

# West Haven child care program thanked with flag

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By Susan Misur

[smisur@nhregister.com](mailto:smisur@nhregister.com) / Twitter: [@nhrsusan](https://twitter.com/nhrsusan)

WEST HAVEN — Supervising play time, holding group activities, finding special educational projects — it's all routine in a child care program.

But then there are behind-the-scenes demands on the staff, such as helping a child get through her mother's deployment overseas.

That's what the staff at the **West Haven Community House Association's** school-age child care program did last year for Rachel Payne and her daughter, Marisa, 7.

Payne showed her gratitude last week with a special gift.

She presented the nonprofit with a flag that flew with a pilot over Afghanistan in the Community House's honor while she was working on an undisclosed base.

"It's a little recognition saying, 'Thank you' to the teachers, the Community House and even to the kids that participate with her," Payne told those in the program at Seth Haley Elementary School.



"You were helping to keep her spirits up, laughing with her, playing with her. It was a difficult time for Marisa, as well as myself, being apart."

Payne, a technical sergeant, was deployed to the United Arab Emirates from May to November 2012 with the Air National Guard. She maintained generators and power for military equipment.

She volunteered for the job after superiors said deployment would be mandatory for people in her group if they didn't find enough volunteers.

She asked the Community House's child care staff to keep an extra eye on Marisa, a Seth Haley second-grader who attends before- and after-school child care sessions.

"I let them know I was being deployed. ... We sat down and had a meeting and discussed what types of things to look for in her behavior and the type of help she could get," said Payne, who also has a 3-year-old son.

"It took a lot of my stress off my mind to know she was taken care of and in a

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secure environment and that she could go to them to talk.”

The staff coordinated phone calls to Marisa if when her mother was available during after-school sessions.

They also had a weeklong educational program on what it means to be deployed and how it affects families.

“It was good for the kids to know what Marisa was going through. It was hard for them to imagine being away from their mother,” said Chuck Asarisi, head teacher at the Seth Haley site for the school-age program.

Also, a military recruiter spoke to kids about how serving the country can be a job.

Before Payne returned, children in the program made banners to welcome her back and gave them to her husband to hang up at home.

While Payne was away, she heard about a program wherein an American flag could be flown with a pilot to honor those at home. She had flags flown for her parents, husband and the Community House.

A plaque Payne gave the Community House said the flag was flown Sept. 24 by the 970th Expeditionary Airborne Air Control Squadron over Afghanistan on a combat mission.

“What she brought to the children here is a little bit of the real world,” said Community House Executive Director Patty Stevens. “It’s an honor.”

*Call Susan Misur at 203-789-5742.*