

**2007 CYFAR Conference
May 1-4, 2007
Chicago, IL
Poster Session Proposal
(accepted for presentation)**

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CYFAR Program Area

School-Age

Integrated Program Components

Community

Audience Level

Beginner

Maximum Number

Preferred Format

1 = Poster Session

***Title of Proposed Workshop, Computer Lab, Poster or Program Showcase Exhibit:**
Evaluation of Ohio's Operation: Military Kids Camps

***Proposal Description** (60-word paragraph which can be used to describe the Workshop, Computer Lab, Poster Session or Program Showcase Exhibit in the conference program and on the CYFAR web site)

Participation in camp programs is known to provide positive benefits to young people in general and specifically for military youth. Ohio has conducted two successful Operation: Military Kids Camps in partnership with the Ohio National Guard. This poster session will highlight the (a) program components, (b) evaluation results, and (c) implications for programming.

***Proposal Abstract (500-word limit)**

Abstracts should include:

1. A description of what relevant, valuable information related to CYFAR program, and professional development goals conference participants will achieve by attending; and;
2. How this presentation addresses issues surrounding the sustainability of community-based programs and institutionalization of organizational changes supporting work with at-risk audiences.

This was the only camp I've been to and it was awesome. I had so much fun and I learned a lot.

You have helped me make many new friends and gave me an experience I'll remember for life.

My daughter would like to come back to the same camp next year as a counselor-in-training.

In recent years, the nature of military service includes increased deployments of service members. The Global War on Terrorism has changed expectations for all service members, but in particular those of the National Guard and Reserves. Deployment is an unusual event in a child's life and can therefore be quite traumatic. A recently released report on youth with deployed parents indicated that deployment is linked with several negative outcomes (Huebner & Mancini, 2005). This presents a number of implications for youth development professionals. Among the suggested recommendations include: (a) getting youth involved in social support networks, (b) encouraging youth to learn new life skills, (c) teaching youth to express stress and emotions in a healthy manner, and (d) promoting the importance of doing fun activities.

Through Operation: Military Kids (OMK) we are working to unite this group by providing opportunities to meet and connect with others who share a similar situation. Through these educational experiences youth have the opportunity to find something positive in an otherwise negative situation. One aspect of Ohio's OMK program that offers suddenly military youth new ways to cope is participation in residential camp programs. We have conducted two successful OMK Camps in partnership with the Ohio National Guard. This poster session will highlight the (a) program components, (b) evaluation results, and (c) implications for programming.

Participation in camp programs is known to provide positive benefits to young people in general (American Camp Association, 2005) and specifically for military youth (Leonhard, 2006). Camp is a very unique educational environment that has helped participants grow in positive identity, social skills, physical and thinking skills, and positive values (American Camp Association, 2005). A residential camp brings youth with similar situations together to allow them to share their experiences and gain support from each other, as well as to build positive coping strategies and develop new skills. Thus, the camp setting is an ideal environment to foster the goals of Operation: Military Kids.

Youth, parents, and camp counselors have completed surveys and open-ended questions to provide feedback about camp. Post-camp evaluation indicates that “meeting new people” is the best thing about camp. Campers indicated that they had fun, were more confident about handling future challenges, and learned something new through their camp experience. Parents also expressed what a positive experience it was for their children. 4-H camp counselors expand their horizons and develop additional skills by working with a new audience. At the organizational level, the partnership between Ohio 4-H and the Ohio National Guard is firmly established. The camp program is a significant piece, and this relationship had led to many other joint programming ventures. In addition, we have attracted considerable media attention and new donors as a result of the camp program. Implications of the camp evaluation include (a) fine tuning program components, (b) expanding leadership roles for experienced counselors; (b) expanding counselor-in-training program to incorporate military youth.