



Cassandra "Sondi" Grace Whiteman AFB, Missouri

Biography

I began my early childhood career 22 years ago in a civilian childcare center. After becoming a military wife and a mother, I started my career in the military childcare system as a home daycare provider. The military life style has allowed me to work in the field of early childhood in a variety of capacities, from family home day care, to operating a civilian group home, and finally as a military childcare provider in a military child development center. I am currently a Lead teacher at the Susie Skelton Child Development Center. I have a supportive husband & 3 beautiful daughters. I earned my associate degree in early childhood education in 1995 & will graduate with my bachelor's degree in May of 2010. In addition to my lead teacher duties, I work as a CDA advisor & a mentor to new employees. The Department of Defense holds its child development centers to standards that exceed any set forth by state governments, & that standard of excellence has provided me with a greater understanding of the need for advocacy from early childhood professionals. Education of developmentally appropriate practice, inclusion of children with special needs, & acceptance of diversity are essential in providing quality care. As part of my drive to advocate for the field of early childhood, I support the March for Babies, Autism Awareness, the Special Olympics, and participate in our center's Parent Advisory Board and Parent/Staff Focus Group.

Project-"Natural Playground"

Military children often face sadness and uncertainty as they face the loss of a parent to deployment or move from place to place. Military families and communities have values and needs, unique to their heritage & to the military lifestyle, that are unlike any other. In honor of the Year of the Military Family, my classroom was inspired to bring additional learning experiences to our children, in the implementation of my project. It will provide a nature area, including a greenhouse garden area, a worm bin, and a wooden stepping stone path surrounded by plants designed to attract a variety of living creatures, all maintained by the children. The addition of more nature items would allow them gain an understanding of the circle of life and the need to support and assist other living things. In addition, the added nature would foster a sense of community between the parents, as the need to respect and contribute to nature and the need for outdoor play remains consistent with most cultures. This experience, even in its beginning stages, provides the children with multiple opportunities for learning, such as building self-esteem, collaborating and negotiating with others, & feeling accomplished. Most importantly, as they share a mutual multicultural appreciation for the outdoors, the children will gain an understanding that although from diverse backgrounds they have a common bond with the children in their class.

