

GEORGIA OPERATION: MILITARY KIDS

MILITARY YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

The inaugural meeting of the Military Youth Advisory Council took place in June, 2010 in Athens. Seven military youth, from throughout the state and representing multiple service branches and components, were selected after completing a rigorous application process. During the four day training session these teens discussed issues and situations that they face as military youth. Through decision making and a collaborative dialogue they developed solutions to their military-specific problems. The Military Youth Advisory Council was charged with the goal of returning back to their communities to share information in innovative ways with other teens, youth and families throughout Georgia. These seven teens also spent the week meeting local and state, military and civilian leaders, such as Governor Sonny Perdue, BG Larry Dudney at Clay Facility Georgia Army National Guard Headquarters, and UGA College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Dean Scott Angle. They shared their problem-solving initiatives with these military and state leaders in hopes of making them aware of the challenges that military youth face, while gaining advocates to help these issues gain awareness.



GEORGIA OMK SUPPORTS MILITARY YOUTH WITH NEWLY DEVELOPED YELLOW RIBBON CURRICULUM

Ms. Kerry Autry, wife of CPT George Autry, commander of the 416th Transportation Company, 260th Quartermaster Battalion, at Hunter Army Airfield coordinated a pre-deployment event for military youth on the evening of September 15, 2010. Ms. Autry noticed that many of the families in her husband's company had not experienced deployment, so she took it upon herself to schedule a fun and educational youth event at Hunter AAF. Ms. Autry learned of Operation Military Kids' new Yellow Ribbon curriculum and decided to build the evenings activities around this curriculum. 4-H Agents from surrounding County Extension Offices facilitated the activities. The educational activities are separated by age and by the different stages of the deployment cycle: Pre-deployment & Mobilization, and a 30/60 Day Reintegration Activity Guide. One of the lesson plans was entitled 'Over Here and Over There' which taught military youth about the countries of Iraq and Afghanistan through a variety of activities including games, map discovery, foods, stories, and more! They also learned about the work that Service Members might be involved in while deployed and explored ways to stay connected with their Service Member during deployment. Adeline Autry, the 4-year old daughter of CPT George and Kerry Autry, loved the activity about stars, showing her mother the star chart saying, "Me and Daddy will be able to see the same stars, even from Iraq!" The other lesson plan was entitled "This Is My Life" which instructed military youth how to create a daily journal to use as a tool for self-reflection and as a springboard to communication with their Service member. Joni Greenwood, wife of SPC Terry Greenwood, was grateful for the confidence the program gave her to help her three young girls through the upcoming deployment of their father. Each activity was developed and included in this curriculum to teach military youth life skills needed to successfully navigate each stage of the deployment cycle. Activities are in two hour and four hour formats, are easy to teach, fun for the youth, and reinforce critical life skills. Both the children and parents thoroughly enjoyed the Yellow Ribbon curriculum activities and pre-deployment event. This was reinforced by Ashley Lassiter, wife of SPC Garrett Lassiter who said, "The program was very entertaining and educational. We all had a really good time."



OMK recreation toolkits and yellow ribbon curriculum manuals have been distributed to Cooperative Extension Professionals and Military Family Support Staff throughout the state near installations. Please call Marcus Eason, Georgia OMK Coordinator, at (706) 542-4444 for support. OMK Yellow Ribbon Curriculum is available online at: <http://www.georgia4h.org/omk>

Georgia OMK assists at Yellow Ribbon events throughout the state. In July, 2010, Burton 4-H Center staff and camp counselors on Tybee Island facilitated a weekend of fun for National Guard youth. The 5th Army Ranger Battalion and the Georgia Counter Drug Task Force partner with Georgia OMK at activities for military youth.

OPERATION: MILITARY KIDS is a partnership of Army Child and Youth Service, National 4-H Headquarters/ USDA and University of Georgia Cooperative Extension. Operation: Military Kids – Georgia is supported by the 4-H/ Army Youth Development Project under Kansas State University special project number 2007-48661-03868.



