

Our Military Kids Deployed Program

The Impact on Children and Families of Deployed National Guard and Reserve Service Members



Survey Conducted: October 2016

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The purpose of this annual survey was to gauge the effectiveness of Our Military Kids' extracurricular activity grants in mitigating stress and other negative symptoms in children of National Guard and Reserve service members during deployment. This survey, the eighth of its kind, was executed to test the accuracy and reliability of previous results. No other third-party studies pertaining to extracurricular activities have focused solely on National Guard and Reserve families.

Participants and Methods. The chosen research methodology required sending online surveys to families of children who received grants between September 24, 2015 and September 24, 2016. Surveys (3,269) were e-mailed to families of deployed reserve component military members. Families had two weeks to complete the survey; they were contacted/reminded by OMK staff three times. Survey questions were crafted to shed light on the program's impact on children, as well as its peripheral impact on family members.



Families had two weeks to complete the survey and were contacted three times. The response rate was 45.07% (852 responses).

Results. Key Respondents: 17.84% of respondents were service members; 83.33% were mothers of grant recipients. **Key Service Members:** 63.15% were enlisted; 38.26% were serving in the Army National Guard; 27.82% had served in the military for 10-15 years; 36.85 had deployed twice; 73.12% lived in the same states as their units; 29.23% had most recently deployed to Kuwait; 75.94% had most recently deployed for 6-12 months. **Key findings on Effects of Deployment:** 32.98% had financial difficulties during their deployments; 41.31% of non-deployed parent respondents reported their employment was affected; 29.93% reported their children's academic performance decreased; 71.60% reported their children experienced increased stress/anxiety during deployments. **Key family findings:** 45.66% had two children receiving grants; 46.83% had one child who received a grant. **Key impacts of Our Military Kids grants:** 68.78% reported their children's academic performance increased; 86.85% noted their children's symptoms improved; 94.13% reported improvement of family overall well-being; 93.43% noted improved service member morale; 62.21% reported the likelihood of experiencing financial strain without the grant. **Key findings on the**

Our Military Kids program: 45.42% heard about Our Military Kids through the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program; 94.84% thought the application process was easy; 93.43% in favor of extending grants through reintegration and redeployment phases; 78.17% considered the grant a factor when making a decision about re-enlistment; and all but one respondent would recommend Our Military Kids to other families.

Conclusions: An overwhelming majority of respondents in the deployed category provided positive results involving the Our Military Kids grant program. Nearly 87% of respondents noted that grants helped their children's stress and anxiety levels, while nearly 69% of respondents reported that grants helped increase their children's academic performance. Results showed that the Our Military Kids Program positively affected not only the children, but their families, as well. Over 94% of respondents reported that grants positively impacted entire families, and over 93% of respondents reported the grants positively impacted service members' morale, including 97% of service members who took the survey, themselves. Finally, all but one respondent would recommend the Our Military Kids program to other families.

INTRODUCTION

Our Military Kids, a nonprofit organization located in McLean, Virginia, began in 2004 as a pilot program with HHC/3-116 Infantry Regiment of the Virginia Army National Guard deployed to Afghanistan. Until 2006, Our Military Kids operated as a regional program throughout Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia. In 2006, by expanding to include National Guard and Reserve families nationwide, Our Military Kids filled an identified gap in support services to geographically dispersed military families. In 2008, the organization further expanded to include the children of severely injured service members and veterans, recognizing that the stresses of families of the wounded are similar to those felt by deployed National Guard and Reserve families. Since its inception, Our Military Kids has provided over \$22 million -- 55,000 grants -- to more than 45,000 children living in all 50 states, U.S. territories and Washington, D.C. Of these, 51,689 grants have gone to children of deployed service members, totaling nearly \$20.9 million.¹

Within Our Military Kids' Deployed Program, grants have covered a maximum of \$500² for up to six months of fees for activities in the categories of Sports, Fine Arts, Camps, Tutoring and Other Enrichment Activities. Children may receive one grant per parent deployment. The purpose of the grants is to help children cope with stresses and negative outcomes associated with separation from parents during deployments. In order to qualify for a grant, a child must have a National Guard or Reserve military parent, who is deployed overseas in support of an overseas military contingency operation.

