

Taking care: providing child care during the pandemic

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Last year, all three missile wings, located at F. E. Warren Air Force Base, Wyoming, Malmstrom AFB, Montana and Minot AFB, North Dakota, had to make operational adjustments due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of completing the regular one to four day alerts to the missile field, missileers, maintainers, defenders, facility managers and chefs, switched to extended alerts and remained in the field for periods of seven to 14 days.

This adjustment came with logistical challenges, especially for single parents. Thankfully, the Child and Youth Programs flights already had programs in place to assist parents who regularly deploy to the missile field for extended periods.

Missile Care, which falls under the Air Force's Expanded Child Care program, is designed to provide overnight, weekend and holiday child care for those members assigned to work more than 24 hours in the missile field.

"Expanded child care, child care beyond the needs of regular child care, are at no cost to the members whose children are enrolled full time in a regular care, either at the Child Development Center on base or off base care," said Mary Jacobsen, Child and Youth Services Flight Chief at the 90th Missile Wing at F. E. Warren AFB.

Expanded child care is provided by Family Child Care providers at each missile wing. FCC providers are military spouses and families who work through a series of

trainings, background checks and certifications to open a licensed daycare in their homes. They set their own hours and rates, and can opt in to provide care overnight or on the weekends and holidays, when typical daycares are closed. The program, however, depends largely on the availability of providers at each missile wing. In a scenario where care isn't available on base, the community child care coordinators have plans in place to assist families.

"When we don't have availability for childcare with our on base providers, I work with the resource and referral office for the state of Wyoming," said Joyce Cisneros, Community Child Care Coordinator at the 90th Missile Wing at F. E. Warren AFB. "They license programs and FCC homes off base. The office shares the list of off base providers and I share it with families as need be."

Minot CYP has been successful in meeting the demands of Missile Care and provide care for each family who has applied for the programs.

"If for some reason we are not able to find a provider, there are resources in town to include state providers and other child care programs," said Kelly Pringle, Community Child Care Coordinator at Minot AFB. "We really push to ensure each family has care available so they can take advantage of these Air Force programs that are free of cost for the member when approved."

The number of families who utilize Missile Care isn't high,

but it provides a peace of mind to those parents who serve up to seven days in the missile field. Currently, three families at F. E. Warren AFB utilize the programs; eight families at Minot AFB; and three families at Malmstrom AFB.

"All families have care lined up to allow them to focus on the mission," said Pringle. "We are very proud to say we have never turned a family away from these after-hours programs and will continue to strive to meet each family's care needs."

"All of our FCC providers are amazing. They do so much to take care of the children, even if it's last minute," said Jacobsen.

These programs were able to continue providing childcare for Airmen deploying to the missile field without skipping a beat, even during a worldwide pandemic. But the programs also saw many changes. Those changes were implemented at CYP facilities across all the missile wings. At Minot AFB, the School Age Center accommodated Minot public school students who were distance learning by offering quiet spaces, laptops and additional support to ensure education was the primary focus for the students.

"Child Development Centers also reduced class sizes, including structured grouping and activities," said Pringle. "SAC implemented cohorts to accommodate the multiple base schools that utilize the program. This reduced the risk of direct

contact with COVID-19."

Malmstrom also made similar changes. Because some families chose to keep their children home to do remote learning, this created a need for care in FCC homes for school-age children.

"FCC providers were able to support remote learning by ensuring the children had access and stayed on schedule with their classes," said Shevaun Holum, community care coordinator at the 341st Missile Wing at Malmstrom AFB.

Daily health checks and screenings, additional cleaning schedules, and adjusting or stopping certain activities was also implemented at all programs across 20th Air Force.

"Activities like family style dining, sensory and water play were all stopped to help stop the spread and reduce chances of transmission of the disease," said Jacobsen.

At Minot AFB, the FCC training program was restructured to allow new providers training virtually.

"This ensured necessary training was provided and care continued," said Pringle. "Over 22 licenses have been approved to include renewals as well since April of 2020, showing COVID-19 did not stop FCC from training and bringing on new providers to meet the demands of the mission."

Although the demand for FCC providers and child care is high, all three missile wings have noticed an increase in staffing challenges, some due to COVID-19 and others due to the applicant pool being small.

"COVID-19 impacted child care both on and off the installation and communities are still trying to recover in the child care field due to lack of employees available to provide care," said Holum.

If you are interested in becoming a licensed FCC provider or have questions about the child care offered at your base, reach out to your base's community childcare coordinator for more information.

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A LOOK BACK THIS WEEK IN USAF HISTORY

OPERATION NEW TAPE
JULY 8, 1960



USAF C-130 from the 40th Tactical Airlift Squadron loads up Swedish troops who were deployed to Congo on July 20, 1960. (UN Photo)

In 1960, the Belgian Congo, a colony in West Central Africa, was granted independence and became the Republic of the Congo. Due to a power-sharing struggle between two opposing political parties and continuing unrest, a civil war broke out. The United Nations deployed troops to help keep the peace as the nation was torn apart. In order to evacuate refugees from the Belgian colony, Operation NEW TAPE began on July 8, 1960. The operation evacuated over 300 American civilians, delivered more UN troops, and flew other humanitarian relief missions. USAF in Europe provided medical air support. The 317th Tactical Hospital Detachment from Evreux Air Base, France, even set up a dispensary. C-130s and C-124s from various American and European squadrons were used to airlift over 1,000 tons of food and over 2,500 refugees. Operation NEW TAPE lasted four years and at the time, became the biggest airlift since the Berlin Airlift.

Information courtesy of: media.defense.gov / airforcemedicine.af.mil / air.museum / arsof-history.org



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