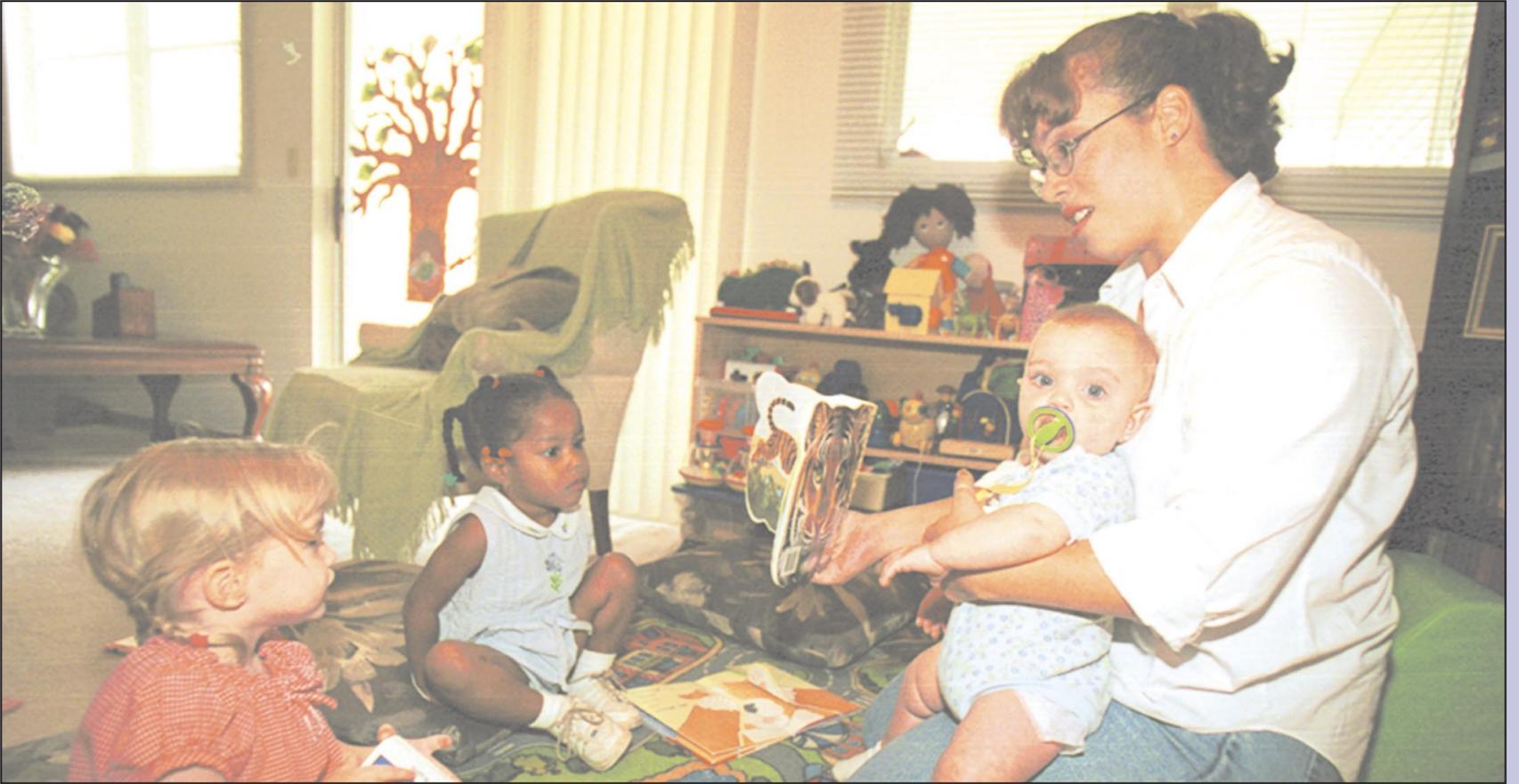


Life & Leisure



Eileen Banks holds on to 9-month-old Julie Conaster and reads a book to two-year-old Kayla Conaster (left) and 2-year-old Alexis Olanegan (right).



Navy homes provide safe haven for childcare

Story and Photos by J03 Brenda Diggs
Staff Writer

The Child Development Homes (CDH) program began four years ago to offer quality childcare for military families through a network of certified home providers living in Navy housing.

"We have a high quality program," said Annette McLamb, CDH director. "The program and training CDH provides is a big benefit to both the providers and the parents who use the program," she said. "The providers are knowledgeable and trained with information that helps them in their home, and the parents know they are getting someone who is educated in the program."

Home providers offer care for children ages 6 weeks to 12-years-old with age appropriate activities in a home-like atmosphere. Providers have planned activities based on "Early Childhood" principles to promote the growth and development of the whole child.

"The training that the providers receive reassures me that my children will be safe," said Tabatha Conatser, whose two children are in homecare. "My children get personal one-on-one training and become close with the provider. Outside of being a good provider the woman that watches my children is very professional and knowledgeable, she can answer almost all of my questions, and if she can't she will get the answer for me," concluded Conatser.

CDH provides toys, books, resource libraries and computers for providers to search the internet for information that will benefit their program at home, according to Marie George, a CDH monitor.