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GEORGIA OPERATION: MILITARY KIDS



DEVELOPMENT OF
GEORGIA OMK

- Operation: Military Kids (OMK) represents a unique collaboration between the U.S. Army and local communities facilitated by UGA Cooperative Extension.
- An official, nationwide program launch occurred on April 6, 2005, led by Iowa Senator Chuck Grassley. In 2010, forty-nine states and the District of Columbia participated in the project.
- The program positively affects youth from families of all branches and components of the military.
- Operation: Military Kids provides support to military kids and their families before, during and after the deployment of a loved one. It recognizes that reserve component youth have significantly different needs than those of active component military families as they are members of civilian communities throughout all of Georgia's counties.

MISSION:

Georgia Operation: Military Kids builds partnerships to increase capacity for youth, families and communities to support youth of military families.



The State OMK Team includes representatives from Georgia 4-H, UGA Cooperative Extension, Georgia National Guard, Army Reserves, Georgia Department of Education, Boys and Girls Clubs of Georgia, Active Duty Army Garrison CYS staff, Air Force Reserve Services, Quality Care for Children, Joint Family Support Assistance Program, and the American Legion.

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2011
GOALS:

- Maintain Operation: Military Kids state team's points of contact.
- Inform community-serving agencies in 100 of Georgia's 159 counties.
- Support educational efforts for military youth designed and implemented by each Georgia partner.
- Educate youth professionals working with military youth and families.
- Educate interested individuals and organizations statewide on the issues facing Georgia's military families.
- Train youth-adult partners to become SOMK Ambassadors.
- Train youth-adult partners how to properly utilize Yellow Ribbon curriculum and toolkits to positively influence children of service members.



GEORGIA OMK IMPACT

Military Families Attending OMK Camping Experiences	380
Hero Packs Assembled	3,520
Hero Packs Distributed	3,482
SOMK Ambassadors	160
SOMK Presentations	200
SOMK Face-to-Face Contacts	40,792
SOMK Indirect Contacts	5,220
TOTAL IMPACT	50,234



PROGRAM COMPONENTS
READY, SET, GO! (RSG!) TRAINING

Georgia tailors this multi-faceted, interactive training for youth development professionals and other interested community members based on the audience and time restraints. Providing hands-on, practical information to assist families builds local capacity in issues such as military culture, deployment cycle and the influence of media. Facilitators deliver the material through requests and professional conferences.

MOBILE TECHNOLOGY LAB

Fifteen computers, printers, digital cameras and video cameras allow military families to communicate with their deployed soldiers. Others can use the lab to learn about military families.



BIBB COUNTY OMK
AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

Each year at the Georgia 4-H Ambassador Program, high school youth apply to represent Operation Military Kids as ambassadors. After educational and team building courses these youths return home to educate community citizens of the military impact within their county and build support of local military families.

One county OMK Ambassador Team has exceeded all expectations by developing and implementing many youth activities for nearby Robins Air Force Base and supporting members of the 48th Infantry Brigade in the Middle Georgia area. The Bibb County OMK Ambassador Team has three State Ambassadors, Darius Maynard, Juawn Jackson, Marcus Curry and ten County Ambassadors. Their adult leader Alesia Mays, military wife and mother, who supports these Ambassadors and fifteen volunteers who assist with planning events to enthusiastically support military families in the community.

"Our main purpose here in Middle Georgia is to serve as a voice for the military youth here in our backyards" stated Darius Maynard. Juawn Jackson added, "What many people don't understand is that when soldiers are deployed and are serving our nation overseas, they aren't the only ones that are serving us, they're kids are as well. They are the ones who are allowing their parent to serve our nation, so I feel that it is imperative for us to make sure that we are providing resources and tools to help support those military youth."

