As part of the national Army Child, Youth and School Services initiative, the University of Massachusetts Extension 4-H Youth Development Program coordinates the statewide Operation: Military Kids (OMK) effort. Mass. OMK’s mission is to build communities of support for the approximately 13,000 MA geographically dispersed military children and youth who could experience the deployment of a loved one at any time.

State team members are from the Mass. National Guard Family Program, Mass. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Westover Airman & Family Readiness Center, the Army Reserve Child, Youth and School Services, the Army Reserve 804th Medical Brigade, Greater Westfield and Cape Cod Boys and Girls Clubs, The American Legion, The American Legion Auxiliary, Mass. 4-H, Cape Cod Extension, the Joint Family Support Assistance Program, UMass Veterans’ Services, the Preschool Enrichment Team and University of Massachusetts Amherst. In addition to the state team, MA OMK has four regional teams which operate from western Mass., central Mass., northeastern Mass. and Cape Cod. These collaborators touch the lives of thousands of military children throughout the Commonwealth.

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A Special Project

I met many new people and made new friends. Samantha stuck with me to the end! Sara, when I fell, she picked me right back up again. Daisy, who is Sara’s older sister, supports me through all my ups and downs, and that’s what I call a true friend! We are so close now. And that is all because of horse camp! Thanks to everyone who made this happen. I loved going to OMK Camp!

Laura Biscoe,
Air National Guard youth

The OMK Cape Cod Team designed, funded, and conducted a week-long day camp for military children. “Stars, Stripes and Saddles,” held at a local horse farm, allowed the 14 campers to learn about and work with horses as well as to share their experiences being geographically dispersed military youth with a deployed loved one.
MA OMK Educates Over 4000 Adults
From October 1, 2011 through September 30, 2012, Mass. Operation Military Kids delivered 11 Ready, Set, Go! (RSG!) workshops reaching 153 community members. 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.

OMK staffed an additional 59 informational briefings around the Commonwealth reaching 3951 people with the OMK message of supporting military children.

MA OMK Delivers 483 Hero Packs!
From October 1, 2011 through September 30, 2012, MA OMK distributed 483 Hero Packs to military and civilian children experiencing the deployment of a loved one. These presentations were done at deployment events, schools, and homes depending on the military or family request. Hero Packs contain stationery, pens, toys, etc. and are a tangible way of honoring children for the sacrifices they are making while their loved one is deployed in support of Overseas Contingencies Operations.

Donations totaled over $119,000! Over $7000 came from The American Legion Dept of Mass. and the American Legion Auxiliary Dept of Mass. These two partners also donated thousands of dollars worth of Hero Pack items. Operation Homefront donated thousands of toys and school supplies through Dollar Tree Stores. As in previous years, the Mass. 4-H Foundation gave $1000. A theater group donated its $750 profit from one performance. Several Boys & Girls Clubs donated the use of their facilities for family events. Many community groups, schools, and individuals made contributions as well.

A Special Initiative
OMK joined with the Inter Service Family Assistance Council (IFSAC) this past year on a special initiative to reach all the public schools in the Commonwealth with a request to document the military children in their systems and promote access to the resources available to support those children. IFSAC is working with the Mass. Dept of Elementary and Secondary Education on this effort.

MA OMK Reaches Over 1,900 Military Youth!
A OMK supported 139 youth events during the 2011-2012 project year. From Cape Cod to Westfield to Danvers, 2240 youth from all branches of the military and Coast Guard participated in activities such as Youth Deployment Days, Zumbatomics lessons, and leadership trainings. Mass. OMK volunteers also supported youth activities at Guard and Reserve family events and Yellow Ribbon pre, mid and post-deployment seminars.

The Mobile Technology Lab (MTL) which consists of ten laptops, two printers, cameras and supplies, was used at 14 youth focused events enabling 151 military youth to make cards and pictures to send to their deployed loved ones.

Quick Fact:
344 community volunteers donated 1779 hours of service to MA OMK.

Number of youth contacts by military branch in 2012
- Active Army = 49
- Army Reserve = 62
- MA National Guard = 590
- Air Force = 241
- Air Force Reserve = 280
- MA Air Guard = 266
- Navy = 11
- Navy Reserve = 36
- Marine Corps = 18
- Marine Corps Reserve = 10
- Coast Guard = 677
OMK QUOTES:
“I can be more compassionate with students now that I have a better understanding about deployment.”
—School counselor in Salem Mass.

“I learned that because people get deployed more than once, it does not mean they do not love their family. Thank you for making more sense of what the military kids go through.”
—School counselor in Salem, Mass.

“This workshop challenged me to see what I can do to make a difference.”
—Community member from Pittsfield, Mass.

“I never fully thought of the complexity involving emotions, actions, everything regarding deployment!”
—School teacher in Norton, Mass.

“Thank you so much for hosting this event! It was such a nice treat to have quality time with just my son while my husband is deployed. Thank goodness my sister in law was able to babysit my daughter!”
—MANG wife and mother

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

Operation: Military Kids is a partnership of Army Child, Youth and School Services, 4-H National Headquarters/USDA and the University of Massachusetts Extension 4-H Youth Development Program.
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UMass Amherst
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