

Casa de Amparo's Development Center Helps Marine Families With Stress

Mom was overwhelmed. With a serious medical illness, unemployed, and Dad deployed to Iraq, it was hard to cope with her three girls and give them all they needed. Shy, apprehensive, and worried about her daughters, she went on a tour of Casa de Amparo's Child Development Center in Oceanside, Calif., to find out if the CDC was a place where she could get some help.

Anxious about the fact that her daughters had never been in a child care environment, and worried about what she was going to do with her own life, Mom nevertheless saw that the girls were having a wonderful time on the tour, and didn't want to leave. They were having the time of their little lives. As CDC staff explained the kind of support they would be able to provide for her and her children, Mom was won over, and enrolled in the program.

Since the family was eligible for this program based on Dad's absence from the home and her own medical issues, Mom's social worker from the New Parent Support program at Camp Pendleton referred the family for three months of services. When the initial three-month referral expired, her therapist completed an incapacity form so that she and her girls could benefit from CDC services for an extended period.

During her time at CDC, this once-shy mother gained self-confidence and clarity. Seeing her girls flourish under the care of CDC staff, and by her participation in the Family Enrichment classes (facilitated by a therapist or behavior specialist), much of her anxiety diminished and she was able to make decisions that would benefit her and her family.

When the time came to extend her services another three months, she was able to say with confidence that she felt capable of using the skills she had learned at CDC to live a full and independent life. Buoyed with self assurance, she was able to get a job and with the help of her husband is taking care of her family with less stress and more skills.

This family recently moved out of state but to show her appreciation, Mom made pillow covers and blankets for us before she left, a great way to give back and to help Casa de Amparo remember her special family.

This is only one of the hundreds of stories Casa de Amparo has been privileged to witness during its nearly 30 years of service to families in San Diego County. Located close to Camp Pendleton and working with the base's New Parent Support Program, Casa de Amparo provides services to a significant number of Marine parents experiencing the strain of deployment, relocation, or other stressful situations typical of military families.



This young girl is not affiliated with Casa de Amparo. Photo by Lynda Modaff.

“Many of the children who come to us have parents who have been deployed to dangerous situations, and the transition is hard for them and for the other parent,” says Melissa Greenway, director of Casa de Amparo’s Child Development Center.

The CDC provides therapeutic day care and preschool for children 18 months to five years old who have been referred to the program due to significant family stress that might affect a child’s development or well-being. Teachers provide developmental interventions and learning experiences to assure that the children are kindergarten-ready. Treatment staff focuses on helping parents provide appropriate care for their children and to create a safe and healthy home environment. In return for their agreement to participate in counseling and parent support/education groups, families participate in the program at little or no cost.

Marine families are referred to the CDC by professionals from Camp Pendleton’s New Parent Support Program, a professional team of nurses and social workers who provide supportive and caring services to military families with children under the age of six. In addition to support groups, play mornings for the kids, and parenting classes, this program offers family counseling. In cases where family stress and trauma are acute, social workers refer clients to Casa de Amparo’s CDC.

Each branch of the military has established New Parent Support programs like the one at Camp Pendleton. For information, contact your base chaplain or resource referral officer to find out how to connect with the NPS at your own base. Google a military branch and *New Parent Support Program* (ie *Navy New Parent Support Program* or *Army New Support Program*) for more information. The professionals that service NPS programs will refer you to additional outside help like that of Casa de Amparo, when appropriate. ●

Casa de Amparo is a non-profit organization supported by the Combined Federal Campaign, as well as by additional grants, donations and a host of volunteers. For more information about Casa de Amparo, go to www.casadeamparo.org or call 760-754-5500.