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News

Midlothian Woman Helps Expand Childcare Options At DSCR

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Published: September 18, 2009

By Stephen J. Baker, DSCR Public Affairs

For more than 17 years, Martina Shipman has looked after the well-being of military and civilian children in Germany, Korea, Japan and the United States. Today, she brings her worldly experience to bear at Defense Supply Center Richmond as its new child and youth services coordinator.

With fewer than two months on the job, the new Midlothian resident is tackling the challenge of creating more off-site childcare opportunities for DSCR parents. She said the families in need of help are those whose children are in before- or after-school programs, or are on a waiting list for the Bettye Ackerman-Cobb Child Development Center here. The center's capacity is currently maxed out at 72 children, ranging from 6 weeks to 5 years in age.

"Right now, we only have one off-site contract," Shipman said. The contract is with Rainbow Station, which provides care for infants and toddlers – the group with the longest waiting list at Bettye Ackerman-Cobb – and school-age children. "We pay a portion of [the parents'] child care so they don't have to pay the full rate."

Shipman is already working with directors at other centers in the Richmond area to establish new contracts so more parents at DSCR can benefit from similar support. She is also seeking input from parents in the form of an online survey. "It's so we can find out where the need is as far as childcare and after-school programs," she said.

In early August, Shipman arrived in Richmond with three children of her own. Her youngest two are enrolled at another daycare facility where she must pay full price, even though they are on the waiting list at DSCR. "I understand what parents are going through, and I think setting up those contracts will help a great deal," she said.

Another potential source of relief for parents with children on the waiting list is the possibility that Bettye Ackerman-Cobb will be expanded through a special authorization in the National Defense Authorization Act allowing for such construction work on child development centers at government installations.

"We're looking at an expansion to 120 children – expanding the existing 9,057 square feet by about 5,000 feet for a total of 14,057 square feet," said Ray Hall, facilities manager at DSCR, adding that a firm timetable has not yet been set.

One of Shipman's other responsibilities is to oversee DSCR's contract with KinderCare Learning Corp., which has 24 employees serving as the staff at the child development center. She regularly tours it to make sure quality standards are met in a variety of areas, including educational programming, recreation, health and sanitation.

"If I go in the kitchen and see that the temperature in the refrigerator is not correct, or they're not storing frozen items correctly, that is something I will mention," Shipman said. "I actually look at the overall program when I walk through. Sometimes I focus on a certain thing. It might be outdoor playing, making sure they're engaging children and bringing activities outside for them."

Overall, Shipman said Bettye Ackerman-Cobb is a great, well-run center.



Martina Shipman, DSCR's new child and youth services coordinator, will play a pivotal role in helping more parents at DSCR and tenant commands benefit from the Child and Youth Services Program. Here at DSCR's Bettye Ackerman-Cobb Child Development Center, she also helps ensure children are receiving top quality care. | Photo by Stephen J. Baker

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"It can be a challenge finding a quality child development center," Shipman said. "Parents are happy to be part of a government-operated program, as the standard of care is usually much higher than anywhere else. I just want them to stay happy once they get their children in here."

To that end, Shipman – who also oversees central registration – sometimes acts as an intermediary between parents and the center's staff.

"If there's a parent who wants to talk about an issue and doesn't feel comfortable talking to the director about it, I can serve as a liaison between the two," Shipman said. "But parents should really contact the director first with any concerns."

"It's very vital to a successful program to have Martina here in place," said Kenya Laceywell, director of Bettye Ackerman-Cobb, adding that Shipman is also a liaison between her staff and the government. "She can help with a lot of the verbiage and translate a lot of the things that might not be so common to us."

While much of Shipman's new position centers on contract oversight, her resume is rich with experience in childcare and education under the Army, Air Force, and private institutions. "I have worked as a director, as an assistant director, as a coordinator, as a trainer, and I used to oversee family childcare homes," she said.

Under her direction, four child development centers and one school-age center were accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Her most recent position was as director of the University of Alabama at Birmingham Child Development Center, where she supervised a staff of 45 and also worked directly with children.

"That's going to be my biggest challenge here – not being able to sit down and interact with the kids," Shipman said. "I'm just a big kid at heart, and still am. I enjoy working with children and feel like I can reach them."

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