"We have a lending library to help providers get started with the age-appropriate toys and books they need," said McLamb. "This allows them to have the basics when they start out without having to purchase items."

Certified providers are required to attend training at least once a month, and CDH monitors provide inspections in homes at least twice a month. The training classes consist of education on a variety of topics pertaining to children of different ages. The providers attend these four-hour classes once a month and are required to complete 15 modules that are used throughout the Department of Defense, according to McLamb.

Starting a career can be difficult for many military spouses when they move every three to four years, according to Eileen Banks, a homecare provider in Hokenani housing area.

"Navy child development has given me a career, which is something that is very difficult to have when you are married to someone in the Navy," said Banks. "We move around so much that we don't get an opportunity to pursue a career."

The training provided by CDH allows providers to work out of their home, learn business skills and stay at home with their children, if they have any.

"This profession has also taught me how to run a business, and that is an immense benefit," said Banks. "I can go on and on with the benefits home childcare has to offer, but I must say that being able to work at your own residence is the leading benefit for a woman such as myself, who would like to be home for my children."

Parent using home childcare can also take advantage of flexible hours of operation, such as full time, part time, shift work, deployment, or drop-in care.

Along with offering regular childcare services, the Child Development Homes program has an Hourly Care program and a Head Start program. The Hourly Care program is convenient for appointments and respite care.

"I learn a lot working with children, which helps me with the development with my own son who is 3-years-old," said Salima Post, who provides Hourly Care in the Radford housing area. "Running an Hourly Care program is a little different than the regular program. I wanted to see the different sights that CDH offered, and I enjoy seeing the different children."

The Head Start program bases acceptance on income and/or special needs. The programs is designed to prepare children for kindergarten, and target children who may need more help in certain areas.

"You have to love children to do this job," said Laura Mercer who provides Head Start care in the Catlin Housing area. "This is not babysitting. We receive a lot of training through CDH and they target a lot of different topics that are age appropriate for these children." "Head Start teaches children to explore things and become more independent," she concluded.

CDH encourages providers to seek higher educations through their programs. Once modules and a certain amount of training are completed, a provider can take college classes and receive a Child Development Associate's degree.

"Navy child development also offers providers a chance to advance our education," said Banks. "We have Head Start providers which can further their profession if they chose. They can go on to teach preschool, or become an assistant teacher."

The Child Development Homes program cost goes by the family income and the program offers a subsidy to families who qualify.

Navy housing areas throughout Oahu offer homecare, but according to McLamb, there is a need for providers in the Naval Computer and Telecommunications Area Master Station (NCTAMS) and Camp Stover area. For more information about becoming a provider or to utilize the program, call 471-8444.



Eileen Banks helps two-year-old Alexis Olanegan wash her hands before snack-time.

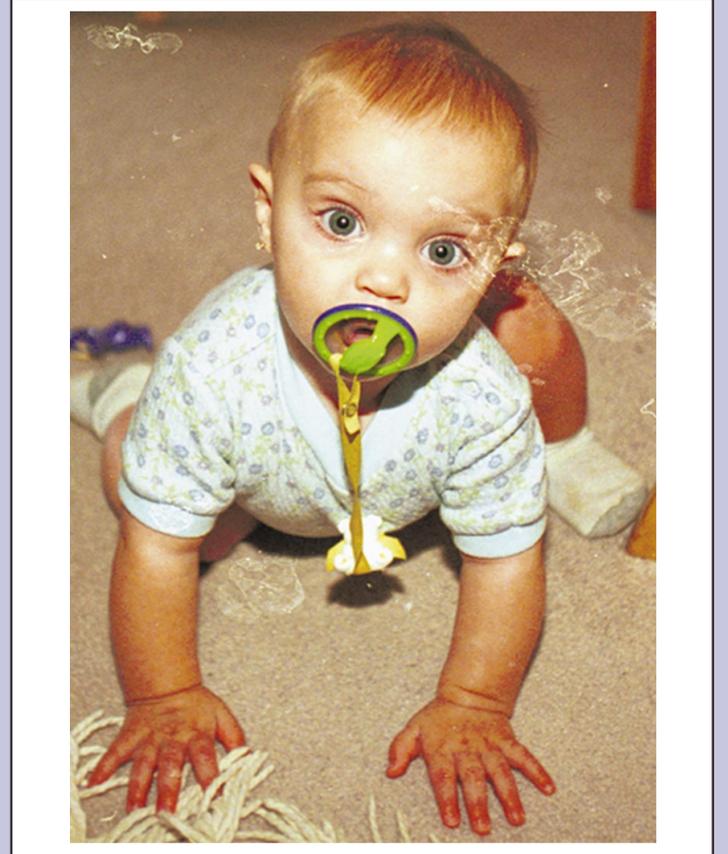


Three-year-old Jazmine Boatwright puts on her safety gear before going outside to ride bikes.



(Above) Two-year-old Kayla Conaster gets creative with a bottle of glue during an arts-and-crafts activity.

(Below) 9-month-old Julie Conaster practices her crawling techniques.



"You have to love children to do this job."

-Laura Mercer-
Head Start care provider

