

## **The ‘Traveling Suitcase’ goes on an educational journey**

**By Katisha Draughn, Naval Support Activity Norfolk Public Affairs**

The sound of scissors cutting construction paper, the sight of beautifully colored pictures of children and their families, the smell of Elmer’s glue as it held popsicle sticks and paper figures together and the huge smiles on the children’s faces as they created their masterpieces. This was the scene as preschoolers at the Naval Support Activity Northwest Annex Child Development Center (CDC) created items ready to go on an educational road trip.

After discussing how they could help their children learn about other Navy children in other places, Lois Davis, CDC Director and Elena Ostyrski, preschool teacher, initiated the idea to have the preschool class make a “traveling suitcase” to send to other CDCs in other states.

The preschoolers discussed how children are the same and how they are different. The teachers wanted to show them that there are children in other places who have the same type of experiences as them.

“Military families have a lot of stressors that they go through and sometimes you forget children don’t always understand leaving the only home they know while other children only know moving,” said Davis. “We did this to show our children that there are other children living the military life too.”

The preschool children made arts and crafts, homemade photo albums, family biographies, stick figures of themselves, maps of their city and anything else that would highlight their life at the Northwest Annex CDC. They gathered these items and put them in a colorfully decorated cardboard suitcase and mailed it off to the CDC in Pensacola, Fla. The CDC in Pensacola then had their children decorate their “suitcase” filled with fun items and mailed it, along with the Northwest Annex’s suitcase, to a CDC in Jacksonville, Fla. and then on to a CDC in Mayport, Fla.

As the suitcase traveled to different CDCs, Davis kept track of it by coordinating with the CDC directors. The CDC in Mayport then sent the traveling suitcase to its last stop and the place it originated, the Northwest Annex CDC. The staff and children opened the container packed with all four CDC suitcases, June 17.

“We thought this would be a nice opportunity to share our experiences with children from other CDCs,” said Ostyrski. “And it gave all of us the opportunity to see what other military children go through on a daily basis.”

The traveling suitcase will help the children learn about other people and places and it will also help build long-distance friendships among the children and the staff.

“This was our way of showing that if a child has to move to someplace new, then it’s OK because there are other children in the same position as them,” said Davis.

The Northwest Annex CDC plans to start a new traveling suitcase this Fall and possibly mail it to a CDC in California or Japan.