National Guard and Reserve families, unlike their active duty counterparts, are dispersed throughout the country and often separated from military support facilities. Additionally, spouses and children are not readily accustomed to long deployments associated with military life; they may lack resiliency skills to manage stress of separation and reintegration.

Previous studies conducted by third parties found that involving children in positive, structured and enriching activities eases the stress and anxiety of having a parents deployed to a war zone.

DEPLOYED PROGRAM

In 2005, Our Military Kids gave an initial outlay of 58 grants to children of deployed service members. Awarding over 51,000 grants since then, its record year to date was 2010, when it gave over 10,000 grants. So far in 2016, Our Military Kids Deployed Program has distributed 2,769 grants.³ The Deployed Program provides one grant per overseas deployment per child. To date, almost 7,000 children have received more than one grant.

Deployed Guard and Reserve Population

Since 2001, an estimated 2.7 million service members have deployed to war zones in Iraq and Afghanistan. Of these, over a million have come from the National Guard and Reserve forces. Although distinctions may not dramatically affect what happens on the battlefield, National Guard and Reserve families face unique challenges. Living far from a military base, as 70% of military families currently do, prevents them from receiving military support they could expect if they lived closer. Secondly, National Guard and Reserve families have less experience dealing with deployment and re-integration than their active counterparts. They are less likely to be integrated into a military social support network, less familiar with how to access military benefits and less likely to use installation-based services. In fact, less than one-half of National Guard and Reserve families surveyed reported a consistent level of support during all phases⁴ of the deployment cycle.⁵



¹As of 10/28/2016

²As of 10/1/2016, the maximum grant award amount was reduced to \$250

³As of 10/28/16

⁴ Pre-deployment, deployment, reintegration and redeployment

⁵ Sogomonyan, F. & Cooper, J.L. (2010). Trauma Faced by Children of Military Families: What Every Policymaker Should Know http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_938.pdf

This program is by far the most helpful non-military program offering assistance during deployment. Financial burden is one of the primary stressors, and the one that can be most directly helped. This program goes to the base of that problem, helping not only the deployed service member, but their children.

-Deployed Army National Guardsman

Grant Activities

Since its inception, the Our Military Kids Deployed Program has awarded over 51,000 grants to more than 44,000 children. Eligible activities, which families choose themselves, fall into four major categories: Fine Arts, Sports, Camps and Tutoring.⁶ Each year, Sports is the most popular category, followed by Arts, Camps and Tutoring. The most popular activities are gymnastics, dance, martial arts, and camps.

Grant Recipients

Age

Our Military Kids grant recipients range in age from 3-18. The largest group falls between ages 7-10.

Gender

Throughout the program's history, Our Military Kids has served more girls than boys.⁷

Race/Ethnicity

Our Military Kids does not collect information on race, ethnicity, or religion.

State of Residence

Our Military Kids has served children in all U.S. states, territories and the District of Columbia. Since 2005, the states having the largest numbers of grant recipients are Texas, California, and Florida.

OUR MILITARY KIDS DEPLOYED PROGRAM GRANT RECIPIENTS

	2016 ⁸	% 2016	2005-2016	% 2005-2016
<u>NUMBER OF GRANTS</u>	2769		51689	
<u>GENDER</u>				
MALE	1272	45.94%	23592	45.64%
FEMALE	1492	53.88%	28011	54.19%
<u>AGE</u>				
3	96	3.47%	1547	2.99%
4	201	7.26%	2853	5.52%
5	212	7.66%	3681	7.12%
6	267	9.64%	4221	8.17%
7	251	9.06%	4369	8.45%
8	253	9.14%	4560	8.82%
9	246	8.88%	4396	8.50%
10	213	7.69%	4295	8.31%
11	187	6.75%	3973	7.69%
12	163	5.89%	3648	7.06%
13	137	4.95%	3243	6.27%
14	139	5.02%	2981	5.77%
15	125	4.51%	2701	5.23%
16	129	4.66%	2412	4.67%
17	95	3.43%	1768	3.42%
18	50	1.81%	819	1.58%
<u>STATE OF RESIDENCE</u>				
TX	143	5.16%	3062	5.92%
CA	188	6.79%	2973	5.75%
FL	199	7.19%	2336	4.52%
<u>TYPE OF ACTIVITY</u>				
ARTS	594	21.45%	13073	25.29%
CAMPS	328	11.85%	5477	10.60%
SPORTS	1620	58.50%	28196	54.55%
TUTORING	227	8.20%	4545	8.79%

⁶ Activities that fall outside of these categories are grouped into the "Other Enrichment Activity" category.

