

SEARCHING FOR CARE

Former base resident starts online babysitter database

Christine Cabalo

Photojournalist

[Http://www.keikisitters.com](http://www.keikisitters.com), a babysitter database, is online for families looking for help thanks to Kathy Sasser.

Sasser realized the potential for the database after advertising her own sitter services online and getting offers from nine families in two days. The wife of a Marine stationed with Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 363, she launched the business site three months ago.

"I heard parents had a hard time trying to find babysitters," she said. "And sitters had a hard time connecting to a family."

While geared to military families in the Windward area who need childcare, Sasser said paid membership is open to all Oahu residents. Users can search for local nannies, pet sitters and other types of care workers. With 187 sitters listed on the site since May, the small business owner guarantees a full refund if users can't find a sitter that meets their needs within two weeks.

Coralie Krammer, children, youth and teen administrator, Marine Corps Community Services, said childcare demand on base fluctuates during the year. During the summer months, Krammer said most families signing into the base's child development center are accommodated. However, the administrator said there is a steady demand for childcare of children under two years old all year, warranting a waiting list.

"We do provide information about nanny services and other options," she said. "For those who need help on a temporary basis, who may have relatives coming but need help temporarily, the information is available if they're waiting."

While MCCS workers can't endorse or approve one particular agency, Krammer said it's important to have more outlets for childcare in Windward Oahu as demand goes up. Expansions to include more space for infant care on base is planned for 2011, but Krammer also provides information on services at other Oahu bases or small businesses such as Sasser's for those who need help immediately.



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Using homemade bubble solution, Kathy Sasser, founder of Keiki Sitters and Ohana Helpers, makes bubbles with Rowan Minton. Sasser said the two-year-old loves to pop bubbles in the backyard of Minton's home in Kaneohe. The duo learn and play together during daycare sessions three times a week. Sasser realized the potential of a babysitter database after advertising her own services online.

At the Keikisitters.com site, the small business owner said she's worked to categorize sitters by several characteristics. Screened sitters post a photograph, references and pay rates, which may be viewed in detail by paying members. Currently, the site is organized so users will post job opportunities to sitters in their zipcode. Sasser said she's currently working on advanced search options that let users find sitters by other qualifications or special skills. Her classification system goes beyond checking if they have CPR qualifications, she said.

"If your family wants to encourage your children in certain areas, we have sitters who have those skills," she said. "If you want a sitter who's athletic or a 'computer geek,' they can find someone who fits their schedule and needs."

Sitters are placed into one or several of the 10 specially skilled categories featured at the Web site. Sasser recommends families begin the search for sitters as soon as possible, because it gives them more time to evaluate candidates. Kramer agrees families should take the time to examine their needs.

"We want people to be able to make their own informed decisions," the administrator said. "Our office makes the information available."

For Sasser's site, the part-time sitter says her users need sitters in a multitude of situations. Demand is all over the place, she said, and some families post looking for a live-in nanny. Calendars on each sitter's information page list when they can work, for those who need someone for evenings and weekends. Sasser personally sits for a stay-at-home mom who runs a home business but needs someone to come a few times a week while she works. Her main advice to other sitters and childcare givers is to provide educational fun for children, since it may be the main source of personal time they get.

Still growing, the small business owner said she's hoping to expand the site to the neighbor islands and to other states. Sasser has also used her site to staff children's charity events and is planning to expand her business with cooperation from other local children's programs.

"It's so exciting," she said. "The process for creating the Web site took about nine months. The site is like a baby — my baby."