

OPERATION:

MILITARY KIDS



2009 ANNUAL REPORT

ILLINOIS



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
EXTENSION

College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences



ILLINOIS OPERATION: MILITARY KIDS INITIATIVE

- Operation: Military Kids (OMK) is a unique collaborative effort between the U.S. Army and local communities through University of Illinois Extension.
- The program positively affects youth from families of all branches of the military with emphasis being placed on reserve and guard youth who are not associated with an active duty base.
- Due to the Overseas Contingency Operations, over 30,000 school-age Illinois youth are directly impacted by some element of parent deployment.
- Operation: Military Kids provides support to military youth before, during, and after the deployment of a loved one. It recognizes that these youth have significantly different needs than those of active military based families, as they are members of civilian communities living away from a base and its associated support service.
- The Illinois OMK Team is supported by the united efforts of University of Illinois Extension and 4-H Youth Development, U.S. Army Child and Youth Services, Illinois National Guard, U.S. Army Reserves, JFSAP, the Illinois American Legion and American Legion Auxiliary, Boys & Girls Clubs, Military Child Education Coalition, Illinois Red Cross, Prevent Child Abuse Illinois, and youth from military and non-military families.

Mission and Goals

MISSION:

Provide a state and local community support network which delivers a wide range of recreational, social, and educational programs for military youth living in civilian communities, and educate the public on the impact of growing up in a military family.

VISION:

Make life better for military youth, one family at a time.

GOALS:

Create community support networks for military youth in the communities where they live when Service member parents are deployed

Deliver recreational, social, and educational programs for military youth living in civilian communities

Support military kids coping with the stress of knowing their deployed parents may be in harm's way

Educate the public on the impact of the deployment cycle on service members, families, kids and the community as a whole

Honor the strengths and sacrifices of military youth

Become a part of the ongoing deployment support service for children and youth where military families live

Program Components

READY, SET, GO! (RSG!) TRAININGS

Illinois OMK Partners work together to provide community stakeholder training using an interactive delivery format targeting youth development professionals, educators, key local stakeholders and other interested community members to increase understanding of the unique issues facing military youth who are dealing with the deployment or reintegration of a family member. This hands-on training provides valuable information on strategies for building local capacity to address issues such as military culture, the deployment cycle and the influence of media on military families.

HERO PACKS

Keeping military youth connected with their deployed parent is a priority of the OMK program. Hero Packs are one tangible way to provide youth with resources they can use to stay connected with their parent who is away. Each Hero Pack contains an assortment of items for the military youth perhaps most important a handwritten letter from a non-military youth or community member acknowledging them for the sacrifices they have made.

SPEAK OUT FOR MILITARY KIDS (SOMK)

Illinois youth are actively educating local communities on what it means to grow up in a military family as members of the Speak Out for Military Kids (SOMK) program. This youth-led, adult

QUOTE FROM EDUCATOR AT TRAINING

"This training helped me realize that I don't understand as much as I thought I did about kids who have parents in the military. I need to rethink some of my thoughts related to a student (from a military family) who refuses to get engaged in the learning process or participate in the discussions. I thought he was not interested in learning; however now I want to find out if there is something going on that may be a bigger issue."

8th Grade Teacher, Calvin Coolidge Middle School, Peoria, IL.



QUOTE FROM CAMP

"When I picked up my daughter from OMK Camp this week she was so excited and had so much to say. The three hour ride home was full of conversation about what she did and the fun she had in the teambuilding activities, GPS training, swimming and hiking and about all of the kids she met. She couldn't stop talking about how they could all relate to each other about being a military child. I just wanted to take a minute out to say thank you to all involved...for my daughter and all military children, this is a wonderful opportunity." Email from a mother of a military family based at the Great Lakes Naval Station.

supported program involves youth of military families and youth of civilian families who are increasing the understanding among their peers, educators, and communities. SOMK team members develop strong public speaking, presentation, leadership, and citizenship skills as they deliver their message. They effectively teach others about the phases and issues of deployment and as they explore methods of coping with deployment and share their own personal stories. Local SOMK groups meet on a regular basis to network and develop new strategies for sharing their message with others.

