Child Care for the Military Community

Overview

Child care services are an extraordinarily important aspect of military family strength. Like any parent, those in the military want their children to be safe, happy, and healthy while they are busy with work or otherwise engaged. Many military spouses work either full- or part-time and often function as single parents due to the unique demands of military life. Frequent deployments, unpredictable work schedules, regular relocation, and a variety of other factors are daily considerations for these hard-pressed families. The military is also home to an increasing number of traditional single parents, who must face the same difficulties without the emotional and financial support of a partner.

In addition to the previously stated challenges, a significant portion of the military community must balance child care with the care of a mentally or physically wounded family member. Collectively these factors often make it nearly impossible for parents and caregivers to pursue a normal life. The result is a family stretched to its limits, both financially and emotionally.

Child care can ease the burden – but only if provided in an affordable, trustworthy, and accommodating way. As communities, we must work to bring excellent child care to the military community.

There are three steps to identifying and raising awareness of child care programs in your community: 1) Identify and Evaluate Services Available to the Community; 2) Bring Child Care Programs to the Military Community; and 3) Build Capacity and Enrich Local Programs.

Is it being done already?

External support programs for the military family have expanded rapidly over the last decade. The field of child care is no exception. Before engaging in any independent child care efforts, be sure to locate and evaluate those programs which are available to your community. Initiate contact with those you find reputable, and work to bring your leadership and resources together to support local military families. It is generally not feasible to begin your own child care service. Doing so requires extensive funding, logistical support, recruiting and background checking. Your efforts will be much better spent working to integrate the military community with those services available in the larger local community.

Step-by-Step Implementation

Step 1: Identify and Evaluate Services Available to the Community

It is extremely important that you inventory the services available in your community. While you may be familiar with some of the organizations operating child care services in your area, it
must be emphasized that child care requires an unparalleled degree of confidence and faith on the part of the community in order to be an effective tool. Parents will not entrust their children to anyone. Examine those services you intend to work with closely; as a community leader, your advocacy holds significant weight. Here are some ways to identify potential services:

- **Military Programs:** Contact the closest military installation to inquire about the family services available in your community to the military community.
  - Most military communities will have access to a family support center, such as a Navy Fleet and Family Support Center, Marine Corps Community Service Center, Air Force Family Service Center, or Army Community Service Center. These organizations provide extensive services for military families, and should be able to offer direction for those services which they do not. Each of these services is available to all active duty, Reserve, National Guard, and veteran families of the local military community, regardless of their branch of service. Reserve and National Guard families that have left the military, however, may be unable to utilize these support organizations.
  - The Department of Defense currently oversees 800 Child Development Centers (CDCs) located on military installations worldwide. These centers offer a safe child care environment and meet professional standards for early childhood education. Child care is typically available through these centers for children ages six weeks to 12 years. The centers are generally open Monday through Friday between the hours of 6 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. Commanders may decide to extend hours to meet the work and deployment needs and schedules of their installation population.
  - The State Area Command (STARC) will usually activate a Family Assistance Center (FAC) when a reserve unit is mobilized. The FAC will be able to provide information on family services available within the state and community, both military and civilian.
  - **Operation Military Child Care**, a joint operation between the Department of Defense (DoD) and the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRAA), provides an information hub for parents and child care providers. The program also provides child care fee assistance to military families in need.

- **National, State, and Community Organizations:** A variety of civilian child care organizations are available at the state and community level.
  - Each state has its NACCRA agency. These organizations provide extensive aid to families in need of child care, and are among the most valuable resources to any community advocate working in area of family support. County-level CCR&R agencies can also be found in some areas.
  - Local chapters of national organizations such as the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the National Military Family Association may be able to provide information on the child care services available in your community. Other national organizations, such as the YMCA, may also provide child care services.
  - If you do not live near an installation or near any government program, you may want to work to develop a list of reliable childcare providers and help raise funds for families to leverage these providers when they need respite.
Online Services: Organizations are increasingly moving into the child care realm by linking at-need parents with local caregivers through the Internet. These organizations generally work through referral, rather than by directly employing caregivers; surveying the community should introduce you to the local organizations doing the actual child care. Nevertheless, it is important that you be familiar with these services. They may be of immense value to your community.

- The most prominent of these are Child Care Aware, the Child Care Services Association, NACCRRA, SitterCity, Military OneSource, and Care.com.