⁷ 2016- 53.88% female; 2005-2016- 54.19% female

⁸ January 1, 2016-October 28, 2016

PARTICIPANTS AND METHODS

Methodology

Data were collected through Survey Monkey, an online survey service. The survey consisted of 31 open- and close-ended questions. Survey invitations were sent via email to one member of each family. The survey was conducted October 3, 2016--October 14, 2016. The response rate was 45.07%, with 852 families responding to the survey. A separate but similar survey was sent to families using Our Military Kids Severely Injured Program.

Sample

Families of Deployed National Guard and Reserve service members, who received an Our Military Kids grant from September 14, 2015-September 24, 2016, were selected for participation in this survey. We had clean email addresses for 1,890 families. Families that had not provided email address on past grant applications were not contacted.

Respondents

One hundred fifty-two respondents (17.84%) were service members, 669 (78.52%) were spouses of service members, six (.70%) were parents of service members, and 25 (2.93%) were placed in the “other” category, to include children of service members, ex-spouses of service members and unmarried co-parents with service members.

The majority of respondents (83.33%) were mothers of grant recipients; remaining respondents (15.38%) were fathers, grandparents (.70%) and other (.59%).



Service Member Information

Gender

Information on gender was not collected.

State of Residence

The largest representation of any state was California (7.63%), followed by Florida (7.16%), Virginia (5.87%), New York (5.52%), Texas (5.40%), and Utah (5.28%).

Number of Children

The highest number of respondents (45.66%) reported having two children. There were respondents (26.53%) with only one child and respondents (.23%) with seven children, the highest number reported.

Pay Grade

The majority of service members were enlisted (63.15%) followed by officers (32.39%) and warrant officers (4.46%).

Branch of Service

Survey respondents represented all branches of the reserve component. The largest representation was Army National Guard (38.26%), followed by Air National Guard (21.60%), and Army Reserve (16.20%).

Length of Military Service

The largest represented group (27.82%) served for 10-15 years followed by 15-20 years (27.46%). The least represented group (6.22%) served for less than five years.

Unit in the Same State as Residence

The majority of respondents (73.12%) reported living in the same state as their unit.

Distance to Nearest Military Installation

Responses for distance from the nearest military installation were almost even. The largest response (29.23%) was for more than 50 miles followed by 10-25 miles (28.76%), 25-50 miles (25.82%) and less than 10 miles (16.20%).

Number of Deployments

The largest number of respondents (36.85%) reported having deployed twice, followed by three or more times (32.86%), and one time (30.28%).

Period of Most Recent Deployment

The majority of most recent deployments was 6-12 months (75.94%), followed by 0-6 months (12.68%), and more than 12 months (11.38%).

Location of Most Recent Deployment

The deployment location with the most responses (29.23%) was Kuwait, followed by Qatar (13.73%) and Afghanistan (12.68%). Multiple locations were listed under the “Other” option.

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Total %</i>
	852	
<i>RELATIONSHIP TO CHILD</i>		
<i>MOTHER</i>	710	83.33%
<i>FATHER</i>	131	15.38%
<i>GRANDPARENT</i>	6	.70%
<i>PAY GRADE</i>		
<i>ENLISTED</i>	538	63.15%
<i>OFFICER</i>	276	32.39%
<i>WARRANT</i>	38	4.46%
<i>BRANCH OF SERVICE</i>		
<i>AIR FORCE-RESERVE</i>	79	9.27%
<i>AIR NATIONAL GUARD</i>	184	21.60%
<i>ARMY- NATIONAL GUARD</i>	3226	38.26%
<i>ARMY-RESERVE</i>	138	16.20%
<i>COAST GUARD-RESERVE</i>	3	.35%
<i>MARINE CORPS- RESERVE</i>	6	.70%
<i>NAVY- RESERVE</i>	116	13.62%
<i>LENGTH OF SERVICE</i>		
<i>< 5 YEARS</i>	53	6.22%
<i>5-10 YEARS</i>	170	19.95%
<i>10-15 YEARS</i>	237	27.82%
<i>15-20 YEARS</i>	234	27.46%
<i>>20 YEARS</i>	158	18.54%
<i>NUMBER OF CHILDREN</i>		
1	226	26.53%
2	389	45.66%
3	160	18.78%
4	52	6.10%
5	15	1.76%
6	8	.94%
7+	2	.23%

“This was a huge morale boost for me. As a deployed mother of three children, I often felt helpless, being unable to do the things with my children that I normally did. Being able to apply for this grant and allow my kids to start a new activity while I was gone, especially since my family PCSed while I was gone, not only helped me, but helped my children make new friends in a new home and school while I was away. That was invaluable!”

