

New PATCH program offers respite care for EFMP families

Story and photo by

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The National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA) partnered with the U.S. Navy earlier this month to launch a new program that will provide respite care to Navy families with children with special needs.

The NACCRRA and Navy Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) Respite Care program serves Navy families based in Hawai'i.

People Attentive to Children (PATCH) is the local agency handling the program for NACCRRA and will be responsible for administering EFMP respite care to Navy families who have family members with exceptional needs.

"Navy families lead a stressful lifestyle to begin with and that stress can be increased when caring for a special needs child," said Jill Marini, Oahu family child care recruiter at PATCH. "This program offers not only care, but quality care."

The new respite care program allows parents of EFMP children up to 40 hours of respite care a month.

According to Marini, specially trained providers are paired up with EFMP families, based on the individual needs of each family, to offer respite care not only for the EFMP child, but also for his or her siblings.

"[The program] allows the parent to leave their child, knowing that the provider is equipped to deal with their child's particular needs, and allows them some much needed time to take for themselves," said Marini.

Patricia Van Sickle said her family was recently matched up with a respite care provider and already she has seen a dramatic difference in her family, which includes four daughters under the age of 10.

"It has been a week and a half now and I [already] call her my miracle worker," said Van Sickle, who has one autistic daughter. "She is so helpful and I am able to get a break and enjoy my kids a lot more. The other day I was able to get a haircut for the first time [in months] and go to my mom's groups where I can socialize and advocate for my causes," she added.

Van Sickle, whose husband is currently deployed with USS Chung Hoon (DDG-93), said that every month she checks her calendar and budgets her allotted hours around school meetings, running errands or other social activities.

"This program is a huge stress reliever for me because not only am I getting a break from the kids, they are getting a break from me," she explained. "It is not only hard to find a [babysitter] for an evening, but also one who understands the challenges that surround a child with special needs. Jessica [the provider] not only knows what to expect, but I feel comfortable leaving all my kids in her care," she added.

Jessica Sells, respite care provider for the Van Sickle family, said she felt compelled to offer her services and give back to the military community by participating in this new program.

"I wanted to give back to children with disabilities and help families dealing with a parent or family member who is gone [on deployments]," she said. "A lot of military families don't want to admit or accept help because they are used to doing everything on their own. [But] with kids, sometimes, you can't do everything on your own and you have to take any kind of help you can get," she added.

Sells also noted that as a Navy spouse, she personally understands the plight of the military family.

"I have worked with [other] children with autism before and with large [military] families so I know how hard it is to have a family member gone and still [look after] children with disabilities," she said. "Because of my military background, I understand the [stress] of military [lifestyle] can have on your family."

Marini said all respite care providers have experience with special needs children and undergo extensive fingerprinting and background checks as well as have special training and certifications, such as CPR and first aid.

To be eligible for the respite care program, Navy families must be enrolled in the EFMP program, have a child up to 18 years of age who is designated as category IV or V, which includes being diagnosed with a long-term chronic medical, psychological or educational disability.

Families who are interested in the respite care program should contact NACCRRRA at 800-424-2246 or visit <http://www.naccrra.org/MilitaryPrograms/navy.php>. NACCRRRA will complete all approval forms and forward them to the PATCH program in Hawai'i for them to contact the approved family and begin the local intake process.

For more information about the EFMP respite care program, visit www.naccrra.org/MilitaryPrograms/NavyEFMP/.