

Military OneSource Podcast Transcript — Child Care in Your Home Fee Assistance Program

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. Child care. It's a critical need for all military families. It's so critical. If you need it, you know it. So the question really is where can we find safe and reliable child care?

The Defense Department has a number of programs. We're going to focus on one of them today, and it's called Child Care in Your Home Fee Assistance. It's a pilot program, and we're going to get into it with my guest today, who is Marcie George. Marcie is Program Analyst for Children, Youth, and Families with Military Community and Family Policy. Marcie, it's great to have you with us. Welcome to the podcast.

Marcie George:

Thank you, Bruce. I'm so excited to be here, and I really thank you for inviting me to speak about this program.

Bruce Moody:

Yeah, this is a really important topic. And as we talk, I would like listeners to know that we welcome your comments. We have a link in the program notes. You can send us your comments about what you're hearing today. If you have any questions about what you're hearing, just jump in there and send us a note. So, Marcie, before we get rolling on this, why don't you tell us a little bit about you and the work that you do?

Marcie George:

Well, thank you, Bruce. Our office develops the policy for the department's child and youth programs, such as the child development programs, school age care, youth programs, and the school support and school liaison programs.

We also provide operational oversight, providing support for the Air Force, the Space Force, the Army, Navy, and the Marine Corps' child and youth programs. We continue to work on various child and youth program initiatives, such as the program we are discussing today, the Child Care in Your Home Pilot Program.

Bruce Moody:

Of course, yeah. Excellent. So specifically, this program that we're talking about is Child Care in Your Home Fee Assistance. So tell us a little bit about this.

Marcie George:

Well, Bruce, this is a pilot program that the Department of Defense is helping military families cover the cost of full-time child care when the care is happening in the military family's home. So this program is not limited to the traditional hours that we normally see in our child care programs, like through Monday through Friday or the time of day, but it's also allows for flexibility for the in-home child care provider or a nanny to be used for rotational shifts and perhaps weekend care, to help meet those non-traditional schedules that our military families often work. It also includes the parents that are working full-time from home. So we try to encompass all of the families with their child care needs through this pilot program.

Bruce Moody:

Well, that sounds great, because work schedules in the military are far from traditional.

Marcie George:

Yes.

Bruce Moody:

So tell us, Marcie, how is this program different from other Department of Defense child care programs?

Marcie George:

Well, this is a very new program for us, and it's very different from our other child care programs because the parents are actually the employers of their child care providers. And so, the care is provided in the military family's home.

So this is so new to us. But this means that the parents must find and hire and employ their child care provider that best meets their own child care needs. So it puts the parent in the driver's seat, basically. But the parents also need to become familiar with their state laws because they serve as the employer of their child care provider.

Bruce Moody:

Okay. So how does the actual pilot operate?

Marcie George:

The pilot is very similar to our other community-based child care fee assistance program which is currently in place to serve our service members. So Child Care Aware of America is our third-party contractor that administers the programs. And what that means is Child Care Aware of America helps verify the service member and the provider's eligibility. They distribute the fee assistance payments to the approved child care providers.

They also ensure that the providers have successfully completed their background checks and training requirements. And then importantly, they provide information to the parents to help them with employing their providers, such as providing some information about tax information and things that they need to know as an employer. And they point them in the right direction, like to Military OneSource.

Bruce Moody:

So Marcie, as we're talking about this, why was this particular program developed?

Marcie George:

Well, thank you for asking. The Department of Defense really views child care as a workforce enabler, and this helps them. It directly impacts the readiness, the efficiency, and the retention of our total force. And that's so important.

So to help expand child care needs and meet the needs of our military families, DOD implemented this fee assistance program for full-time child care. And it also came about through the National Defense Authorization Act of fiscal year 2021, where they initiated the requirement under Section 589 establishing a pilot program to provide fee assistance to the military who pay for their in-home child care providers.

Bruce Moody:

Okay. And as we've discussed, this is a pilot. Marcie, where is the program available?

Marcie George:

Well, during pilot year one, the program was available in five locations. And for year two, it was expanded to six additional locations. So the Child Care in Your Home program is currently available in 11 locations where there is the highest demand for child care. And these locations are the National Capital Region; Hawaii; Norfolk, Virginia; San Antonio, Texas; San Diego, California; Colorado Springs, Colorado; Fayetteville, North Carolina; Jacksonville Mayport, Florida; Fort Walton Beach, Florida; Las Vegas, Nevada; and Seattle-Tacoma, Washington.