-Deployed Navy Reservist

EFFECTS OF DEPLOYMENT

Approximately 2,000,000 children in the United States have one or both parents serving in the military. Approximately 800,000 military parents have experienced at least one deployment. Deployments, which have increased in frequency and length since 9/11, affect families in different ways. Different symptoms and behaviors may surface for different family members, depending on their ages, temperament, the phases of deployment, and the relationships family members have to the deployed service member (spouse, parent, child). Very young children may exhibit separation anxiety, temper tantrums, and changes in eating habits. School-age children may experience a decline in academic performance, or they may experience mood changes or physical complaints. Adolescents may become angry, act out, withdraw, or show signs of apathy.⁹

“Receiving this grant allowed my son to participate in karate classes, which I feel helped him work out some of his feelings of frustration and sadness during my six-month deployment. Thank you so much for caring for my son and family during this most difficult time in our lives.”

-Deployed Air National Guardsman

Many children experience deployment with minor repercussions, while one in three is at high-risk for psychological issues. One in four children experiences depression, and one in five experiences academic challenges.

Military children, particularly those from National Guard or Reserve families, experience anxiety due to a lack of understanding or awareness of military culture in the communities in which they live, as well as limited military peer networks.¹⁰

Financial Difficulties

Almost 33% of respondents reported that their most recent deployments caused financial difficulties for their families. Approximately four out of 10 (41.31%) noted their most recent deployments affected the non-deployed parents' ability to work outside of the home.

Effects on Children

Nearly three out of 10 (29.93%) respondents reported that their children's academic performance decreased as a result of service members' most recent deployments. Additionally, 71.60% reported that their children experienced stress/anxiety during this time.

Symptoms¹¹

Nearly two-thirds (65.93%) of the respondents' children experienced deployment-related symptoms in addition to anxiety and stress. For 29.67% of respondents, the most common symptom was Acting Out/Aggression, followed by Crying/Depression (24.61%), Attention Difficulties (21.99%), Fearfulness/Nightmares (17.06%), Headaches/Stomach Aches (13.97%), Social Withdrawal (10.58%), Changes in Appetite (10.23%) and Negative/Morbid Thoughts (8.32%).



⁹ National Center for PTSD. "How Deployment Stress Affects Children and Families: Research Findings."

http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treatment/family/pro_deployment_stress_children.asp

¹⁰ Chandra, A., Lara-Cinisomo, S., Burns, R. M., & Griffin, B.A. (2012). "Assessing Operation Purple: A Program Evaluation of a Summer Camp for Military Youth." Rand Center for Military Health Policy Research.

http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/technical_reports/2012/RAND_TR1243.pdf

¹¹ Respondents were asked to report on ALL children in the family, not just those receiving Our Military Kids Grants. The number of children represented here is 1,682.

Results varied by gender. For females, Crying/Depression was the most common symptom, followed by Acting Out/Aggression and Fearfulness/Nightmares. For males, Acting Out/Aggression was the most common symptom followed by Attention Difficulties and Fearfulness/Nightmares.

Results also varied by age. The three most common symptoms for each age group were as follows:

