

Military OneSource Podcast — CYF Come Grow With Us

Episode transcript

Intro voiceover:

Welcome to the Military OneSource podcast. Military OneSource is an official program of the Defense Department with tools, information and resources to help families navigate all aspects of military life. For more information, visit militaryonesource.mil.

Bruce Moody:

Welcome to the podcast. I'm Bruce Moody. Here's a fun fact you may not associate with the military. The Defense Department is the nation's largest employer-sponsored childcare system. We manage one of the largest youth programs in the country, and so within all of that, there's job opportunities. There are a variety of entry- and management-level positions with military-connected children and youth.

The Defense Department has a program, we'll talk about this program today. It offers meaningful employment opportunities to work in high-quality child development and youth program settings on or near military installations worldwide. This program is called Come Grow With Us. So, we're going to get into that program, Come Grow With Us, with our guests.

Today, we have with us Joy Goodrich and Kim Bleakley-Sias. Joy, let's begin with you. Why don't you introduce yourself?

Joy Goodrich:

Oh, hi. My name is Joy Goodrich. I work for Navy Child Youth Programs as a school liaison in Navy Region Southwest, and I've worked for Navy Child Youth Programs since about 2012. I've held numerous management and leadership positions throughout our organization and working for Navy Child and Youth Programs has been a full circle experience for myself. As a military child dependent of my parents, I was a customer and now here, as a spouse, I have been hired through military spouse preference and have worked for the military here for about 10 years now.

Bruce:

Well, thanks, Joy. It's good to have you on the program today. It sounds like you've been with the Navy longer than a lot of folks. So good to have you with us. Kim, welcome to the program and why don't you go ahead and introduce yourself.

Kim Bleakley-Sias:

Hi, Bruce. Well, my name is Kim Bleakley-Sias. I have had the privilege to work for Army Child and Youth Services here at Fort Hood for about 22 years now as a program

operations specialist. And, like Joy, I started the program actually as a youth in the youth center program. So, kind of coming full circle as a patron of the program and now as a grateful employee.

Bruce:

Oh, that's fantastic. So, the both of you. Well, thank you so much. Growing up in the programs and now serving as adults, it's wonderful. This'll be a good conversation. Kim, why don't we just begin with you and I'll start it off with a really wide-open question, which is, why does the Defense Department find itself in the childcare and youth development business?

Kim:

So, that *is* a pretty wide-open question, Bruce, but the quick answer to that is just that the DOD is in the business to provide quality, safe and developmental childcare and youth programs. So, really the best customers in the world, which is our military and DOD civilian heroes.

Bruce:

Wonderful. And, obviously, as we said before, the childcare system, the youth program, it's huge. It's enormous. And with that, it's a large employment opportunity, which brings us to the Come Grow With Us initiative.

So, Joy, why don't you tell us a little bit about the Come Grow With Us initiative?

Joy:

The Come Grow With Us initiative is just that. There's a need within our programs for talented care providers and managers and we are actually putting on an initiative to bring that amazing, talented group of people on board to work with us both in entry-level and management-level positions.

Bruce:

Kim, why was the initiative developed?

Kim:

Bruce, I think it's just really to spread the word about the different types of career opportunities in child and youth programs within DOD. Oftentimes, you hear the words child and youth programs and you think just automatically childcare providers. Child and youth services programs within DOD are comprised of so much more than that.

You have positions that I call "behind the scenes" people, the people that make the program run just outside of that childcare space in general. You've got kitchen personnel, you've got maintenance, of course, managerial staff, administrative staff. It's really just to kind of spread the word about the different opportunities that people may not know exist within child and youth programs within the Defense Department.

Bruce:

OK, that's a really good point. I imagine it's the people that I see when I initially walk into the childcare center, but it's far beyond that. Kim, why don't you kind of get more into this. What are the different types of positions that are available?

Kim:

Within child and youth programs like I mentioned, there's just so many different opportunities that are available. If you have a passion, CYS pretty much has a position to kind of meet that passion or skillset that you have. We've got anything from custodial workers who provide safe and healthy environments for the children that we care for, on up to the child and youth services coordinator.

So, Bruce, just to kind of caveat, so, of course, I'm coming from an Army perspective. I've only ever worked for Army Child and Youth Services program, so it's really great to kind of have my partner in crime on the other side, with Joy just sharing her experience with Navy child and youth programs. With Army Child and Youth Services, we've got positions that a lot of people may not realize that are there. I do know that Joy works with the school liaison program on the Navy side of the house.