Bruce Moody:

Right. So for those who are keeping track of this list, it may be a short list, but these are huge military populations, so a lot of people are going to be eligible for this program. So with that, let's get into the eligibility. Who is eligible to participate in this program?

Marcie George:

Well, military families that are serving in the pilot regions, those 11 regions that I mentioned, are eligible, if they are single in dual active duty service members, single or dual guard or reserve members on active duty, active duty service members with a full-time working spouse, guard and reserve members on active duty with a full-time working spouse, and then active duty members that include the reserve component personnel that are on active duty with a spouse that's enrolled on a full-time basis in a post-secondary institution. So if they're going to college to expand their degree or to expand their education.

Bruce Moody:

And Marcie, as you mentioned before, a lot of how this program works is in putting a lot of these decisions in the hands of parents. So as they're moving forward on this, I think it's important for them to understand who can be hired to provide in-home child care.

Marcie George:

Yes, and that's really important as well. So the requirements are very similar to our Installation Child and Youth Program staff. The Child Care In Your Home providers may be US citizens or legal permanent residents. They must be at least 18 years of age. They must hold a high school diploma or equivalent, have the ability to read, speak, and write English, and comply with all applicable employment laws, to include the income tax implications.

But also the provider may be a family member. And this is a new category of eligibility for our providers that we added in our second year. So a family member is a grandparent, an aunt, an uncle, an older sibling, a cousin, a niece, or a nephew. However, the family member may not live or be financially dependent on the parent.

And then other things with the providers is that the provider, even if they're pre-selected or they're related to the family, the provider must complete all the training and background check requirements. And then the providers, to include family members that are serving as the child care providers, they may not care for their own children in the service member's home where the child care is provided.

Bruce Moody:

Okay. Well, I have to say that's really cool. Hiring your mom to be the child care provider. And suddenly you're your mom's boss. And that may or may not work out for some family members, so they're out hiring child care providers. Does the Defense Department help families as they're hiring child care providers?

Marcie George:

Well, parents, Bruce, are actually responsible for finding and for selecting their in-home child care provider. But to help families find a provider, they may use the expanded child care services that are available at no cost through Military OneSource.

And another important note is that since parents are the employers of their providers, it's really important that the parents actually negotiate and execute a written agreement with our provider. And so, there's some information that's always available through militarychildcare.com and also through Child Care Aware of America to guide the parents through that process.

Bruce Moody:

Okay. So some of the resources you've just touched on, we'll get some links in the program notes, so specifically addressing that. So what is the process for background checks and ensuring family safety for service members who employ an in-home child care provider?

Marcie George:

Bruce, this is such an important piece, about the background checks. Background checks are required for each of our child care providers, and they're so similar to our installation staff requirements.

So Child Care Aware of America provides each child care provider applicant with information to obtain the necessary fingerprints and also submit the required background checks. And they actually have documents and information for each area that the provider may be located, so each of those 11 areas. So once the background checks are completed and returned, Child Care Aware of America is actually responsible for validating that the child care provider has successfully completed their background checks, and then they ensure that the background checks are favorably adjudicated.

Bruce Moody:

So my next question would be, where do families request care?

Marcie George:

This is a really great question. So to sign up for Child Care in Your Home, families must request care through militarychildcare.com. And this is the department's Request for Care system. So whenever families need to request child care, they should go to militarychildcare.com. It's important for families to understand, for the Child Care in Your Home Program, that the spaces for fee assistance are limited in each area, so wherever the pilot is offered. So it's important that if they're interested and they need to request care, that they request care through militarychildcare.com.

And one other note is that even when parents are getting ready to PCS, they're changing, they're going to a permanent change of station and going to a new location, they should also know that they can request care through militarychildcare.com and look up their new Installation and put their name and request care under the care that whether it's a child development center or through this program or through any of our other programs.

Bruce Moody:

Now, Marcie, when we started talking about this, you were describing this as a program that's been around for a while. I understand we're in the second year of this pilot. So where are we now? Has DOD implemented any change with this program?

Marcie George:

Yes. As you mentioned, we're in the second year of a five-year pilot program, and we've made some changes. As I mentioned earlier, we've expanded to a total of 11 locations from the original five, and we've also included family members as being eligible to be providers.