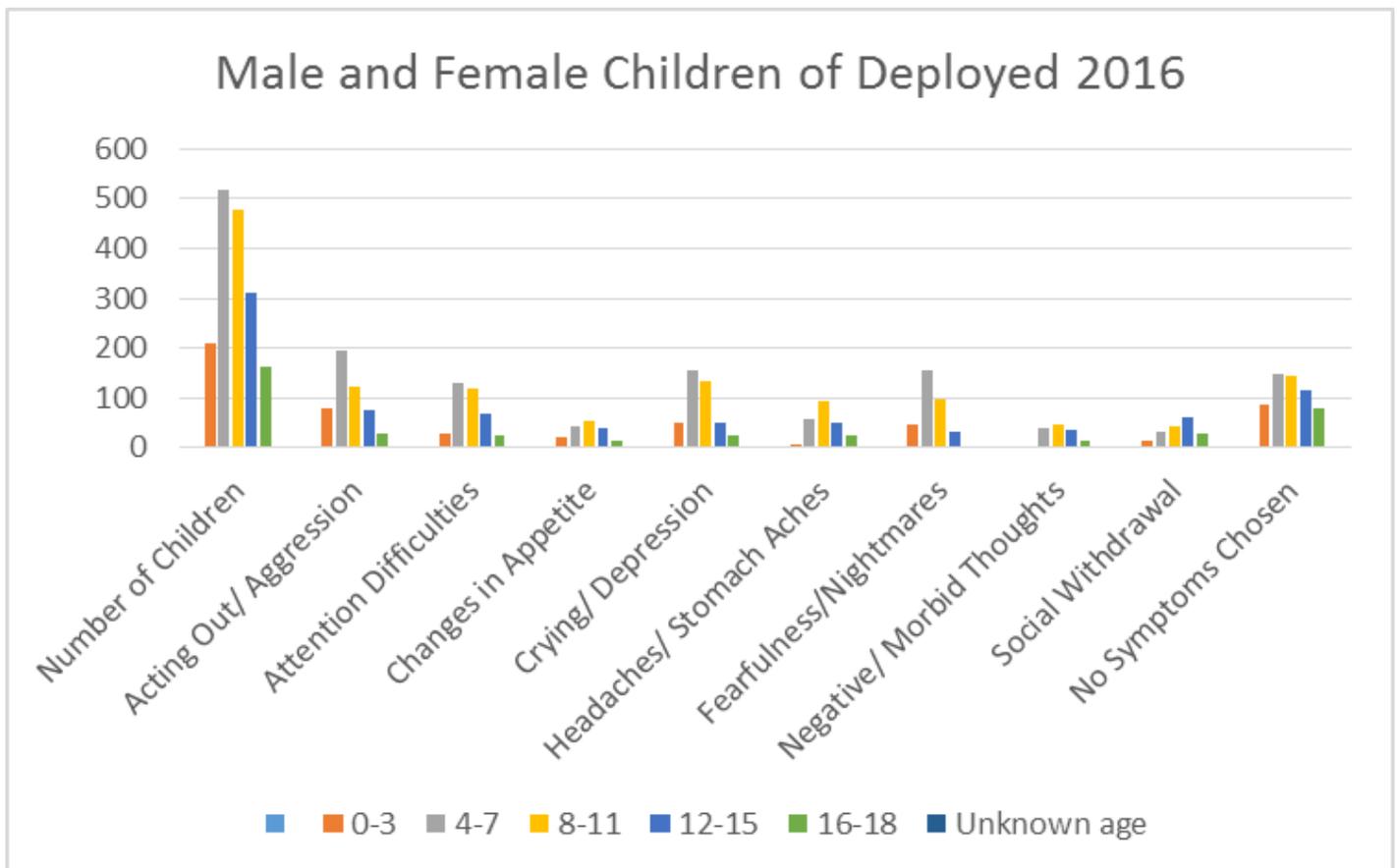
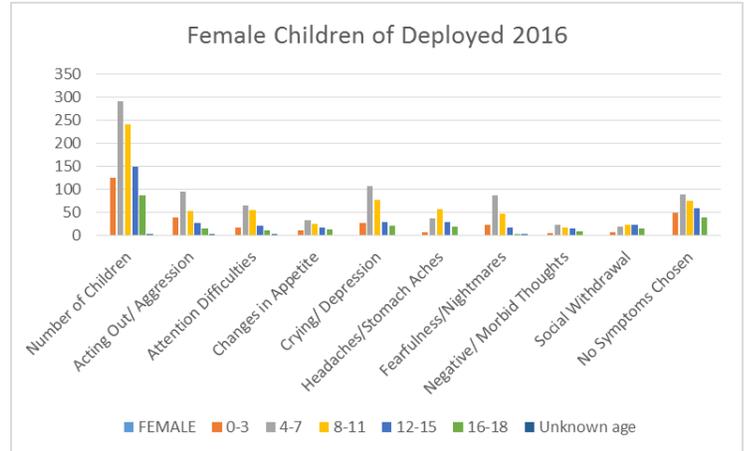
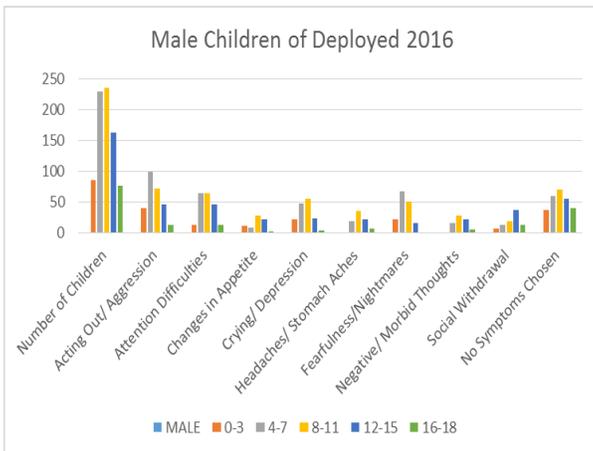
0-3- Acting Out/Aggression, Crying/Depression, Fearfulness/Nightmares