### Volunteer Opportunities

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Child Care Liaison</th>
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<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Develop a list of child care programs within the community; research and compile information on the history, hiring procedures and reputation of available child care services; perform preliminary outreach to child care programs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attributes</td>
<td>Enthusiastic, affable, and interested in the military community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Who</td>
<td>Volunteers should be well-organized and have experience conducting basic research; members of the military community are encouraged to apply.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hours</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
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### Step 2: Bring Child Care to the Military Community

Once you have identified and evaluated the reputable child care services available, you must work to bring them to the military community. Despite the busy lives of military families – particularly those coping with deployment, a wounded warrior or the reintegration of a family member – many are unaware, or simply leery, of child care programs. In your efforts to bring child care services to the military community, you may wish to consider the following ideas:

- **Information Sessions:** Design and host information sessions describing the various child care services available within the community, both military and civilian. Over the course of the information session, be sure to discuss the possible ways to locate child care and family support: through the military, through civilian organizations, and through online hubs such as Sitter City, Military OneSource, and Care.com. In addition to specific programs, you may wish to highlight the availability of family support and child care centers, such as the CCR&R, FAC, etc. Provide as much detailed information as possible: location, hours, hiring practices, fees (if applicable), etc. Contact these organizations directly prior to organizing the seminar; many may volunteer speakers, donate literature or offer other forms of support. Their endorsement will lend credibility to your information session.
• **Venue:** Should you decide to host an information session, it is important that you secure a venue early. Local family support and child care organizations may be able to provide you with the space needed; otherwise many facilities are willing to donate several hours of use for charitable purposes. Develop a list of small-, medium- and large-scale venues in your area that might be amenable to hosting your information sessions: libraries, high schools, colleges and universities, faith based organizations, and military installations and armories are among the most common. Be sure to ask whether the facility will provide tables, chairs and other materials.

• **Webinars:** As with the information sessions, webinars can provide a centralized hub of information for those who would be otherwise unaware of available family support and child care services. In terms of content, the information sessions and webinars should be substantially the same. While webinars eliminate the need for a venue, they lack the sense of personal engagement found through in-person information sessions. Webinars are an excellent and relatively cheap way to reach a broad audience. Nevertheless, they may not be sufficient as a substitute for in-person interaction, though this is somewhat dependent on the age and technological comfort of your community.

  ▪ There are dozens of programs designed to make the hosting of a webinar as simple as possible. While it does not matter precisely what tool you use, there are some basic ideas you should keep in mind.

    ▪ Ensure that the program selected is user-friendly. Your webinar should be available in the major modern browsers (i.e., Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari, and Chrome).

    ▪ Attempt to minimize the number of required downloads to participate in the webinar. Programs like Microsoft PowerPoint and Apple Keynote are excellent tools to utilize during the webinar to summarize and convey lengthy or difficult information, such as a list of child care websites.

    ▪ Keep your webinar relatively brief, and be sure to provide direct links, addresses, and contact information for those family support centers and programs you are recommending.

    ▪ You may also wish to provide a website where links and important information can be consolidated.

• **Community Outreach:** Engage military and nonprofit organizations in the family support and child care fields. Inform them about your efforts to increase awareness of child care options to the military community, and request they promote and support your information sessions/webinars through their email distributions, at their meetings, and in their facilities.

  ▪ You may wish to prepare simple literature, such as fliers or brochures, for distribution to interested parties.

  ▪ This literature should explain your vision, offer a synopsis of the information sessions, and direct interested parties to your website or call center. For more information on organizations you may wish to contact, see Additional Resources.
more information on raising awareness and campaign literature, see Family Strength: Annual Media Campaign.

Volunteer Opportunities

**Title:** Information Session Manager  
**Task:** Plan a series of information sessions designed to highlight the family support centers and child care programs available to the military community; identify and contact potential venues for information sessions; perform preliminary outreach to family support centers and child care programs in the local community.  
**Attributes:** Enthusiastic, affable, and interested in the military community  
**Who:** Volunteers should be well-organized and have experience conducting basic research; members of the military community are encouraged to apply.  
**Hours:** Flexible

**Title:** Webinar Manager  
**Task:** Plan a series of webinars designed to highlight the family support centers and child care programs available to the military community; identify audiovisual software to be used in the webinar series; prepare any slides, charts, data, etc. to be used in webinar presentations.  
**Attributes:** Enthusiastic, affable, and interested in the military community  
**Who:** Volunteers should be well-organized and have experience conducting basic research; some experience with online presentation tools is highly recommended; members of the military community are encouraged to apply.  
**Hours:** Flexible

