soldiers. These constitute the desired outcomes of the exercise. The next step is to identify the observable indicators of success in achieving these outcomes as well as the conditions under which those indicators would potentially emerge. After all of

this is complete, the team creates scenarios that place the participants in those conditions.

The resulting exercises immerse Soldiers in realistic situations that move learning from the theoretical to the practical. Soldiers take ownership of the learning as they observe and interact with role players to experience the impacts of words and actions. A young Private might find himself sitting with a group of peers who are making sexually explicit comments about a newly arrived comrade. Likewise, a Sergeant might observe the harassment of another Soldier in the workplace. In every case, the exercise participants have to decide what to do or say as the events unfold. Upon conclusion, a detailed After Action Review links action (or inaction) to consequence.

Execution is the most challenging aspect of this program. To ensure success, specially-vetted volunteers from across the installation complete a deliberate certification process focusing on mastering the art of facilitating the developmental exercises that are the hallmark of the People First Center's program. Cadre typically serve for up to 12 months with the People First Center before returning to their units as experienced and certified positive influencers. To ensure continuity, a standing Board of Directors oversees the Fort Hood People First Center. This board includes senior officers and civilians who provide expertise and resources. These individuals also provide the critical eye necessary to assess the program's effectiveness in the long term.

The Fort Hood People First Center delivers resources through learning in innovative ways that aim at prevention rather than reaction. The delivery of an immersive, realistic developmental experience is what makes the program different from other initiatives. For those Soldiers who already embody the Army's values, the People First Center's developmental program helps to better equip them to influence others and, when necessary, to intervene. They become more decisive because they become active vs reactive. Young Soldiers lacking the social skills and judgement to recognize when their words and actions are unacceptable will gain an increased set of experiences to help guide them. Units as a whole depart the People First Center more attuned to warning signs and ready to take positive action.



The Fort Hood People First Center will continue to evolve in response to the needs of our Soldiers and Families. Many of the problems that our Army confronts today are also matters of concern for our public schools, universities, and local municipalities. This presents us with an opportunity to deliberately share intellectual capital in the study of common problems and in developing transferable solutions. The cities and towns outside of our military installations have a shared interest in this endeavor because Soldiers live, shop, and play alongside the local citizenry. We are, in reality, all part of a single, interconnected community. The People First Center can serve as a focal point for such collaboration when appropriate. Today, multiple institutions of higher learning and community officials in Central Texas have expressed interest in exploring these types of opportunities.

“People First” is not simply rhetoric at Fort Hood. Leaders across the installation are investing in their Soldiers and their Families. The People First Center is a tangible manifestation of that investment. It will not solve all of the problems that we face, but it will add to the efforts of commanders and leaders at all levels who are already decisively engaged in this important fight. There is a lot of work yet to be done across the entire Army, and none involved in this effort will ever feel completely satisfied.

We owe it to our Soldiers to remain focused until we eradicate the harmful factors that undermine trust and impact the combat power within our units. The Fort Hood People First Center will get us closer to that goal by helping to prevent tragedy rather than simply reacting to its aftermath.

COL Chad Foster is currently the Garrison Commander at Fort Hood, TX. He is an Armor officer who has served in a variety of command and staff positions since being commissioned in 1998. He is a member of the Fort Hood People First Center’s Board of Directors.

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