

All work and all play makes Keiki Sitters a fun career opportunity for anyone

MCB Hawaii spouse's Web site provides flexible job opportunities

Jessica Goolsby

Special to the Hawaii Marine

It took nine long, hard months before Kathy Custer was able to deliver her baby – a baby who through inspiration has helped more than 250 military spouses find jobs since its start in March 2008. Despite only starting 15 months ago, Keiki Sitters and Ohana Helpers hopes to boost their numbers this year, setting 600 as its target number for sitters in 2009.

Whether it's a sudden or last minute affair, a party, a date or one of hundreds of other reasons for needing a sitter, families have plenty of reasons to reach out for child or family care. If you just moved or are new to an area, "Where do I find the right baby sitter?" or the more urgent "Where can I find a job?" become important, primary questions for a family, said Custer, a 24-year-old Marine Corps spouse.

Keiki Sitters offers a solution to these pressing questions and offers virtually endless job options for those seeking employment in a struggling economy, boasting the slogan "Work when you want. Get paid to play."

"With such a need in the community [for sitters] it's been really easy to get the business up and running," Custer, owner and creator of KeikiSitters.com said. "It keeps people coming back, whether they're looking for a job or looking for a sitter."

The Web site also allows parents and potential sitters to know who they are working with on a much more in-depth level, providing background checks, preferences, profiles and availability schedules for both parties.

"It is so important these days with all of the crazy things going on that sitters are background checked and are at least 18 years old and that these parents are able to pre-screen them before just inviting them into their homes; they can actually check their criminal records," Custer said.

Other needs also arise in today's on-the-go society. There may be the need for an elderly companion, live-in nanny, tutor, pet sitter or house sitter. Who can a family turn to and trust to care for their loved ones, pets, and home while they are away?

"It's a very stressful time for families right now economically whether they are looking for a job or looking for family care, and I just

want people to know that it's okay – we're hiring, so come to us," Custer said.

"We helped more than 450 families last year find services and sitters and we also work with the Exceptional Family Members Program on MCB Hawaii helping disabled children and their families find assistance, so we're very diverse," Custer said.

Keiki Sitters is so flexible even moms with commitments to their children or those with a desire to go to school are able to find jobs that fit their busy schedules.

Teresa Sumner, 26, has been working with Keiki Sitters for two and a half months. A mother of a 2- and a 4-year-old, Sumner was looking for a job with flexibility which would not keep her away from her own family obligations or her ability to complete college.

"I heard so many good things about the site, and since I wanted to be able to be there for my own children but still have a career, I thought 'Hey, I can definitely do this,' and so I just signed up," Sumner said.

"I love that the parents I've come in contact with are so flexible and understanding that I have my own children to look after too and I don't have to choose between my personal commitments to my kids and my job anymore," she said. "They're a part of my job."

Sumner said that her children enjoy being a part of their mom's day-to-day routine as well, noting that taking them with her to work has helped them branch out and make new friends.

"Most of the kids I watch are anywhere from infants to 9-year-olds, and my kids adore the older ones because it makes them feel cool just by knowing them," Sumner said. "Since we just got to the island in February it's been great to help them meet new playmates and develop better social skills."

Sumner said she would recommend Keiki Sitters to anyone in need of a job, career change, or simply a more flexible schedule.

"It puts extra money in your pocket, it gives you something to do, and it's just something fun and enjoyable that doesn't make you dread going to work every day," Sumner said. "Some parents even opt for you to sit their children in your own home, so jobs can be done in the comfort of your own living room as well."

Leah Raffo, 21, has also had success with



Courtesy Photo

Keiki Sitter and Navy spouse Kelsey McDonald paints children's faces during a March of Dimes charity event last year. Keiki Sitters is involved with several base charity events annually at MCB Hawaii. They are hoping to increase the list of available sitters to approximately 600 this year.

Keiki Sitters.

As a Marine wife searching for a job willing to cater to the needs of a military spouse, and she jumped at the opportunity to make a career for herself on island.

"I was listed on the site for no more than a week before someone contacted me for a job," Raffo said, noting that others have had the same fortune with the Web site.

Raffo currently has a steady position with one family watching their 18-month-old son five days a week.

"Since I have no children of my own, I get to experience what it would be like to have kids and it's wonderful," Raffo said. "I get to

teach him; we're starting to do words, colors, and shapes and it's just a bonding opportunity to watch him grow. I love the relationship I get to build with him.

"I love that I make my own schedule, am home in time to spend time with my husband in the evening, and I get to play with a little one all day," Raffo said. "If you have experience and love kids, it's a wonderful opportunity to make your job enjoyable and make your schedule work for you."

For more information about Keiki Sitters and Ohana Helpers, visit <http://www.keikisitters.com> or email Kathy Custer at Kathy@keikisitters.com.

Honolulu Big Brothers, Big Sisters seeks volunteers

HONOLULU — Big Brothers Big Sisters of Honolulu is a preventive, non profit organization focused on helping children grow into responsible adults by matching them one-to-one with volunteer mentors. Since 1963, thousands of volunteer "Big Brothers" and "Big Sisters" have created a positive lasting impact on Hawai'i's children simply by sharing their friendship, guidance, and support.