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**Step 3: Build Capacity and Enrich Local Programs**

Identifying reputable child care programs, guiding the military community to family support centers, and raising awareness of available services are extremely important goals, and should be the subjects of your initial efforts. Should you desire to take more direct action in the child care realm, however, consider the following ideas:

- **Mentoring:** Many colleges and universities provide a mechanism through which students can receive credit hours or other incentives through civic engagement, typically organized via the Office of Community Engagement. Enact a program in which student volunteers mentor local elementary, middle, and high school students in exchange for credit hours.
- The design of such a program typically involves the submission of program outline by a student and the sponsorship of a faculty member. Approach the education department at your local university with your proposal; they should be able to direct you to the appropriate student groups, faculty members, and schools.
  - Do not be discouraged if your local college or university already participates in such a program. Contact the lead organizers; you may be able to help grow the program, expand its size or provide other forms of support.
• **Extracurricular Support:** Develop a program through which volunteers can support the extracurricular activities of local elementary schools as tutors, coaches, etc. Form an outline and contact local schools to gauge their interest.

• Most such programs are after-school and provide child care while encouraging youth to pursue their interests and hobbies. These activities can include sports, music, academic societies, school clubs, and many others, allowing a broad opportunity for student and volunteer engagement.
  - An increasing number of organizations, such as Playworks, are supporting the extracurricular activities of elementary, middle and high school students. Depending on your community, it may be more beneficial to work with or volunteer through one of these organizations than to attempt to start one yourself.

• **Transportation:** Reducing the barriers to entry is the key to increasing participation in any program. Collaborate with local child care providers to develop a simple transportation program that picks up and drops off participants at the child care center.
  - Please note that drivers, should you choose to recruit them, must be closely scrutinized: references, driving record, and a background check are necessary to ensure your service is secure, and that your volunteers meet the rigorous standards demanded by parents.
  - Insurance and other liability issues may also impact your ability to consider transportation as an option.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Driver</strong></td>
<td>Transport children to and from participating child care centers.</td>
<td>Attentive, affable, and accustomed to children</td>
<td>Volunteers must have a valid U.S. driver's license, and be willing to submit to a background check; volunteers must have a driving record clear of any significant infractions (minor traffic violations are permissible); members of the military community are encouraged to apply.</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
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<td><strong>Transportation Coordinator</strong></td>
<td>Manage a network of volunteer drivers; organize pick-up and drop-off of children to and from home and child care centers; provide administrative oversight of children, volunteers, vehicles, and any other variables arising from the transport program.</td>
<td>Attentive, well-organized, and responsible. Management experience is preferred.</td>
<td>Volunteers must submit to a background check, and should have a demonstrable history of organization; experience with logistics and/or management is a plus; members of the military community are encouraged to apply.</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
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Measures of Success

Measuring the success of your efforts is important. You must be able to evaluate which of your methods are effective and which are not. Doing so will enable you to better focus your attention moving forward, and will greatly streamline your methodology in the months and years to come. It can be difficult to accurately measure the effect of your participation in the child care realm. Though parent surveys provide the most accurate picture of the effectiveness of and overall satisfaction with a particular service, this information can be hard to attain, and does not necessarily reflect the effectiveness of your own efforts. Below are some additional ideas you may wish to use to evaluate the effect of your efforts:

- **Parent Reviews**: It may be helpful to establish a website where members of the military community can comment on child care services, provide information as to the receptiveness to the needs of the military, etc. This can be public or private, depending on your particular interest, but be sure to emphasize the community orientation of the site. Establishing and managing a forum, Wiki or other interactive form of online community requires little to no coding experience, but may prove immensely valuable to your efforts and to the community as a whole.

- **Survey Local Services**: Ask local family support sites and child care services to track the changes in community participation in their programs as your efforts proceed. Some questions you may wish to consider are as follows:
  - Are you having a positive effect on enrollment in child care services?
  - Are family support centers within the community receiving more traffic?
  - Depending on the granularity of the survey questions, you may be able to track not just the overall impact of your efforts, but the demographics most responsive to them as well. This information can be extremely valuable as you move forward and work to refine your community outreach.
  - You may also wish to survey the military community directly, though this can be time-consuming and requires an extensive work or volunteer force.
• **Follow the Numbers:** Be sure to track the number of calls you receive about a particular child care service, the number of attendees at your information sessions, and the flow of web traffic your webinars and website receive. Such information may prove valuable in future press releases, communications with local service providers or organizations, and in any other communication addressing your efforts in the child care realm.

