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 innovative ways to engage other teens, youth and families throughout Georgia. These seven teens also spent the week meeting with local and state, military and civilian leaders, such as Governor Sonny Perdue, BG Larry Dudley 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.

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 with local and state, military and civilian leaders, such as Governor Sonny Perdue, BG Larry Dudley 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.

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.

For more information about OMK, contact the OMK Coordinator, Georgia 4-H, 706-542-4444.

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.
**MISSIO**

**GEORGIA OMK**

**GOALS:**
- Maintain Operation: Military Kids state team 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 families.
- Educate interested individuals and organizations statewide on the issues facing Georgia’s military families.
- Train youth-adolescent partners to become OMK Ambassadors.
- Train youth-adolescent partners to properly utilize Yellow Ribbon curriculum and toolkits to positively influence children of service members.

**PROGRAM COMPONENTS READY, SET, GO (RSGC) TRAINING**

Georgia tutors this multi-faceted, interactive training for youth development professionals and other interested community members based on the audience and time allowed. This training engages them throughout the deployment cycle.

Georgia hosted four weeks of military youth based camps in the summer of 2010, supporting approximately 700 military youth. Operation: Military Kids held a week of fun residential camp at Wabash 4-H Center near Danville, Georgia to August. During the week campers got waterlogged during the whitewater rafting, tried out their night vision while care cooking, slept a fit a fast food and went down the rapids. Campers also attended many educational workshops related to Science, Engineering and Technology, Water Conservation and Healthy Living. Through these fun activities military youth gained general knowledge and developed skills to build resiliency during deployment.

**BIBB COUNTY OMK AMBASSADOR PROGRAM**

Each year at the Georgia 4-H Ambassador Program, high school youth apply to represent Operation Military Kids (OMK) in their respective communities. After educational and team building courses these youths return home to educate community members about the impact within their county and build support of local military families.

One county OMK Ambassador Team has exceeded all expectations and implemented 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 McMurtry, Jaron Jackson, Marcus Key and five 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 backyard,” stated Darius McMurtry. Jaron 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 who are left behind. There are always some 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 these youth.”

Recently, the Bibb County OMK Ambassador Team planned Operation: Scraptach at the Warner Robins Air Force Base where ambassadors helped military youth create memories in a scrapbook. A Hero Pack Service Project event where they pack over 300 Hero Packs to distribute to military youth, they adopted a military base overseas by supporting them with manuactured letters. They also assisted in hosting 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 in the summer military family week 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 for the first time stated, “I am glad that 4-H and OMK are providing opportunities for military youth. It’s hard when you have to leave your kids at home and the JROTC is something new. Just to know that they have that outlet is a relief.”

While the Bibb County OMK Ambassador Team is busy supporting local military families and youth, they in turn require support from their county Extension office and local partnership. 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 BACKYARD,” STATED DARIUS MCMURTRY. JARON JACKSON ADDED, “WHAT MANY PEOPLE DON’T UNDERSTAND IS THAT WHEN SOLDIERS ARE DEPLOYED AND ARE SERVING OUR NATION OVERSEAS, THEY AIN’T THE ONLY ONES WHO ARE LEFT BEHIND. THERE ARE ALWAYS SOME WHO ARE ALLING 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 THESE YOUTH.”

**HERO PACKS**

Here Packs are tangible ways to handle deliver a salute to military youth for their strengths and sacrifices during deployment. Georgia OMK has prepared and delivered thousands of Here Packs since the program’s inception to school and community organizations. While a “pack” may include a variety of items, each one contains a handwritten letter to the young person from another youth in Georgia.