MASSACHUSETTS

OPERATION: Military Kids

Mission and Goals

The University of Massachusetts Extension 4-H Program coordinates the statewide Operation: Military Kids (OMK) effort. As part of the national Army Child and Youth Services OMK initiative, MA OMK’s mission is to support military children and youth. Our statewide team does this by organizing regional teams, by educating communities on the effects of the deployment cycle on military youth and by offering educational, recreational and social activities for those military youth. Specific goals include the packing and delivery of Hero Packs to military children experiencing deployment of a loved one, conducting Ready, Set, Go! workshops on the effects of deployment on children for community members, staffing OMK information tables at events, supporting military youth events, and providing the Mobile Technology Lab (a set of laptop computers, cameras and printers) at military family events. State team members are from the MA National Guard Family Program, MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Westover Air Reserve Base, the Army Reserve Child and Youth Services, Greater Westfield and Cape Cod Boys and Girls Clubs, The American Legion, The American Legion Auxiliary, Homes for Our Troops, MA 4-H, Cape Cod Extension, the MA ARNG Chaplain Corp, UMass Veterans’ Services, the Preschool Enrichment Team, Army One Source, and University of Massachusetts Amherst. In addition to the state team, MA OMK has four regional teams which operate from western MA, central MA, northeastern MA and Cape Cod. They all work together to get the word out about OMK and support military children.

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Massachusetts OMK Educates Over 2500 Commonwealth Residents and Military Members & Families!

During 2009, MA OMK delivered 11 Ready, Set, Go! workshops reaching 594 participants.

YMCA staff, school teachers, church members, 4-H volunteers and other community members learned about the deployment cycle and the effects of deployment on children. This year, a special workshop, “Your Children During Deployment,” was developed and delivered six times as part of Yellow Ribbon events for the MA National Guard, Marine Reserve, Air Force Reserve, Army Reserve and Navy Reserve reaching 280 military members and their spouses. State and regional team members staffed an additional 69 informational sessions around the Commonwealth reaching over 1700 people with the OMK message of supporting military children. Audiences included the MA Association of School Committees, MA Early Childhood Educators, Montasson staff, MA Association of Student Councils, VFW’s, United Way members, among others. To further spread the OMK message, OMK appeared on Cape Cod Community Access tv and the Rte 9 Veteran’s Forum cable tv show. These shows aired many times throughout the year. The Rte 9 show also has a special link to Iraq and Afghanistan bases.

Massachusetts OMK Delivers Over 300 Hero Packs to Military Children!

During 2009, MA OMK distributed 317 Hero Packs to military children at deployment briefings, Family Readiness Groups, schools, and homes, wherever the child or family member thought it best to be done.

Hero Packs are a tangible way of honoring military children for the sacrifices they are making while their loved one is deployed. They contain a thank-you letter written by a non-military youth, a variety of items such as cameras and stationery to be used by the children to stay in touch with their loved ones and items for themselves such as toys and stuffed animals. Teens were given a choice of a Hero Pack or a Hero Pack-age which contained some of the regular items in addition to a gift card. Children too young for Hero Packs were given Hero Totes and infants were given Hero Blankets made from fleece or handmade quilts tied with a ribbon and soft toy. Many items for these packs and all the quilts and blankets were donated.

OMK team members trained 86 military and civilian teams on communication skills through “Speak Out For Military Kids” in an effort to help them learn how to relay the OMK message. A key partner in this effort is Worcester Community Cable Access www.wccatv.com which supported deploying soldiers by producing individual DVD’s of them delivering messages to leave with their families when they deploy.

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Massachusetts OMK
Touched Over 2300 Military Youth!

“Your organization is doing a wonderful job of supporting these kids and making their days brighter.”

– spoken by a wife of a soldier and mother of one –

Massachusetts OMK supported a myriad of youth events during the 2009 project year. From Cape Cod to Westfield to Danvers, over 2300 youth from all branches of the military and Coast Guard participated in activities such as mock deployments, swimming lessons, afterschool programs and leadership trainings. MA OMK also supported youth activities at Guard and Reserve family events and Yellow Ribbon seminars, often coordinating the help of Boys & Girls and 4-H Clubs.

Of special note this year were the camps organized by MA OMK and funded by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Military Community & Family Policy Office. Collaboration among the Air Wing at Barnes, the Greater Westfield Boys & Girls Club and OMK resulted in 57 Air Guard youth attending the “Military Kids Club” offered during two drill weekends in the spring. Of her sons’ participation at the Club, one Air Guard member said, “They could hardly contain their excitement when telling me of their day and asked if they could go back to the club when I have to work again.”

Two overnight week-long sessions were also funded through this Office of the Secretary of Defense effort. Collaboration among the Lyndon Center YMCA Camp, 4-H, Military Family Life Consultants, OMK and several community volunteers resulted in 96 military youth enjoying the experience of spending time with other youth similarly experiencing the deployment of a loved one.

In addition, the Army Reserves funded an overnight, week-long camp for 28 of its youth at the same YMCA camp, during which MA OMK provided specific activities for those military youth each evening.

The Mobile Technology Lab (MTL) which consists of ten laptops, two printers, cameras, cables, etc., was used at six family events and each evening during the three weeks of overnight camp at the YMCA Lyndon Center. By using the MTL, approximately 200 military youth were able to make cards and pictures to send to their deployed family members.

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