



4-H CLUBS SUPPORT OMK

4-H clubs in several Minnesota counties supported OMK activities. In Chisago County the Panola Rockets 4-H Club packed boxes for 11 service personnel, and wrote messages for the packages and thank you notes for the children of military personnel. The boxes were packed with a variety of nutritious "goodies" as well as items such as hand lotion and shoe insole cushions.

LEARNING CIRCLE LESSON AND WEB SITE INFORM COMMUNITY

The University of Minnesota Family Relations Team created a Learning Circle Lesson and web site. The lesson explains the process of deployment and how deployment affects a family. It provides a way for community members to have a conversation about how they can support the family members of service people who have been deployed. Included are a leader's guide, participant handouts and several computer-based narrated presentations. The Lesson and a 15 minute narrated presentation that describes the five stages of deployment and how this impacts families is found at www.parenting.umn.edu/militaryKids/index.htm

MINNESOTA MEDIA SUPPORT OMK PROGRAMMING

Media sources throughout Minnesota that shared OMK goals and activities included radio stations in Minneapolis, Fargo, Moorhead and Rosemont; television stations in Minneapolis and Fargo as well as various cable stations around the state; and newspapers in Duluth, Fosston, Hastings, Mankato, Marshall, Rochester and Worthington.



"These are unique kids. As they deal with the impact of war, deployment of their immediate or extended families, kids need a chance to express their thoughts, hang out with other military kids and they need an understanding and supportive community... The extension (of military deployment) in Iraq has quite an impact on the kids."
National Guard Family Assistance Specialist



SERVING THOSE WHO SERVE US

OMK-MN team members were asked what it meant to them to support families affected by the military surge. Their responses reflect both the challenges and success of the program.

"Being a part of an effort to increase the awareness of military kids was great...I can't count the number of times people said 'I didn't realize how this would impact youth and families.'"

"I enjoyed meeting the wonderful staff and feeling good about the difference this program makes in the lives of our military families and the teens!"

"Creating an environment where people work toward a common goal. It was good seeing different people apply their talents for others."

"The positive reception of this 'service' request by volunteers - Minnesota wants to support its military families."

"Sometimes being there to listen is the most important thing in a child's life. They need adults (and kids) to talk to."

KIDS, PARENTS AND PARTNERS SPEAK

"I didn't think I could make it through my dad's deployment until I met these other kids who have done this before." 13 year-old

"Most kids weren't aware that their family wasn't the only family disrupted by the Surge. On more than one occasion I was asked, 'Did you know my dad is in the Army?' They were surprised that all the other kids present were in the same boat." OMK Team Member

"There was a true appreciation of the parents that attention was given to their children by older teens." OMK Team Member

"My five children talked all the way home about the great time they had attending the day." Wife of Deployed Husband

"I didn't know this was available and that I could belong." New OMK Partner

"Thank you for all you do." Parent

OPERATION: MILITARY KIDS - MINNESOTA STATE & NATIONAL PARTNERS

Strong collaborations of state and national youth, adult, school, civic, military and private organizations joined a statewide support network for Military Kids - the Everyday Heroes in Our Own Backyards.

 University of Minnesota Extension Center for 4-H and Community Youth Development www.mn4h.org	 U.S. Army Child and Youth Services www.armymwr.com	 Boys & Girls Clubs of Minnesota www.boysandgirls.org	 The American Legion www.mnlegion.org
 University of Minnesota Extension www.extension.umn.edu	 MN Child Care Resource and Referral Network www.mnchildcare.org	 Minnesota Department of Education www.education.state.mn.us	 Military Child Education Coalition www.militarychild.org
 Minnesota Army National Guard www.dma.state.mn.us	 U.S. Army Reserve www.armyreserve.army.mil	 U.S.D.A. National 4-H Headquarters www.national4-Hheadquarters.gov	

For more information about Operation: Military Kids - Minnesota, contact: www.operationmilitarykids.org or Jim Deidrick, State 4-H Military Liaison Center for 4-H and Community Youth Development; deidr001@umn.edu (800) 444-4238 or (612) 624-7171



Supporting Military Kids and Families

Addressing the special needs of youth whose loved ones are affected by military deployment





Imagine for a moment that you are a typical 14 year-old named Ashley. Her mom serves in the Minnesota National Guard. It was one thing to have her mom away for weekends, or for a couple weeks of active duty. It was quite another thing for Ashley to see her mom go to war for a year when she needed her most. Then, just when she was counting down the days to her mom's return, Ashley's dad told her about a troop surge that meant her mom's tour of duty would be extended for another three months. Ashley doesn't know how to explain that to her friends, since she had been so excited about her mom's homecoming. And she doesn't understand it herself.

