

Corps improves quality of life for military families

What Sarah Cole enjoys most about the Child Development Center at Fort Stewart, Ga. is the bright colors. “It’s so cute,” said Cole, as the children’s excited screams and laughter echo around her. Cole, a military spouse, uses the center to provide hourly care for her 16-month-old son.

Like Cole, many military families call on the help of childcare facilities on military installations to care for their children. Family support facilities like these not only help to improve the quality of life for deserving military families who support Soldiers, but they also provide convincing incentives for Soldiers to continue their service.

With this in mind, more than \$145 million in construction projects in support of Soldiers and families are under way within the Savannah District. These facilities, which will support thousands of military families on six installations, uphold the Army Family Covenant, which pledges to improve the quality of life for Soldiers and families. Included are facilities such as Soldier and Family Assistance Centers, schools, and child development and youth centers.

Providing peace of mind

Since January 2009, the district has constructed four childcare facilities – one at Hunter Army Airfield, one at Fort Stewart, and two at Fort Benning. Several others are under construction at Hunter AAF, Forts Stewart, Bragg, Gordon, and Moody Air Force base.

Quian Huff, facility director of Indian Head Child Development Center at Fort Benning, said that childcare facilities on military installations help to accommodate the need for quality, convenient childcare.

“The last thing a Soldier needs to be worried about is their family when they are deployed,” said Huff. “Our facility provides them with peace of mind, so that they can focus on their mission, knowing that their child is in a safe environment.”

Child Development Centers on military installations typically provide care for children ages six weeks to five years, and strive to provide a stimulating environment where children can develop motor, cognitive, social, and emotional skills. The Savannah District builds the centers with this goal in mind. The childcare rooms at the centers also come equipped with child-sized sinks, toilets, and water fountains.

“These centers are not only visually appealing, but conducive to learning,” said Evelyn Egings-Alston,

facility assistant director, Child, Youth & School Services at Fort Stewart & Hunter Army Airfield.

At Fort Bragg, there are several family support projects underway to meet the demands of Soldiers and families arriving at the installation due to the Army’s stationing initiatives. In particular, childcare facilities and schools are in demand.

According to Michelle Peralta, Savannah District Project Manager for Schools and Child Development Centers at Fort Bragg, there are more than 17,700 school age dependents of Soldiers and civilians assigned to Fort Bragg eligible for care. Due to the influx of military families with school age dependents, there is a shortage of youth and childcare facilities. “The stationing initiatives are anticipated to create an additional requirement for facilities to accommodate 1,300 six-to-10 year olds,” said Peralta. “Currently, school age child development facilities are full with extended waiting lists.”



All Child Development Centers, like the one shown here at Fort Stewart, Ga., are equipped with a playground area. Each classroom has a private door that leads to the playground area, where sets of play equipment accommodate different age groups.



Education Specialist Janeen Rosenberg discusses bachelor's degree program options with Staff Sgt. Jaime Perez and Sgt. Juan Batista at the new Soldier and Family Assistance Center at Fort Stewart, Ga.

Convenience at a critical time

When Soldiers become ill, wounded, or injured, they need to rehabilitate in a supportive environment.

That's exactly the type of peace the new Soldier and Family Assistance Center at Fort Stewart strives to provide to Soldiers and their families, according to Diane Smith, director of the facility.

"Our facility provides a peaceful, supportive, and safe place for Soldiers to share stories and express what's on their mind," said Smith.

The district completed the 15,000 square-foot center in June, and plans to award two more contracts this year for similar facilities at Forts Benning and Bragg. Designed to complement Warrior in Transition units, Soldier and Family Assistance Centers provide a "one-stop location" for support to family members who are caring for ill, injured, or wounded Soldiers who are transitioning back to military or civilian life.

The center's staff provides guidance, assistance, and information on finances, child care, family advocacy, military personnel issues, legal assistance, and a variety of other support services. The facilities "one-stop shopping" helps speed the recovery of Warriors in Transition and aids their families.

With a kitchen, computer lab, childcare room, playground, and fireplace-equipped sitting area on site, Smith says that the center provides a relaxing place for families to come and seek the services they need.

Sgt. Tracy J. Smith, A Company, Warrior in Transition Battalion, says that she loves the resources available at the center. "I love the people, and it's one of those places where you go to find your niche, and discover what you want to do. Whether its obtaining a degree or legal advice, the resources are here, but you have to fully embrace them," said Smith.

Building quality schools

In addition to youth and childcare facilities and Soldier and Family Assistance Centers, the district also has several construction projects under way for schools at Fort Bragg, N.C.

A new elementary and a middle school, both under way in the Linden Oaks area of Fort Bragg, will open next to the new family housing.

At 123,616 square feet, the elementary school will serve 714 students, pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. The middle school, approximately 99,300 square feet, will serve 550 students in the sixth through eighth grade. Located on one site, the schools will share a cafeteria and parking lot.

The Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) Domestic and Dependent Elementary and Secondary Schools (DDESS) will operate both facilities. Their designs meet DoDEA standards. With a comprehensive pre-kindergarten through 12th grade curriculum, DoDEA schools serve the children of military service members and eligible Department of Defense Civilian employees throughout the world.

"Military families place a high emphasis on their child's education, so they look at our schools as one of the benefits available for their families," said Cindy Gibson, DoDEA/DDESS public affairs officer. "Our teachers and staff truly appreciate the unique challenges military children face with deployments, separations and the transitions of moving."

The facilities that the district constructs for military families play a vital role in the support of Soldiers and the sustainment of the Army.

"It is an honor to provide these facilities to our Soldiers and families who have given so much to this country," said Peralta. "They deserve the very best." 

By Rashida Banks, Corporate Communications Office

Department of Public Works Installation Support Program of the Year

Because of outstanding support provided to Forts Benning and Bragg, the Savannah District was selected as the 2009 Department of Public Works Installation Support Program of the Year, by the U.S. Army Installation Management Command. In three of the past five years, the Savannah District has received this award — the Army's highest satisfaction rating among engineering agencies supporting the military — a testament to its dedication to Soldiers.