But this year we also are providing families with the option to start their provider under something called provisional approval. And under provisional approval, sponsors may agree in writing to allow their provider to start caring for their child or children once the FBI fingerprint check is completed and favorably adjudicated. And the remaining background checks must be initiated upon the provider's application submission.

Now, the Child Care in Your Home provider must also agree in writing to submit and successfully complete all the required background checks and the orientation training. So those things are very important, but it's actually helped families speed through the process to start receiving fee assistance a little faster.

Bruce Moody:

Simple question that probably has a complex answer to it, but what is the amount of fee assistance that families will receive?

Marcie George:

Well, there are lots of variables that factor into the fee assistance amount. So for instance, the amount is based on what a family would pay if they were receiving care on the installation. And this is always based on their total family income. It's also based on the monthly rate the child care provider charges the family, and then the cumulative provider rate cap determined for fee assistance.

So when looking into this program, families should really work with Child Care Aware of America to figure out if the program actually works for them. And it's important for families to

understand that they are responsible for all the additional costs that the fee assistance does not cover. So Child Care Aware of America actually provides the families with information to help them understand the assistance.

Bruce Moody:

Well, Marcie, I really appreciate all this information. Is there anything else that you'd like to share with us about this program?

Marcie George:

Well, yes, I would. Families can also expect that the Child Care Aware of America will conduct quarterly site visits in the service member's home while the in-home child care provider is providing care and when the children are present as well, to ensure program compliance. And so, we feel that this assists us with the oversight of the program.

Bruce Moody:

So where can listeners find more information about the Child Care In Your Home Fee Assistance Program?

Marcie George:

Families can find out more information through militarychildcare.com or through Child Care Aware of America. And we're so excited about this program and we're continuing to work on ways to help educate families and provide them with more information about the Child Care In Your Home Pilot Program.

Bruce Moody:

Marcie, for service members who live outside the pilot program area, what are the options available to them?

Marcie George:

Bruce, there are various child care options. There are installation programs such as the Child Development Centers, family child care, and we also have Military Child Care in Your Neighborhood, MCCYN, which is the department's child care fee assistance program for military families using civilian providers in their local community. So the civilian providers must meet DOD requirements, which include state license with annual licensing agency inspections, employee background checks, and national accreditation.

Bruce Moody:

Now, there's a lot of information that we've covered, but there's more available. So where can listeners find additional information on other child care options?

Marcie George:

Well, our listeners may review the military child care programs article on Military OneSource. They may also contact Military OneSource directly by phone or set up a live chat to discuss the child care options. And then they may also visit militarychildcare.com to explore the military options available. And they may also visit childcareaware.org to visit the fee assistance options. And they may also reach out to their installation child and youth programs for more information.

Bruce Moody:

Marcie, I want to really thank you for joining us today.

Marcie George:

Bruce, may I also repeat some information? Because I just want to reiterate some information for our families.

Bruce Moody:

Of course. Of course. Go right ahead.

Marcie George:

Thank you. So it's so important for families and parents to understand that child care is their choice and it's personal and should meet their family needs. Also, for the Child Care in Your Home program, parents need to remember that they're the employers of their providers. So they're going to find, hire, and employ their provider.

And then parents must understand their responsibilities as being the employer. And then it's really important that they establish a written program agreement with their provider. So again, the families that are interested in the Child Care in Your Home Pilot Program, they can find out more information through Military OneSource, through militarychildcare.com and through Child Care Aware of America. So thank you for letting me take that time to just reiterate some of that information.

Bruce Moody:

Absolutely. Well, thank you. This is great information. Again, child care, it's just such a critical, critical issue. We appreciate you being with us today and hope you return.

Marcie George:

Thank you.

Bruce Moody:

Marcie George is a program analyst for Children, Youth, and Families with Military Community and Family Policy. Thanks for joining us today.

Want to remind you that Military OneSource is an official resource of the Defense Department, and we want to hear from you. So we have a link in our program notes. You can click on it and send us a question about what you heard today, maybe a comment or a suggestion for a topic that we can address in a future episode. And that we hope you'll subscribe to this podcast wherever you listen to your podcasts, because we cover a wide range of topics to help military families navigate military life. I'm Bruce Moody. Thank you so much for listening. Take care. Bye-bye.