

## **Kansas Communities Move from Awareness-to-Action in Support of Military Youth and Families**

**By**

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A number of studies have confirmed that a disproportionately high percentage of soldiers serving during the Iraq war are from small towns (O'Hare & Bishop, 2006; Associate Press, 2007). With the economic downturn, more families from small towns are seeing their unemployed youth and underemployed adults enlist to serve in all branches of the military. For families of National Guard and Reserve military, often the isolation they feel by being one of only a handful of military-connected people scattered across Kansas counties is compounded by the stress they experience in keeping a household going when a loved one is deployed.

Though military-sponsored support services exist, Kansas OMK (Operation Military Kids) is calling on civic organizations from Kiwanis, Rotary, and church groups to recreational sport teams to take action and offer and then provide tangible help beginning with the month of November.

Specifically, OMK is sponsoring the annual "Awareness-to-Action" campaign which calls on community clubs and civic groups to increase citizen awareness of the challenges confronted by Kansas-based military families. But being aware does little good unless there's some tangible action that follows. The Awareness-to-Action kits, which are available free of charge at the Kansas OMK website, encourages groups to take action through efforts such as weekend events for military youth, fall yard care, free babysitting help or transportation to a child's football game. The actions need not be expensive, flashy or "photo opportunities" for dignitaries. Actions begun in November and carried over the year should be signs to military youth and families that their sacrifices are appreciated and that communities value them.

The Kansas OMK coordinating team for Awareness to Action includes representatives from Kansas 4-H, Army Reserve, Kansas National Guard, Kansas State University, Ft. Riley-Ft. Leavenworth-McConnell AFB School Liaisons, Military Source-JFSAP, and the KS American Legion.

To learn more about OMK's 2009 "Awareness-to-Action" log onto:

[www.kansasomk.org](http://www.kansasomk.org)

You can also contact:

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