Studies have shown that children matched with Big Brothers and Big Sisters are less likely to start using drugs, less likely to start drinking and less likely to skip school.

Volunteers are asked to be matched to their mentees for at least a year and spend time at least 2 times a month doing different activities they both enjoy.

Matches are based on fun and friendship, and each match will be professionally supported by Match Support staff.

We have a need for Big Brothers and Big Sisters in many areas, but especially the Wai'anae, Nanakuli, Waipahu, Mililani and Wahiawa areas.

For more information or for an application call Big Brothers Big Sisters of Honolulu at 521-3811 or visit <http://www.bigshonolulu.org>.

Sesame Street video teaches military kids about deployments

Press Release
Navy LIFELines

The Sesame Street Workshop has produced a video product to help parents or loved ones explain military deployment to young children. Elmo, one of Sesame Street's most beloved characters is the spokesman.

Free copies of the DVD called "Talk, Listen, Connect: Helping Military Families During Deployment" is available to military families and may be downloaded from the Internet at the Sesame Workshop.

As military families know, explaining deployment to small children is about as hard as talking about death or divorce.

When a parent suddenly disappears, for whatever reason, kids don't understand. Explanations that are complete and truthful are always too complicated.

As a result, the Military Child Education Coalition, in conjunction with the New York State Office of Mental Health teamed

with Elmo to say it right.

The program was produced in partnership with and funded by Wal-Mart at a cost of \$1.5 million.

"Our goal is to really get military families with young children ... to talk about the different stages of deployment with their children, not only talk about it but prepare them for it," said Jeanette Betancourt, vice president of content design at Sesame Workshop, which produces Sesame Street.

Moses Rogers, a Navy reservist and father of two, participated in the program. He said being part of the DVD project made him think about deployments in a new light.

"I think the lesson that I got personally was, separating from your family is really hard, but if you communicate that is good."

Rogers says his best advice to parents is, "Talk to your children. Let them know what's going on. Let them know that you're going somewhere to help somebody."



CAP inspires federal managers to hire more disabled workers

Technology offers solutions for those with limitations

Blair Martin
TRICARE

Since its inception in 1990, the Department of Defense Computer and Electronic Accommodations Program has assisted in more than 76,000 accommodations to federal employees with disabilities by providing assistive technology that allows them to keep their government positions and continue working.

However, according to Dinah Cohen, CAP program director, despite her organization's notable efforts, the current recruitment of disabled workers by the federal government diminishes every year and is currently at a record low of only 0.92 percent of today's total federal workforce.

In a special training seminar held at the Hickam Air Force Base Officer's Club on June 1, Cohen gave a spirited lecture that encouraged all hiring authorities of various federal and government agencies to not only consider hiring more disabled employees or wounded warriors, but also reiterated the important resources and services available to them by the CAP program.

"Every year, we are telling these employees that we don't care and that [because you are disabled], you have lost your value," she told the attendees. "If we did that to any other minority group, there would be people marching at Capitol Hill. We need you to get angry and start caring about employees with disabilities. Only then, will we start to make a difference," she added.

The primary mission of CAP is to provide assistive technology to disabled workers, allowing them to access data and information necessary to complete their jobs. CAP assistive technology includes voice recognition and video communication technology for keyboards of disabled workers, screen readers and magnification software for visually impaired workers as well as teletypewriter and personal amplification devices for the hearing impaired.

"Our goal is for equal access so everybody can have the same opportunity to participate and access information in the work center," she explained. "This not only will engage your employees, but also empower them."

During her lecture, Cohen also reviewed several CAP accommodation solutions for hiring managers including the "schedule A" program, that enables a federal employer to non-competitively hire a candidate with a disability without even posting the available position.

Other solutions involve a Department of Defense and Labor-sponsored workforce recruitment program which screens college students with disabilities from more than 180 colleges and universities all over the country for summer internship positions.

"The federal government should serve as the model employer and mirror the American population," said Cohen. "And the talent in the disability community should not be overlooked. We have the best and the brightest and need to tap into this population."

Mona Yamada, Navy Fleet Industrial Supply Center executive director, said her command has not only been actively recruiting people with targeted disabilities for the past year, but has also hired more than a dozen disabled workers for various job positions.

"We just decided that is something that we wanted to do," she said at the seminar. "We have been [utilizing] CAP services with our workers and they have absolutely helped. [In fact], we would be lost without these resources."

Yamada said she hopes that after this seminar, more military installations will be inspired to consider employees with disabilities for available federal positions.

"My experience with hiring the handicapped has been very positive," she said. "The people are excited to be at work and they give us 200 percent. In fact, one of our supervisors told me that if he had one more person like [the one we had hired with a disability] that he

wouldn't need half his crew. So that is what kind of employees they are," she added.

Supervisors and managers interested in hiring people with disabilities should review their vacant positions and contact Colleen Martineau, the disability program manager, at 474-5140 or email at colleen.martineau@navy.mil. For more information on the CAP program, visit <http://www.tricare.mil/cap>.