With Army Child and Youth Services, we have that same position at our installation levels. They partner with the school districts to really provide a bridge between the military family and that surrounding school district to make sure that that student's educational needs are met. We have staff within our child and adult care food program just to make sure that all of our USDA reimbursable paperwork is dress right, dress to make sure that we get our reimbursements as required.

We have training specialists that are with new staff really every step of the way throughout their CYS career because, once you get into what we call ratio, where you can actually provide direct care for the children that we serve, the training process doesn't stop there. The managerial staff and then the training staff are always holding our staff by the hand to kind of guide them through that journey among their career.

Bruce:

All right. And we appreciate the dress right dress term. And to make the program a little more purple, Joy, if you could jump in and maybe talk about the eligibility for some of these positions.

Joy:

People who are eligible to apply for the positions within child and youth programming are those who are looking to gain experience or have previous experience working with children. And that could be something as simple as having been a babysitter or even a camp counselor to having an education degree and having been a trained teacher. When it comes to our direct care staff, really the requirement is only a GED or a high school diploma because there is a very extensive in-house training program. We develop from within. It's a very rewarding career.

Anyone who's looking to have a career that's going to really give them that peace of mind that they are working toward a greater good for our service members, then this is the place for them.

Bruce:

Joy, when we're talking about who might be eligible, we're certainly looking at military spouses, but we're also looking at the kids of military families. Am I correct in saying that?

Joy:

Yes, most definitely. Children who have matriculated through our teen program and have graduated and are now looking to be a part of the programs as an employee, then they're eligible for hire as well.

Bruce:

Military-connected applicants, are they given any special consideration for positions?

Joy:

Yes, definitely. Both military spouses and veterans receive preference during the application process.

Bruce:

All right. Kim, I know we're talking about a lot of different positions, honestly more than I previously thought or really associated with childcare youth programs, but what would be some of the skills that would be needed for these kinds of positions?

Kim:

It really depends on the type of position that somebody's applying for. As Joy mentioned, our minimum requirements are 18 years of age with a high school diploma or GED. And, as Joy mentioned, we have our own in-house training program. It really just depends on the type of position you're looking for.

As you get into managerial type positions, of course, those come with positive education requirements that must be met as well as experience. But we really try to focus on what everybody brings to the table, especially during the interview process, to make sure that we're giving them a true picture of the day in the life of a child and youth program employee with, whether it be Army Child and Youth Services or, in Joy's case, with the Navy, but just making sure that we're setting them up for success right from the start as they're applying for those positions and interviewing for them so that they don't think coming in the door that, oh, well, it's just an easy babysitting job where I change diapers and wipe noses.

Defense Department childcare is definitely not just what we would consider to be quote, unquote "custodial childcare." It's very much the opposite where we have an adopted curriculum that's in place, there's lesson planning that's based on the individual

needs of the children. Just so many different plus ups when it comes to Defense Department childcare programs in relation to just babysitting.

Bruce:

OK. But to get there, and Joy, maybe you could help us out with this, but to get there, part of the Come Grow With Us initiative, as I understand it, is not merely hiring, but training. And you alluded to this earlier, but maybe you could talk about this a little bit more. It's not merely people coming through the door. Once they're there this particular initiative gets people training to prepare them for their positions. Am I correct in saying that?

Joy:

Well, this initiative kind of supports what's already being done within child and youth programming. We have very extensive training just because of the nature of our career field. All of our employees go through an extensive orientation process, and then they're required to do monthly training hours and curriculum development hours, as well as annual trainings. They're usually receiving trainings in CPR, first aid certification. They're getting training on their curriculum development skills as well as development tracking for the youth and children that they take care of. They're also given the opportunity should they want to, to apply for our child development associate and middle-school age accrediting certificates. And then they're also given the opportunity to develop their leadership skills through our coaching courses, as well as through our STAR service here with the Navy.

Bruce:

OK, very interesting. Now, what about some of the benefits, Kim, if you want to take this, some of the benefits and also, are there incentives available to military spouses who choose a career with child development or youth programs?

Kim:

Some of the benefits as it relates to just working with child and youth services programs in general is just the ability to transfer your CYS career upon any type of permanent change of station move. Army Child and Youth Services has a campaign called Stay CYS, which allows, whether you're a childcare provider, an administrative support assistant through the civilian employee assignment tool or the CEAT program, it allows staff that are currently in a position within Child and Youth Services, certain eligible staff to request a non-competitive transfer to another Army installation where that same position may be available. So, it really helps you. We always want to kind of grow our own and what better way to do that and share with the next Army installation than allowing that process to transfer between one installation to another to be as smooth as possible and that's actually made possible through the CEAT program?