MOBILE TECHNOLOGY LAB (MTL)

Illinois OMK has access to and supports a Mobile Technology Lab (MTL) which includes 15 laptop computers, printers, digital cameras, video camera, and headsets all used to help military families stay connected. The MTL is set up at OMK Community Events, SOMK training experiences, OMK Camp experiences, and many other partner events to allow youth of military families to develop multi-media resources they can then use to share with a deployed parent. The MTL is also a resource used at community events to allow non-military youth to create items to support youth of military families.

CAMP OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH OF MILITARY FAMILIES

Participation in an outdoor summer camp experience can be a life-changing experience for any young person; however the camps offered by Illinois OMK for youth of military families proved to be an opportunity for youth to grow, make new friends, and develop a strong support network with their peers. During 2009, Illinois OMK coordinated four summer camp opportunities for military youth.

OMK TNT CAMP (TEAMBUILDING & TECHNOLOGY) - WATERLOO, IL AND PRINCETON, IL

Technology & Teambuilding was the theme for two OMK Camps targeting youth, ages 8-12. Fifty-five youth of military families participated in the TNT Camps, one held in southern Illinois at Camp Wartburg, Waterloo and the other at Pilgrim Park Camp, in northern Illinois, near Princeton. Youth combined technology and the great outdoors as they explored unknown terrain using GPS units and used

the MTL to create a pictorial review of their camp experience to share with their military parent. Campers gained valuable teambuilding skills as they learned to support each other and achieve team goals.

OMK TEEN LEADERSHIP CAMP (TLC) - WATERLOO, IL

Targeting teens, the OMK Teen Leadership Camp involved 15 youth of military families, ages 13-18, in experiences designed to shape their citizenship and leadership skills. Illinois Speak Out for Military Kids (SOMK) team members were involved in training campers as they used the MTL to develop podcasts to market future program opportunities for military youth. SOMK team members also had the opportunity to tell their story of growing up in a military family and share strategies for dealing with the tough issues and challenges they faced. TLC campers were challenged to step out of their comfort zone as they experienced the high ropes challenge course.

OPERATION PURPLE® CAMP

Illinois OMK hosted an Operation Purple Camp, a program of the National Military Family Association (NMFA). NMFA supports this residential camp experience for youth of military families who fall in a current 18-month window of deployment. With an emphasis on "Kids Serve Too!," Illinois OMK coordinated



a positive youth development experience for 78 youth, at no cost to the military families, at Camp Wartburg, Waterloo, IL. During the week, youth developed coping skills, interacted with other youth experiencing deployment, participating in teambuilding activities, and were engaged in outdoor educational experiences. On “Military Day,” campers interacted with military personnel, military guest speakers, and explored military vehicles.

MILITARY KIDS CAMP

OMK Team members also provided support to Military Kids Camp, held at Camp Abe Lincoln, Blue Grass, IA, reaching 50 youth from military families. In addition to the typical camp activities such as canoeing, archery, and horseback riding; campers were also engaged in military focused sessions led by OMK team members.

FISHING CAMPS

OMK Illinois National Guard Partner collaborated with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) to offer 20 Military Fishing Day events held across Illinois. Military youth were encouraged to bring a friend and an adult for the event so they would all gain fishing skills together and could then have someone to fish with in the future. Over 150 “fishing friends” participated in the Military Fishing Day events.

OMK Program Highlights

- 198 youth of military families attend residential camps; involved 39 on-site counselors; 25 adult OMK partner staff; and \$35,000 of additional grant funding
- 63 Briefings conducted by OMK Partners, reaching over 4,000 contacts
- 13 Ready, Set, Go! Trainings held reaching 650 contacts
- 59 SOMK youth trained; delivering 20 presentations; reaching 225 community members
- 331 Hero Packs assembled; 403 delivered to youth of military families
- 124 Community Events reaching over 8,000 youth through Military Family Days, Holiday Gatherings; Operation Family Time Out; Youth Conferences; Kids on Guard; Family Readiness Group activities; Day Camps; After School Programs; and community days. Youth from all military branches were served
- Pillow cases were distributed by OMK Partner, American Legion Auxiliary, during deployment ceremonies, each imprinted with a photograph of the deploying family member and the military child
- Secured \$38,000 in donations from community partners and other grant sources



OMK PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS



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