

## OMK To Provide Free Camp Experience For Military Children

Kerry Bickford, chairman of the Barnstable County Operation Military Kids (OMK) and a youth educator at the Barnstable County/UMass 4-H and Youth Development Program, has announced that Operation Military Kids is offering two weeks of camping free of charge to military children and any child of a Department of Defense contractor deploying to Afghanistan or Iraq.

The OMK summer camp will be held at the YMCA Cape Cod Camp Lyndon the weeks of July 11 to July 16 and July 25 to July 30. There will be two one-week sessions, consisting of six days and five nights each. Registration will be on a first-come, first-served basis.

The OMK Camp provides a residential camping experience for military children ages 8 to 15 where they learn life skills, interact with other military children in a recreational setting, and have fun.

"We are so pleased that this camp was funded again," said Kerry Bickford, "it provides a wonderful opportunity for military children to get away from the stress of worrying about a deployed family member and to be with other children who are facing similar situations.

I want to thank P.J. Richardson, director of the YMCA Cape Cod Camp Lyndon, and a member of the Cape Cod Operation Military Kids team, for working with me to host this retreat for our military kids, and I am excited that the counselors-in-training from the Boys & Girls Club of Cape Cod, another Cape Cod OMK partner, are going to be taking part in it, as well.

Ms. Bickford continued, "Last year the Barnstable County Extension 4-H Youth Development program provided evening activities for the campers and helped the kids use a the OMK Mobile Technology Lab, the Hyannis Veterans Services Office conducted an informational session and distributed the Hero Blankets made by the campers for veterans; and the Hyannis VFW provided a session on flag etiquette. We are hoping to involve all of these organizations again this year."

P.J. Richardson added, "The YMCA Cape Cod is very excited to once again be partnering with our local OMK partners to bring this wonderful resource to our military families. This effort is a true community collaboration and the YMCA Cape Cod is honored and proud to work with our friends at 4H/UMass and the Boys & Girls Club, together there is no end to what we can accomplish!"

For more information about the camp, contact M. O'Brien at 508-428-9251, extension 0, or e-mail [mobrien@ymcacapecod.org](mailto:mobrien@ymcacapecod.org). For information about Operation Military Kids Cape Cod, contact Kerry Bickford at 408-375-6695 or Ruth Provost at 508-477-8845.

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, including on Cape Cod.

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; attend single-day or weekend camps; and meet other youth who are also experiencing deployment.

One of the most popular programs that OMK offers is providing a morale boost to children with deployed family members by giving them recognition through the Hero Pack program. Hero backpacks are presented in the classroom, at Scout meetings, and after-school programs, or anywhere that a family requests, to honor the child's service to their country through the long months of deployment. Hero backpacks contain toys, materials for staying in touch with the deployed parent, school supplies, and other items to help cheer up a child who is missing a parent.

Residents who know of a child with a deployed parent are asked let the Cape Cod OMK team know about them and they will arrange a Hero Backpack presentation for that child. For information or to make a donation to help OMK fill the backpacks, call 508-375-6695 or 508-477-8845.