

9/1/2011



OMK

WISCONSIN OPERATION MILITARY KIDS TOOLKIT



Community Toolkit | S. Curtis, L. Pettersen

OPERATION: Military



Contents

***What is Operation: Military Kids?* 3**

***Toolkit Basics* 5**

Events and activities

Partners

Audience

Follow up

OPERATION: **Military Kids**



What is Operation: Military Kids?

Operation: Military Kids (OMK) is the U.S. Army's collaborative effort with America's communities to support the children and youth impacted by deployment. This initiative was officially launched in April 2005. Since its inception OMK has touched 88,000 military youth and provided information to 21,009 community members across the United States.

Operation: Military Kids, as part of the 4-H/Army Youth Development Project, is a vital part of the Army OneSource (AOS) delivery system. Families and youth can access information about OMK programs by linking to OMK partner programs on this OMK website or by contacting their State 4-H Military Liaison.

Through a network of community partners, OMK provides youth program opportunities for school age, middle school and teenaged youth and connects them to support resources where they live. Through OMK, Military Youth can:

- Participate in a range of recreational, social and educational programs
- Gain leadership, organizational, and technical skills by participating in the Speak Out for Military Kids program or Mobile Technology Lab programs
- Receive assistance with school issues by connecting with Army Child, Youth & School Services School Liaisons -- More on School Transition Support
- Attend single day or weekend camps
- Meet other youth who are also experiencing deployment

National, state and local partners of Operation: Military Kids provide access to youth programs and support services where military children live. OMK Partners can organize special events, provide transportation to military kids to sporting events or other extracurricular activities, or participate in the Hero Pack initiative.

Army Child, Youth & School Services programs are offered through Army Garrisons, National Guard Family State Program offices or Reserve Regional

OPERATION: Military



commands. National 4-H Headquarters provides information to connect military families to 4-H programs in their hometowns. Wide arrays of program opportunities, such as Keystone Clubs, are offered by the Boys & Girls Club (www.bgca.org). Schools can help create academic, social and emotional support networks for students. The Military Child Education Coalition provides professional development opportunities on working with military populations for school personnel and community members to help them understand the stressors that can be associated with a military deployment and how they can offer support. The American Legion also has a variety of youth program options such as the "High School Oratorical Scholarship Program" for youth of all ages. The National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (NACCRRA) can assist military families with child care issues.

OMK Teams operating in forty-nine states and the District of Columbia include over 600 OMK partner members from both national and local organizations that work together to provide support to military children in their state.

OMK National Website

Source: <http://www.operationmilitarykids.org/public/home.aspx>

Wisconsin Operation: Military Kids Contact Information

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OPERATION: Military



Toolkit Basics

This toolkit is designed to provide suggestions to local community organizations on ways to support military families. Every county in Wisconsin is home to military children. Often these families are Guard and Reservists experiencing deployment without the resources of military installations or other local families in similar circumstances. Communities can rise to the occasion and support these families in a variety of ways. Possibilities include hosting a birthday party for a child with a parent deployed, inviting a military family to a church dinner, repairing a broken lawn mower and everything else in between. Start with the ideas below and create opportunities that will make a difference for local military families.

Opportunities

Generate ideas as to what you want to do to support military youth and families. Try to utilize resources that are already available in your community. Here are a few ideas:

- During community meal events (steak fry, pancake breakfast, or spaghetti dinner) invite military families to attend and receive a free meal. Ask the service member to come in uniform, so he or she and the family are easily recognizable. Honor the guests with a word of thanks, encourage current members to get to know the family, and ask the guests to come back to your next event and bring friends.
- During the planning process for a community service event be sure to consider some of the things your organization could provide for military families experiencing deployment. Perhaps it is lawn mowing services once a week, dinner once a month, or meeting another family's specific need. Responsibility can be shared throughout the group so that everyone can contribute, and no one feels overwhelmed.
- Military family appreciation promotions can be a great way to support families. Consider an open gym night at the YMCA when military youth/families receive free admission or encouraging restaurants to offer a 10% military family discount.
 - Honor local military families at community celebrations.
 - OMK provides books that address deployment to the regional libraries. Work with your local library to sponsor a story hour.



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Partners

You are not alone! There are multiple organizations and resources available to support you in providing opportunities for military youth and families.

- Youth programming:
 - 4-H Clubs
 - Girl Scouts
 - Boy Scouts
 - Boys and Girls Club
 - Red Cross
 - YMCA
- Monetary or in-kind donations:
 - American Legion
 - Veterans of Foreign War (VFW)
 - Elks
 - Faith based organizations
 - Local businesses
 - Legion Auxiliary
 - Legion Riders
 - Red Cross
 - YMCA
- Volunteer support - people power:
 - 4-H Clubs
 - Girl Scouts
 - Boy Scouts
 - Red Cross
 - American Legion
 - Legion Auxiliary
 - VFW
 - Elks
 - Faith based organizations



OPERATION: Military



Audience

The key to providing support to military youth and families where they live is to determine who those youth and families are. There is no list or contact page; privacy concerns are of the utmost importance. A few simple steps can get you started:

- Ask members of your organization to identify neighbors or friends who may be part of a military family
- Share information about upcoming events or opportunities with the following groups; they may not be able to give you names, but they'll pass on the information to the right people:
 - School counselors or teachers
 - Churches
 - Service organizations
 - Local Boys and Girls Clubs
 - 4-H Clubs
 - Family Resource Centers
 - Local Red Cross Chapter
 - Armories
- When publicizing events note that military members and their immediate family are welcome and point out any special services or opportunities available to them. Provide a phone number for the military families to learn more.



Follow up

Share your successes and experiences.

- Wisconsin Operation Military Kids can highlight programs and activities that have been successful on their website. This will provide a resource to other groups looking for ideas and best practices.
- Write letters to the editor or submit newspaper or newsletter articles that thank families for participating. This will help encourage other military families to get involved.
- Congratulate your members on a job well done! Continue to plan for opportunities to offer support to the military families and youth in your community.