

U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army

contact: paoci@eur.army.mil
phone: 49-6221-57-5815 / DSN 370-5815
fax: 49-6221-57-6376 / DSN 370-6376



RELEASE #2007-12-20-05

Dec. 20, 2007

FAMILY CHILD CARE PROVIDERS GIVE PARENTS GREATER FLEXIBILITY, EXTRA SOLUTIONS

By Sgt. Aimee Millham

U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs Office

HEIDELBERG, Germany -- Single parent Carlen Finch has an aversion to institutionalized child care, so when it came time for her to return to work after the birth of her daughter she turned to Heidelberg's Family Child Care program.



SGT AIMEE MILLHAM

Family Child Care provider Melody Atkinson reads to Zoe Finch, 1, and Lexa Eschenburg, 15 months, in her home Dec. 20.

"I was thinking if I can't find an FCC provider, I'll have to quit my job and go Stateside," the Mark Twain Village Elementary School teacher said, adding, "Of course that's not an option for me, so Melody (Atkinson) has truly been a blessing."

Atkinson is one of 16 FCC providers in the Heidelberg military community, and together they each offer working parents an at-home child care alternative to the community's Child Development Center.

"When I walk into Melody's home, it feels like I'm walking into my own home," said Finch, who refers to Atkinson as her 1-year-old daughter's "day mom."

The FCC program, part of Child and Youth Services, is available to military personnel and family members, and Department of Defense civilian employees and contractors. Fees for care are based on the total family income.

Besides providing a home away from home, the program's appeal is its flexibility, said Merenda Haynes, U.S. Army Garrison-Heidelberg Family Child Care program director.

Most homes offer care from 5:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., and special services may include 24-hour and long-term care during training exercises, evening and weekend care, and care for children with special needs.



SGT AIMEE MILLHAM

Family Child Care provider Melody Atkinson keeps this play room for the children she cares for in her home.

FCC homes are generally restricted to the care of six children at one time, with a maximum of two children under the age of two. Any of the FCC provider's own children under age eight count as part of the six-child maximum, Haynes said. Homes exclusively caring for children from four weeks to two years old can serve a maximum of three children.

This more individual care allows providers to know the children as well as the parents do, Haynes said.

“(Atkinson) reinforces everything I teach Zoe at home, and whenever I pick her up or drop her off, she always has a smile on her face,” Finch said.

Once qualified applicants are selected to become providers, they and their homes must meet specific requirements related to health, fire prevention, safety and child development programming, and are certified by the installation, according to the Army FCC Web site. Also, providers pass stringent background checks and inspections, and are regularly visited and inspected by FCC, CYS and installation representatives.

“These are not just babysitters,” Haynes said.

Applicants selected to become FCC providers receive 40 hours of instruction on topics including identifying and reporting child abuse, first aid and CPR, fire prevention, safety measures, business practices and developmentally appropriate practices.

“I wanted to become everything that I looked for in child care,” said Atkinson, who has been in childcare since 1997.

Finch says she has succeeded, and the Heidelberg community could use more like her.

For more information on the Heidelberg FCC program, call Haynes at 388-9378.



www.hqusareur.army.mil