Bruce:

OK. But if somebody is transferring overseas. Right. Are there positions within child development and youth programs to be found overseas?

Kim:

Yes, and I'm actually jealous of those who have the opportunity to work overseas. There are positions in Europe, Germany, Italy and the Asia-Pacific, like Korea and Hawaii. I mean, just to name a few. But I mean, could you imagine the amazing weekend trip opportunities above and beyond just having a rewarding career Monday through Friday?

Bruce:

Absolutely, there's a lot of interesting places to be posted, of course. So how do you find them, right? I guess that would be my next question. What are your tools for interested candidates when they're looking for open positions?

Kim:

For child and youth programs, usajobs.gov is the go-to for any type of position listing within DOD child and youth programs. What's pretty unique about the usajobs.gov platform is that you're able to go on and register and actually set up your account, upload your supporting documents, upload your resume so that whenever a position does become available, it's really just a few clicks of your mouse and you've actually submitted your application and resume for consideration.

Bruce:

Yeah. They recently redid the whole websites. It's a pretty powerful tool. So that's good to know, good to know. Joy, how about the benefits? Talk to us a little bit about the benefits of working for the DOD, specifically within child and youth programs.

Joy:

Well, there are a lot of amazing benefits. One of them just being that you really are having a rewarding career within the service that you choose to work for. But, of course, there's health and life insurance, paid vacation, sick leave, 401(k) benefits, there's tuition assistance, which is amazing. It allows our staff to be able to develop and get the career path and the degree that they'd like within that childcare field. There are numerous opportunities for training, mentoring and professional development, as well as career advancement opportunities and being able to promote from within.

In addition to that, of course, kind of going off of what was discussed earlier with the career transfer and flexibility options, being a military spouse, I've used it numerous times to be able to transfer from duty station to duty station and not have any kind of negative effect on my benefits and my retention or my years of service.

Bruce:

This has been a really interesting conversation because this is a conversation about a job, a career field that is just so much more than a job, job, if you will. So, I want to hear

from each of you when it comes to working in child development and youth programs, and I'll even extend that. To go from being in the youth programs and then working in child development and youth programs, what does that really mean to you personally? Kim, let's start with you.

Kim:

Well, for me, it's really the ability to affect change. Being a positive influence in the lives of a child or a youth and even so far as to just family members in general. And it really transfers to any position that you have within child and youth programs.

As I mentioned before, there's a pretty big spotlight on childcare staff, but also wanted to kind of spotlight those behind-the-scenes staff. If you're a cook in the kitchen, you're exposing children and youth to healthy nutrition that they may not necessarily have the exposure to at home. We talked briefly about school liaison officers and partnering with parents to provide that smooth path to transfer their student between Army installations when they PCS all the way up to the administrative support assistance, who work with a parent to navigate militarychildcare.com to get their child on the wait list for care.

Speaking personally, for me, it's more than a job and I think I started working in Army child and youth programs when I was 19, pretty much just a year after I exited the program as a youth, as a customer of the program. It helped me to kind of shape my idea of what a career really is within the program. Being young and 19, I had absolutely no idea what a career was at the time, but I've been afforded many opportunities, specifically Fort Hood Child and Youth Services, to advance my career to the point that I'm a program operations specialist now. It really helps to put things in perspective of you're here to do a job, but you're doing a job that's extremely important. Coming in the door every morning, affecting that change in people's lives.

Bruce:

That's wonderful. Joy, let's hear from you with regard to working for youth programs and child development.

Joy:

When it comes to my career with child and youth programs, again, it really has been a full circle experience having been brought up and attended CDC school-age programming and youth programming, and then coming on board to work as a staff member years later.

All I can say really is, when you work for child and youth programs, you really do have an impact as an employee on our military families. Like a really, really direct impact to military families and their ability to thrive and strive at their duty station. And it's so rewarding to see the relief on a service member's face when they've been able to secure their care for their baby, their child or their school-aged youth. And just knowing that they have that security throughout the day and that their child is being cared for and being developed, and that program is also willing to work with them as a service

member or a spouse to make sure that the development is happening and that they're in the know as to what's going on with their child throughout the day.

Bruce:

Well, that's wonderful and I really appreciate the opportunity to talk with the both of you about the Come Grow With Us initiative. We have a link to this program; it's in the program notes, so go ahead and have a look at it. And I want to thank our guests very much for joining us today.

I want to remind you that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department. We're a website, we're a call center, we're all over social media, and now we're a podcast covering all sorts of topics to help military families navigate military life. So please subscribe.

I'm Bruce Moody. Thanks for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.