Or consider 10-year-old Brandon. The first nine years of his life his biggest concerns were finishing his homework, doing well on the soccer team that his dad coached, and looking forward to fishing on Sundays and vacations with his family. Suddenly his dad, a long-time member of the Army Reserve, is called to active duty and shipped to Iraq. Soccer games don't mean as much to him anymore. At night he worries about his dad's safety. In school kids ask, but he can't explain when his dad will be home again.

Operation: Military Kids (OMK) is the U.S. Army's collaborative national effort with America's communities to support the children and youth of National Guard and Army Reserve service members impacted by the Global War on Terrorism. When military parents living in civilian communities are mobilized, their children suddenly have unique needs for special support services. They need to connect with other youth in similar situations. They seek friends and adults who can help them cope with their new world. To address this need Operation: Military Kids was formed. Since April 6, 2005 34 states have initiated OMK programs. Minnesota joined the program in 2006.

In Minnesota, over 15,000 children have experiences similar to Ashley's and Brandon's. Some find both parents being deployed. All but two counties in Minnesota have been affected. Participants in OMK-MN programs build support networks with youth like themselves, engage in physical activities, and learn life skills. OMK-MN state and regional teams, and community partners offer programs throughout the state.

MINNESOTA OMK STATE AND REGIONAL TEAMS PROVIDE LEADERSHIP

The OMK-MN State Team includes many partners as shown on the back page of this report as well as youth from military and non-military families. Eight regional teams located in Brooklyn Park, Camp Ripley, Duluth, Mankato, Marshall, Moorhead, Rochester, and Rosemount assist the State Team to effectively address the mission and goals of OMK-MN.

MISSION:

Minnesota OMK builds partnerships to increase capacity for youth, families and communities to support youth of military families.

GOALS:

- ▶ Create community support networks for military youth "in our own backyard" when loved ones are deployed
- ▶ Deliver recreational, social, and educational programs for military youth living in civilian communities
- ▶ Support military kids coping with the stress of knowing their deployed loved ones may be in harm's way
- ▶ Collaborate with schools to ensure that staff are attuned to the unique needs of military students
- ▶ Educate the public on the impact of the deployment cycle on service personnel, families, kids and the community as a whole

This annual report highlights the 2007 programs that were delivered in support of OMK – MN and the Troop Surge that extended many tours and involved even greater numbers of Guard and Reserve personnel.

– Jim Deidrick, State 4-H Military Liaison, University of Minnesota Extension Center for 4-H and Community Youth Development



***"The OMK projects open up an avenue for new friendships to develop, help to remove those lonely feelings, and let you know there are people who care."** – Parent*

OMK-MN BRIEFINGS EXPAND COLLABORATIONS

Over 100 briefings reached 2250 people. State and Regional OMK teams inform community and military organizations about OMK and collaboration opportunities. Among those receiving briefings in 2007: community groups, military staff and organizations, family readiness groups, ministerial associations, staffs of partner organizations, teachers, government agencies, and county and state Extension staffs.

HIDDEN HEROES WORKSHOPS MOVE COMMUNITIES TO ACTION

State and Regional OMK team members and partners conducted 47 interactive Ready, Set, Go! training sessions involving over 650 community leaders. Also known as "Hidden Heroes: How Deployment Impacts 'Suddenly Military' Kids," these workshops offer insight into military culture and the deployment cycle, and provide hands-on practical information about the needs of military children living in civilian communities. Through these workshops partners develop strategies for creating local support networks of youth workers, educators, counselors, clergy and community service groups.

CONNECTING YOUTH

Helping kids feel connected, active and supported is a primary goal of OMK-MN. In support of this goal OMK - MN trained youth speakers, assembled and provided HERO Packs for military youth, connected children and youth with deployed family members and involved youth in exciting educational and fun activities throughout the year.

- ▶ **Speak Out for Military Kids (SOMK) Informs Community** – The youth speaker's bureau includes military and non military youth. County 4-H Ambassadors and OMK team members trained these youth to speak out to community members on what it means to become military. In 2007, 20 SOMK youth made 38 presentations. One young woman developed an eight minute speech on the five stages of deployment, the impact of deployment on youth and strategies

communities can employ to assist children. She presented it at five high school speech competitions and a parent's night. This example demonstrates the multiple impacts of SOMK: youth examining their personal stresses, developing skills, connecting military and non-military youth, and informing a broader audience about the issues facing military youth.