4-7- Acting Out/Aggression, Crying/Depression, Fearfulness/Nightmares

8-11- Crying/Depression, Acting Out/Aggression, Attention Difficulties

12-15- Acting Out/Aggression, Attention Difficulties, Social Withdrawal

16-18- Social Withdrawal, Acting Out/Aggression, Crying/Depression & Headaches/Stomachaches



IMPACT OF OUR MILITARY KIDS GRANTS

- 69% of respondents reported an increase in the grant recipient's academic performance.
- 87% reported an easing of the grant recipient's stress/anxiety.
- 94% reported a positive increase in overall family well-being.
- 93% reported a positive increase on the service member's morale, *including 97% of service members themselves.*
- 93% agreed that additional grants should be awarded through reintegration.
- 11% responded they would be able to enroll their children in related activities without experiencing financial strain.

FEEDBACK ON APPLICATION PROCESS

94.8% of respondents noted that the grant process was easy. All but one respondent would recommend the program to other families.¹²

DISCUSSION

Our Military Kids began in 2004 with a vision to help families connected to a local National Guard unit, which was deploying overseas. The gratitude was overwhelming, and the staff at Our Military Kids realized the need gap they had filled. Ongoing involvement in multiple wars required ongoing deployments and redeployments. The need for Our Military Kids remained and grew, and with that need came an organizational commitment to serve the children who sacrifice alongside their deployed parents.

Research gives ample evidence of the existing strain deployments cause military families. The good news is that there are proven ways to mitigate some of the negative impact deployments have on children. Family support programs, like Our Military Kids, increase resiliency and decrease negative behaviors and physical problems children experience. Not only do these increased support programs improve family functioning, they also increase the likelihood that a service member will remain in the military.¹³

The 2016 survey results are similar to those in past years; as a result, this year's survey reinforced the value of the mission of Our Military Kids: to support children of deployed National guard and Reserve service members and children of wounded warriors by providing grants for activities to help them cope while parents are recovering or absent.

A unique aspect of this year's survey was the technical ability to isolate service member responses. This data speaks loudly: **Nearly 97% of service members stated that the grants from Our Military Kids helped improve their morale during their deployment.**

Other important results: 94% of all respondents reported that grants helped their entire family; almost 87% said grants positively impacted the grant recipients' stress/anxiety; almost 69% said it helped the grant recipients' academic performance; and all but one said they would recommend Our Military Kids to other families. These numbers are overwhelmingly supportive and indicative of Our Military Kids' impact.

¹³ Sogomonyan & Cooper, 2010

Qualitative Data

Of the 852 people who took the survey, 462 (54.2%) elected to provide a comment in response to the following:

“Your feedback helps Our Military Kids receive more funding to keep the grant program available. Please share how Our Military Kids helped you, your family, and your children, in an effort to help us persuade corporate donors and foundations to continue supporting this program. We have included several comments in the following pages that best represent the sentiments shared by respondents.”

