

## One gets deployed and the rest also serve



One camper describes Operation Military Kids Navy camp as a "once-in-a-lifetime adventure spent with complete strangers that became close friends."

What happens to a child when the parent is deployed? Every youth responds differently to the deployment of a loved one, but many often feel that their peers do not understand what it is like to have a parent who is serving in another country. They worry about the safety of their parent, and the extensive media coverage of military operations creates daily anxiety.

[Wisconsin Operation: Military Kids](#) [1] (OMK) provides support to these children and teens by helping them connect with other youth in similar situations and providing activities to help them cope with the stresses of deployment. UW-Extension provides leadership for OMK in Wisconsin.

OMK Camps have provided a welcoming environment to military youth for the past three years. Consistently, youth say the best part of camp is the chance to spend time with other youth who walk in their shoes. Sharing personal experiences with one another, developing lasting friendships and learning they are not alone are invaluable opportunities provided by camp.

Navy youth from across the country came to Wisconsin to experience OMK camp in December 2011. The camp was a new experience for many. Some had never seen snow before, and the new environment helped youth discover their personal strength while making new friends, strapping on a snowboard for the first time and weathering delays at the airport.

At the end of the week, campers shared their appreciation for the experience, their peers and the staff. Participants developed a sense of self and appreciation for their contributions to a group and had a chance to meet new people and recognize the value in each person's uniqueness.

"It was a once-in-a-lifetime adventure spent with complete strangers that became close friends," one camper says.

Wisconsin is home to almost 15,000 military children, and they can be found in every county in the state. OMK provides opportunities for these youth to connect with peers who are in similar situations, programming for those who need help coping with the stresses of deployment, and education for local communities about the impact of deployment on service members and their families and how they can offer support.

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### Links:

[1] <http://www.uwex.edu/ces/4h/omk/>

[2] <mailto:laura.pettersen@ces.uwex.edu>