- ▶ **HERO Packs Recognize Youth** – Approximately 400 Hero Packs distributed to children provided comfort as well as recognition of their strengths and sacrifices while their loved ones serve their country. Each back pack includes an assortment of gifts such as a disposable camera, resource book or journal, writing materials, a baseball hat, stuffed animal, a HERO pin, OMK lanyard, slogan bracelet, in addition to space for youth to keep the projects they make and letters written by local youth in their community.
- ▶ **Mobile Tech Labs Connect Families** – Over 500 youth and family members accessed computers and other digital technology to communicate with deployed loved ones. Youth create presentations, develop cards for military families, transfer photos to t-shirts, produce DVD's, and make magnets with pictures to send to family members while learning life skills such as concern for others, communications and managing their feelings.
- ▶ **Youth Workshops, Events and Activities Meet Critical Needs** – The OMK-MN state and regional teams planned and coordinated a wide variety of youth-focused programs throughout 2007 to address the needs of military youth. Youth practiced and developed important personal life skills such as decision making, taking responsibility, being resourceful and dealing with emotions.

Examples of 72 programs involving over 2500 youth include the following:

Family Readiness Group Support – While parents attended 12 Family Readiness Group (FRG) meetings 4-H staff, county 4-H clubs, 4-H Ambassadors and other community and civic groups provided leadership for activities that engaged over 2500 youth.

Holiday Programs – Over 170 youth in Dakota, Stearns, and Martin Counties celebrated at holiday parties. Children included those with parents deployed, parents who have returned from deployment and those who have not yet been deployed. They made Christmas ornaments for deployed service personnel, memory books, tree decorations, 4-H bracelets, holiday bags, and mobiles. 4-H Ambassadors and 4-H Leaders planned and presented the programs.

Military Family Days – "Water Fun," "Bubbles, Bubbles, Bubbles" and flag activities highlighted these family days and similar activities that engaged over 440 youth. Youth learned cooperation, teamwork and how to deal with emotions as they formed water Olympic teams and participated in water games and water experiments related to carbonation and water pollution.

"This is the best day ever!"
Participant (at youth program)

Military Kids Day Out – Fifty youth utilized the electronic equipment found in the Mobile Technology Lab to create pillow cases and Lego robots, become clowns and participate in a variety of craft and art activities. In Moorhead several OMK partners provided support including the National Guard, Child Care Resource and Referral Network, Minnesota State Community Technical College, Moorhead Public School Community Education, Moorhead Veterans of Foreign Wars, U of MN Extension, Clay County 4-H and the Fargo Veterans Administration.



Teen Team Building Workshop – Thirteen Hastings Middle School teens with a deployed parent/family member met and shared common experiences, concerns and challenges in a "Team Building" workshop under the leadership of 4-H Youth Teaching Teen Teachers. As a result the Middle School Counselor asked to form an OMK group that would meet regularly during the school year.

OMK Day Camps – These camps focus on helping youth develop teamwork and communication skills. Youth learn that they can depend on others while their loved one is away as they interact in programs such as "Water Experiments," "The Art of Fish Painting" and fishing. The "Play It Safe! OMK Day Camp" featured ambulance and fire squads who provided youth opportunities to learn what to do in situations such as a fire, choking, cuts, and bug bites. Youth also made safety posters, ice cream in a bag, participated in a safety scavenger hunt and decorated their own first aid kit.

Ely's Peak Climbing and Spirit Mountain Outdoor Adventure – OMK youth developed team building skills as they practiced rock climbing, including belaying and rappelling. Youth shared how the experiences of rock climbing and team building relate to military experiences -- the need to stay focused and work together to accomplish results and to be flexible to adapt to changing circumstances.

MN 4-H created lesson plans for 45 OMK experiences. Examples of other OMK workshops conducted in 2007 included Amazing Pets Day Camp, Bread in a Bag, Kites – Up, Up and Away, Rockets Workshop, Daddy's Hands, Peace Puppets and What's Bugging You.

"Hello, I am Nelson & Jack's mom...they were at the safety camp. Both of them had a great time!!! I cannot thank you enough!!! They have quoted very valuable information that they received while there!! Thanks again. P.S. They love the back packs they are using for summer school! Please let me know if you are doing any other fun things this summer."

E-mail from mother of youth attending OMK Safety Day Camp