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<tr>
<td><strong>Title:</strong> Review Manager</td>
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<td><strong>Task:</strong> Create an online community in which veterans, service members and their families can review, rate and discuss local child care services; compile and maintain a list of child care services on the site; moderate the online community to ensure civil and healthy debate.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attributes:</strong> Affable, enthusiastic, well-organized, interested in the military community</td>
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<td><strong>Who:</strong> Volunteers should be comfortable with online communities and social media; experience with online community building, online marketing, search engine optimization (SEO) and general community management is a plus, but not required members of the military community are encouraged to apply.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hours:</strong> Flexible</td>
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Additional Resources

- **Blue Star Families:** [http://www.bluestarfam.org/](http://www.bluestarfam.org/)
  - Founded in 2008, Blue Star Families is an organization composed of military spouses and other family members of active duty personnel, National Guardsmen, Reservists and veterans. Their goal is to support, connect and empower military families by informing civilian and military leaders about top issues. Blue Star Families has specific programs designed to aid military children.

- **Care.com:** [http://www.care.com/](http://www.care.com/)
  - Care.com provides a trusted place for families and care providers to easily connect, share care giving experiences and get advice. The company addresses the unique lifecycle of care needs that each family may go through — including child care, special needs care, tutoring, senior care, pet care, housekeeping and more. The service enables families to find and select the best care possible based on detailed profiles, background checks and references for hundreds of thousands of mom-reviewed providers who are seeking to share their services.

- **Child Care Aware:** [http://www.childcareaware.org/](http://www.childcareaware.org/)
  - Child Care Aware is the nation's most respected hub of information for parents and child care providers. A program of the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA), Child Care Aware® helps families learn more about the elements of quality child care and how to locate programs in their communities. Child Care Aware® also provides child care providers with access to resources for their child care programs.

- **Childcare.gov:** [http://www.childcare.gov/](http://www.childcare.gov/)
  - ChildCare.gov is a comprehensive online resource designed to link parents, child care providers, researchers, policymakers and the general public with federal government-sponsored child care and early learning information and resources both quickly and easily.

- **Military Child Education Coalition:** [http://www.militarychild.org/](http://www.militarychild.org/)
  - Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) is a nonprofit, worldwide organization. A model of positive leadership and advocacy, the MCEC's work is focused on ensuring quality educational opportunities for all military-connected children affected by mobility, family separation and transition. The MCEC performs research, develops resources, conducts professional institutes and conferences, and publishes resources for all constituencies.

- **Military OneSource:** [http://www.militaryonesource.mil/](http://www.militaryonesource.mil/)
  - Military OneSource provides a wide variety of support to service members and their families, such as free counseling, moving help, health care information, spouse education and career support, and child care services.

- **National Association of Childcare Research and Referral Agencies:** [http://www.naccrra.org/](http://www.naccrra.org/)
  - NACRRRA works with more than 700 state and local child care resource and referral agencies nationwide. These agencies help ensure that families in 99 percent of all
populated zip codes in the United States have access to high-quality, affordable child care. To achieve their mission, NACRRA leads projects that increase the quality and availability of child care professionals, undertakes research and advocates child care policies that positively impact the lives of children and families.

  - The National Military Family Association is an organization with strong grassroots support balanced with professionalism. They support military families – and are military families. Spouses, parents and family members make up staff and board positions. They speak up on behalf of military families and empower husbands, wives and children to understand and access their benefits.

- **Playworks**: [http://www.playworks.org/](http://www.playworks.org/)
  - Playworks is a national nonprofit organization that supports learning by providing safe, healthy and inclusive play and physical activity to schools at recess and throughout the entire school day.

- **Sittercity**: [http://www.sittercity.com/](http://www.sittercity.com/)
  - Sittercity is an online service that links parents with babysitters and nannies in their area. The site provides detailed profiles, background checks, references and reviews for all their personnel. Through a partnership with the Department of Defense, Sittercity is made free to all military families.

- **YMCA**: [http://www.ymca.net/](http://www.ymca.net/)
  - The YMCA is an inclusive organization of men, women and children joined together by a shared commitment to nurturing the potential of kids, promoting healthy living and fostering a sense of social responsibility. The services of the YMCA vary based on location, but most provide child care, a gym, athletic classes and a multitude of community programs. The YMCA also provides free membership to military families.