Recently, the Bibb County OMK Ambassador Team planned Operation: Scrapbook at the Warner Robins Air Force Base where ambassadors helped military families store pictures of their love ones into a scrapbook, held a Hero Pack Service Project event where they packed over 300 Hero Packs to distribute to military youth, they adopted a military base overseas to support by supplying them with manufacturer coupons to use while shopping, held a Military Youth Story Time at the Warner Robins Air Force Base Youth Center, greeted 48th Brigade troops at a Welcome Home Parade in downtown Macon, and participated at the annual Military Family Weekend as instructors and were involved in a citizenship flag raising ceremony. One parent at the Warner Robins Air Force Base Youth Center when coming in to pick up her child after the ambassadors presented story time was stated saying, "I am glad that 4-H and O.M.K. are providing opportunities for military youth. It's hard when you have a loved one deployed and the load can become overwhelming, but thanks to programs like this, the load isn't as bad."

While the Bibb County Ambassador Team is busy supporting local military families and youth, they in turn require support from the state OMK program as well as their County Extension office, installation personnel, and local partners. The Bibb County OMK Ambassador Team has enthusiastically accepted the challenge of supporting military youth and families throughout the Middle Georgia area.



MILITARY KIDS CAMPS IN GEORGIA



Military and civilian partners all joined forces during the summer and fall of 2010 to expand camping opportunities for military youth. From day camps to week long residential experiences, military youth and families engaged in camps to support them throughout the deployment cycle.

Georgia hosted four weeks of military youth based camps in the summer of 2010, supporting approximately 380 military youth. Operation Military Kids hosted a week of free residential camp at Wahsega 4-H Center near Dahlonega, Georgia in August. During the week campers got waterlogged during the whitewater rafting trip, tried out their night vision while cave crawling, overcame their fear of heights repelling down a 45 foot wall and going down the famous zip line. Campers also attended many educational workshops related to Science, Engineering and

Technology, Water Conservation and Healthy Living. Through these fun activities military youth gained self confidence and developed skills to build resiliency during deployment.

Georgia OMK assisted with two Operation Purple® Camps, a program of the National Military Family Association sponsored by the Sierra Club Foundation. Operation Purple® was developed to help support America's military children, especially those with a parent who is, will or has been deployed. Burton 4-H Center on Tybee Island and Fortson 4-H Center in Hampton hosted 200 campers for week long residential camps. During the week youth learned about their camp environment such as the barrier islands or the Piedmont of Georgia, developed coping skills and interacted with military members and kids with similar experiences during deployments.

In reference to Georgia military summer camps, one parent shared, "It is great for kids to have a place to go where other kids are going through or have gone through everything they are dealing with. So many times, people don't understand...I would just like to say thank you so much for giving these children a place to relax and just have fun." Day and weekend long camps build connections among geographically dispersed youth to enable them to communicate with one another during deployment. Military youth form a special bond with one another because they are experiencing or have experienced the deployment of a loved one. Thirteen-year-old Katrina P. who attended OMK High Adventure Camp at Wahsega has lots of friends at Academy of Richmond County in Augusta, but thanks to the Operation Military Kids camp, she now has friends that can relate to her home life. "Camp helped me a lot because I got to meet other military kids," she said. "They all live about three hours away from me, but we keep in touch by texting each other and we'll see each other at camp next summer."

SPEAK OUT FOR
MILITARY KIDS
(SOMK)

SOMK Ambassadors permeate Georgia, raising awareness for military families among their peers, schools and communities. A youth-adult partnership involving military and non-military youth, SOMK Ambassador training includes youth-led simulations, interviews and individual research. After training, Ambassadors lead activities for other youth and solicit community support for military families.



HERO PACKS

Hero Packs are tangible ways to hand deliver a salute to military youth for their strengths and sacrifices during deployment. Georgia OMK has prepared and delivered thousands of Hero Packs since the program's inception to schools, communities and individuals. While a "pack" may include a variety of items, each one contains a handwritten letter to the young person from another youth in Georgia.

