

We fully understand the death of Sonny Degenhard has been a terrible tragedy for the Deghenhard family. We cannot begin to feel the sadness this has brought them. Every time a child dies, that family is robbed of a future.

Sonny's death was also a tragedy for everyone associated with our Child Development Centers and our Fort Bragg community.

We worked with investigation teams from within Fort Bragg, the state and the federal government to determine the cause so we could prevent this from happening again.

Investigations showed there was one infant care giver who is believed to be responsible for Sonny's death. That person was terminated and the case was turned over to federal authorities for prosecution. To date the federal prosecutor has declined to prosecute.

We recognize there are no easy or concise answers to explain Sonny's death and like his family, we want to ensure we take all measures in our powers to avoid this incident ever being repeated.

As with the investigators, we have been fully open with how we operate our CDCs and train our staff and we will do the same with WRAL. To insure WRAL's audience fully understands the training and professionalism of our infant care givers, we are answering your questions below in writing, allowing the reader the opportunity to go back and re-read a statement for clarification.

- What is/was being done to raise the training standards at child care centers on post?

Like any organization tasked with maintaining the highest standards possible for child care, we constantly review our training programs when new lessons are learned that may improve child care.

Fort Bragg and the Army took Sonny's death very hard and caused us to re-evaluate our training procedures and standards and to make changes we felt were needed.

Within a month of Sonny's death, April 4, 2012, the Army's Installation Management Command issued an initial finding on what Child Development Centers Army-wide were doing correctly and where improvement was needed. This finding directed 5 key steps be followed to reduce chances of SIDS within CDCs Army-wide. These five steps included:

Step 1: Teach appropriate methods of "Tummy Time."

Step 2: Change opening and closing procedures

Step 3: Change how/when managers and trainers are in the classrooms and homes and what they do there

Step 4: Require management to randomly view video footage of classrooms

Step 5: Re-train Child and Youth Program Assistant staff/Family Child Care providers who work with infants in any setting focusing on SIDS training

On March 2, 2013 an operations order (OPORD) directed a training stand-down with respect to SIDS. An amendment to this OPORD was issued on March 4 directing that the stand-down had to be completed no later than April 15, 2013.

Fort Bragg conducted its SIDS training stand-down in early March. This training followed the training slides directed in the OPORD. They are attached as four separate slides; "Classroom Training," "Performance Oriented Training," "Preventing SIDS" and "Tummy Time."

Records were kept so we would know who received this training. The attached document, "Stand-down training certification," is an example of the verification of this training.

Fort Bragg has a lead trainer and a cadre of trainers who ensure all training records and requirements, which include SIDS, are met by all of our CDC employees.

Lastly, all of Fort Bragg's CDCs, including Eagle, are currently DoD certified, which is equivalent to state licensing and required to operate. To obtain this certification the CDCs must successfully undergo a rigorous inspection process, which includes four unannounced inspections annually. Training and training records are included in these inspections.

- Why are the facilities on post being cited (more) often than their civilian counterparts for failing to have SIDS training for appropriate employees?

We do not know why child development centers off of Fort Bragg did not meet state standards. That is a question best asked of North Carolina's Department of Health and Human Services.

What we can say in regards to our 10 Child Development Centers and the issues we have had with NCDHHS, there are differences between our Army-directed SIDS training standards requirements and the states. These differences have resulted in us being cited by the state of North Carolina.

These differences should by in no means lead anyone to believe our infant care givers are not well trained and professional. They are and in many ways, they exceed state training standards.

Both Fort Bragg and North Carolina require SIDS training within the first four months of infant care givers and directors being hired. Fort Bragg also requires this training for all of our CDC employees.

North Carolina requires care givers and directors to renew their SIDS training once every three years. Fort Bragg requires recertification on an annual basis, to ensure everyone at our CDCs are well trained in the latest techniques to prevent Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

- How could the same facility where Sonny died (now Eagle Child Development Center) have been cited twice for SIDS training deficiencies in its past two annual inspections?

The issues we are having with the state for SIDS training at all of our CDCs include those for Eagle CDC so our replies to all of your questions include Eagle CDC.

- Is there any proof (training records, payment for classes) that such training is taking place and Fort Bragg is diligently overseeing the centers?

Yes, we maintain training records and background checks for everyone associated with children, from our Child Development Centers' staff, to coaches, contractors, and many others. These records are maintained at Fort Bragg and are open to inspection by state and Army agencies.

As mentioned before, we have a cadre who ensures all of our Army training requirements are met. This includes our SIDS training requirements. An example of one of our training records is attached, "Completed PDP."

Our training records, as well as other Army directed training records, are another area where the differences between North Carolina and the forms we use that are required by the Army have led to citations by the state.

The attached document, "NCDCEE Inspection," shows we were inspected on September 4, 2013. For ITS-SIDS training, they cited us saying some of our employees had not completing ITS-SIDS training, yet if you check the training certificates included in that attachment, you will see everyone they identified had received our Army directed ITS-SIDS training before the inspection.

Our staff did have certificates/proof of ITS-SIDS training, but because they were not on the state's forms, nor follow the state's training slides, they were not accepted by the inspectors. Review of our Army directed training slides and the state's shows the material is the same.

- What is/was being done to better follow guidelines to conduct initial and periodic background checks on day care employees?
 - Fort Bragg requires that everyone who works at our Child Development Centers pass five different background checks before they can work at any of our CDCs. These checks are conducted by:
 - Fort Bragg's Military Police Investigators
 - Cumberland or Harnett County Sheriff Departments
 - US Army Criminal Investigation Command
 - Drug and Alcohol Agency
 - Army Central Registry (This is the data base where reports of family abuse within the Army is kept.)

Additionally, our CDC employees are fingerprinted for a national check by the FBI and until the FBI check comes back, they have to be under constant line of sight supervision of a fully cleared employee and they must wear clothing that identifies them as requiring this level of supervision.

The state background check is initiated on a Child Development Center employee's first day on the job. The state requires this to be done before they are hired.

NCDHHS requires the one background check that is initiated by the individual before they are hired.

Fort Bragg requires background checks to be done every five years, while the state requires it every three years.

The differences between NCDHHS and Fort Bragg's child care background checks, ITS-SIDS training standards and forms are something we have been working with the state for years now. We have been told by state inspectors that this issue can be resolved, but the differences still exist.

The main reason we seek a license by the state of North Carolina is so some of our families can receive subsidized funding for child care. Out of our more than 1,200 children who are cared for at Fort Bragg's 10 CDCs, approximately 24 families receive this assistance.

In addition to all of Fort Bragg's CDCs being DoD certified, all of our day-long care CDCs are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Roughly 10% of the nation's child development centers have this national accreditation. This makes Fort Bragg's CDCs, including Eagle CDC, among the best in the nation as validated by an outside agency.

Most of us in the Fort Bragg community cannot imagine the pain and suffering the Degenhards are going through, but we hope they know we took every step possible to protect their child Sonny and are taking every step possible to stop it from happening again.

Fort Bragg's Service members and their Families trust us to care for and look out for the betterment of their children, and we take this very seriously. We strive to exceed not only North Carolina's standards for background checks and ITS-SIDS training, but we also strive to exceed the Army's standards. We owe this to not only our Service members but to our nation. It is our belief that if our Service members are worried about their children while deployed or away from home training, they are not as effective a force as we need them to be.