

Are my children safe and secure? Yes -- at CYSS, Carlisle Barracks

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March 3, 2012 -- When the garrison commander says that the Child Development Center and Youth Services at Carlisle Barracks are safe and secure environments, he can base his assessment on a great deal of evidence.

“Parents can be confident in Carlisle Barracks’ responsibility and ability to create a safe environment for the children of our service members and civilians,” said Lt. Col. Bill McDonough. “As commander, I have confidence in the employees, policies and procedures of our Youth Center, Child Development Center and Chapel at Carlisle Barracks, and the Child Development Center at Letterkenny Army Depot.

“According to the results of two Army audits, the Army is equally confident in our ability to serve our community with safe child development services.”

The CDC and YS operations here have been inspected by the Army Audit Agency and the DA Inspector General’s office within the first two months of 2013. Those audits reinforced, in great detail, what leaders here routinely learn through a tough and regular inspection program.

Four types of operational CDC and YS inspections happen annually: an unannounced inspection by the Installation Management Command; an annual self-inspection; unannounced monthly inspections by military public health staff of both Dunham Army Health Clinic and the U.S. Army Public Health Command; and safety and fire inspections by Carlisle Barracks Fire Services personnel.

Additionally, we are subject to unannounced inspections, as happened last Summer, by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The independent, non-DoD national organization re-accredits the CDC every 5 years, reviewing the hiring practices, curriculum and overall management of the centers. School-age care facilities are accredited by the Council on Accreditation.

“Overall, we are scrutinized and doubly inspected, and our CYSS programs fare well in the scrutiny,” said Liz Knouse, who provides management oversight to the CYSS programs.

Two additional reviews this year: AAA and DA-IG inspections

In mid December 2012, the Department of the Army announced the start of an investigation of personnel procedures at the Army’s child development centers after a review of personnel records at one of two CDCs at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall found information in the background checks of some employees that raised concerns about their suitability for employment in a childcare environment.

Following the initial findings at the Virginia base, Secretary of the Army John McHugh directed an Army-wide review of management and procedures at child care centers, and review of compliance with those policies and procedures. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta directed each service to conduct a similar review of hiring practices.

“Military children are precious members of our DoD family. As a department, protecting our service members and their families is paramount. That includes doing everything we can to provide for the safety of children attending CDCs throughout the department, and ensuring they are provided with the highest quality care by dedicated professionals,” said Panetta in December. “We owe nothing less to the members of our DoD family who have sacrificed so much for this department and this nation.”

As a first step, every garrison was tasked to verify the completion of 100 percent of employee background investigations of CDC personnel. Carlisle Barracks completed the action in December.

During a weeklong visit in January, the AAA audit team verified records of background checks during a weeklong visit in January, and assisted in introducing processes that will ensure uniformity across all Defense Department child development centers. Background checks went well with no derogatory information, according to McDonough.

In February, the DA Inspector General team gave reviews and guidance to the Child, Youth and School Services program, as well as the Chapel.

Carlisle Barracks contributes CDC expertise

Each team of IG inspectors is augmented by one CYSS expert and local CDC director Mel Irwin is one of them – first, training at the Pentagon and, then, inspecting facilities through the end of March.

“This is huge for us,” said Knouse. “Any time there are sweeping changes, it’s tremendously helpful for us to be on the ground floor of potential changes,” she said about Irwin’s participation on the DA team.

“She was nominated by headquarters CYYs folks because she has had flawless inspections at CDC and the YS throughout her career. In fact, she was director of one of the first CDCs to be accredited, in 1992.

The Myer case initiated scrutiny of original hiring records – sometimes for people hired decades ago by other agencies or military Services. An applicant to a CDC position must meet several background investigation requirements, and employment cannot start until favorable completion:

- Verification of previous employment
- Reference checks conducted as part of the application screening process, and documented in writing. Reference checks are required for all categories of CYS Services personnel, to include employees, contractors, providers, volunteers, youth, etc.
- Installation Record Checks will check multiple agency data bases: the Medical Treatment Facility, Army Substance Abuse Program, Military Police, civilian law enforcement, any other record check as appropriate, and an additional DA Criminal Investigation Division check of the Defense Central Index of Investigations.
- For employees and contractors, such as instructors, a Child Care National Agency Check with Inquiries is required. The CNACI includes a state criminal history records search for the previous five years.

The Moore Child Development Center at Carlisle Barracks serves 99 children with 20 full-and part-time staff members; the CDC annex at Letterkenny currently serves about 55 children with a staff of 18 full- and part-time workers. The Carlisle Barracks Youth Services has capacity for 120 youth, with a staff of 10 full- and part-time employees.

Armywide, there are 199 child development centers and 84 school age facilities/ youth services programs.