MASSACHUSETTS

OPERATION: Military Kids

Over 4,000 OMK military children and youth contacted in 2010:

2010 ANNUAL REPORT
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 who are experiencing the deployment of a loved one. Our statewide team does this by organizing regional teams, by educating communities on the effects of deployment 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, conducting community Ready, Set, Go! workshops on the effects of deployment on children, 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 Airmen & Family Readiness Center, the Army Reserve Child and Youth Services, the Army Reserve 804th Medical Brigade, 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 Joint Family Support Assistance Program, UMass Veterans’ Services, the Preschool Enrichment Team, Army One Source, and University of Massachusetts Amherst. In addition to the state team, MA OMK has 4 regional teams which operate from western MA, central MA, northeastern MA and Cape Cod. These collaborators touch thousands of lives of military children throughout the Commonwealth.

“I thank you for all your efforts and wanted to emphasize the impact such actions have on service members and our families.”

– Capt. Stephen Burgess, MA Air National Guard

State Team Coordinator
Gretchen May, M.Ed.
gmay@umext.umass.edu
101 University Dr.
Amherst, MA 01002
Telephone 413-577-0332

OMK website
www.operationmilitarykids.org/MA
Massachusetts OMK Delivers Over 575 Hero Packs to Military Children!

During 2010, MA OMK delivered 17 Ready, Set, Go! (RSG!) workshops reaching 711 participants. YMCA staff, summer camp staff, school personnel, child care providers, 4-H volunteers and other community members learned about military culture, the deployment cycle, its effects on children and what resources are available to help military children. State and regional team members staffed an additional 60 informational sessions around the Commonwealth reaching almost 1500 people with the OMK message of supporting military children. To further spread the OMK message, OMK appeared on Cape Cod Community Access tv and the Rte 9 Veteran’s Forum cable tv show. The Rte 9 show has a special link to Iraq and Afghanistan bases. These shows aired many times throughout the year. 

Quote from a workshop participant and child care provider: “I know a lot more now about how deployment works and how to help those family members left behind.”

76% of summer camp staff who participated in RSG! workshops rated the information as worthwhile or very worthwhile. OMK team members trained 39 teens (military and civilian) through “Speak Out for Military Kids” on communication skills 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 deployed.

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 Package 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. Donations totaled over $19,000 and included the MA 4-H Foundation, Cumberland Farms Dairy Stores and community members. Of special note this year was a donation from Berkshire Blankets of Ware, MA. Upon hearing our OMK public service announcement on the radio, they donated 500 boxed sets containing a teddy bear and a fleece throw to our effort! Operation Homefront donated thousands of toys and school supplies through Dollar Tree Stores. Two quilters’ guilds and one youth church group made quilts and fleece blankets. 4-H Clubs, Girls Scouts, Boys & Girls Clubs and a synagogue youth group made Hero Pack thank you cards, raised donations and packed hundreds of Hero Packs. In addition, a variety of community groups, individuals and organizations made contributions to the Hero Pack initiative.
“My children are proudly wearing their OMK backpacks to school each day as well as their hero pins.”

– Daniele, Army National Guard –

Massachusetts OMK supported a myriad of youth events during the 2010 project year. From Cape Cod to Westfield to Danvers, over 4000 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 volunteers also supported youth activities at 12 Guard and Reserve family events and Yellow Ribbon pre and post deployment seminars.

MA OMK organized the following Office of the Secretary of Defense, Military Community & Family Policy Office funded camps. Held at YMCA Camp Lyndon on Cape Cod the two, 1-week-long overnight sessions attracted 74 military youth. They participated in all the traditional summer camp activities such as nature, archery, music, drama, arts & crafts, and swimming. Evening sessions were tied specifically to being a military youth. A Military Family Life Consultant was present to provide emotional support throughout each week.

Collaboration among the Air Wing at Barnes, the Greater Westfield Boys & Girls Club and OMK resulted in two day/time only weekend “camping” opportunities. A total of 74 Army and Air Guard youth attended the “Military Kids Club” offered at the Boys & Girls Club during 2 drill weekends April 10 & 11 and June 18 & 19. The “Club” was actually a supervised open house with planned activities throughout each day. The UMass Air Force ROTC cadets provided activities one of the weekends.

In honor of the Month of the Military Child, OMK coordinated 2 days at the Ecotarium in Worcester, a hands-on science museum for children. Staff prepared a unique show in their planetarium entitled “Under the Iraqi-Afghani Sky” and a family room was set up where the participants could relax and mingle and the children could make cards for their loved ones. The USO provided refreshments. Over 150 military family members attended and the event will be repeated in 2011.

The Mobile Technology Lab (MTL) which consists of 10 laptops, 2 printers, cameras and supplies was used at 14 youth focused events and each evening during the 2 weeks of the OMK overnight camp. By using the MTL approximately 300 military youth were able to make cards and pictures to send to their deployed family members.

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- Army
- Army National Guard
- Army Reserve
- Air Force
- Air National Guard
- Air Force Reserves
- Navy
- Navy Reserve
- Marine Corps
- Marine Corps Reserve
- Coast Guard

If you would like further information or to get involved with Operation Military Kids, please contact the MA OMK State Team Coordinator or visit the website:
www.operationmilitarykids.org/MA

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Operation: Military Kids is a partnership of Army Child and Youth Services, National 4-H Headquarters/USDA, and the University of Massachusetts 4-H Youth Development Program. Operation: Military Kids Massachusetts is funded by the 4-H/Army Youth Development Project under Kansas State University special project # 2007-48661-03868.

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