“OMK has helped my family maintain some sense of normalcy while I am gone for an extended period of time. My son used sports as an outlet to get rid of physical energy and OMK enabled him to continue to do so which improves his schoolwork and family life. My wife benefits from this because my son is more calm and obedient at home when he comes home from soccer practices and games and my son sleeps like a rock! Without OMK, I wouldn't have been able to keep my son involved in soccer as much and it has truly been a blessing. I believe that there is a direct correlation between OMK's funding of my son's sports camp and our family's overall health and well-being as well as his schoolwork. Lastly, I am happy knowing that my son isn't at home being unproductive or sad, and it is nice to break up the monotony of a deployment when sports camps and other activities are spread out throughout the deployment so that there aren't so many long stretches of just missing my family.”- *Deployed Navy Reservist*

“I greatly appreciate your support and positive difference you have made while I was gone. He was able to focus on martial arts to distract him from me being away. It gave us something to talk about and pictures of his advancement in belts. Thank you so much for putting a smile on my son's face when I couldn't.”- *Deployed Army Reservist*

“Our Military Kids is an outstanding organization that has helped my family so much! More than words can ever describe! From my heart and family thank you OMK! Bravo Zulu!” -*Deployed Navy Reservist*

“I am deeply grateful for the support we received from OMK. We received grants for 2 of our children that allowed them to participate in extra-curricular activities while I am deployed. This support helped relieve financial strain on my household and helped the kids deal with the stress of my absence.”
Deployed Army Reservist

“My daughter was withdrawing from her friends and constantly asked if I had been captured or why I wasn't coming home. Her grades dropped and she cried a lot at school and told everyone she missed her mommy. I tried my best to call as often as I could to keep her spirits up but she seemed to focus on my absence. She always drew the most beautiful pictures but scribbled them over with black markers because ‘nothing was beautiful without mommy.’ I asked her about activities she might like to try and she seemed really interested in horseback riding. We enrolled her through Our Military Kids and I believe that it gave her a positive distraction to help her cope. Her grades improved and she didn't cry as much as she did. I am back now and she still continues to ride. I am so glad we found something that she enjoys so much. Thank you for giving us the opportunity!”- *Deployed Air Force Reservist*

"Even when families can afford the child's activities without the grant-applying and receiving the grant feels special and serves as a moral boost. Knowing you "earn" this for your sacrifices helps to promote the feeling within the family that we're all "in this together" and that the kids deserve to be recognized, too, for what they're going through."- *Spouse of Army Reservist*

"Thank you for providing the funds for our daughter to have a reading tutor. Having the additional help was a huge help to both of us. Her reading tests and grades overall improved dramatically with the assistance of her tutor. I am very grateful for your service and dedication to our service members."- *Army Reserve Spouse*

"Our 9-year-old son took this past deployment very hard. Daily sobbing for at least an hour about 5 days a week. Not only did Our Military Kids give him an outlet and something else to think about, but it gave me a chance to regroup. I don't know what I would have done had we not had this opportunity. Life changing."- *Spouse of Army National Guardsman*

"Just wanted to say thank you for all you guys do. My 2 children were showing signs of anxiety, irritability, and negativity in the beginning of my deployment. Once they were approved for the grant and were enrolled in martial arts, my wife and I have noticed an improvement in their behaviors ever since. Thank you for taking care of my kids. When I was at the airport coming back during my back to back deployments, I was talking to a younger gentleman. This gentleman thanked me for my service and asked how he could give back to me. I told him by donating even the smallest amount of money to Our Military Kids and that taking care of our kids is the greatest thing a deployed troop can ask for."- *Deployed Army National Guardsman*

"This program helped my boys attend a YMCA summer camp with their friends that I would not have been able to afford during my husband's deployment. During his deployment as a recalled Navy Reservist, our income was cut by 40%. We do not live in a military community, and while we have great friends and family around us, we don't have many support resources available or other military families who understand what we go through when a family member is deployed. I can't thank you enough for the joy that attending this camp brought to my boys during this difficult time."- *Spouse of Army Reservist*

"It made my kids feel important to the whole process of being mobilized. They had felt abandoned and that the US Government didn't care what happened to the family. Now they feel like they have not been forgotten."- *Deployed Navy Reservist*

"Our Military Kids made a considerable impact in my daughters' lives while their father was deployed. As children, they don't fully understand why dad has to leave. For love of dad and their country, they try and put on a brave face, but at night the tears and fears settle in. Grants from Our Military Kids allowed my children to enroll in extracurricular activities they could look forward to and hold on to while dad was away. This program makes such a huge difference with such a kind act."- *Spouse of Air National Guardsman*