



## Pod— Youth Development

- Children & Youth
- Liaison to Child Welfare Foundation
- Junior Activities
- ALA Girls State

# Children & Youth

## 2011-2012 American Legion Auxiliary Plan of Action

Purpose: To protect, care for and support children and youth, particularly those of veterans' families and military families.

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For examples on how to implement each objective in this Plan, refer to the *How To* component at the end of this section.

# Children & Youth

## National-level Objectives

1. **Objective:** Develop, implement and monitor programs and activities that contribute to the physical, mental and emotional health and wellness of children and youth of military families.

### Action Steps:

- a. **ALA KIDDS—Kids in Danger of Depression and Suicide—is an Auxiliary project that builds referral networks of public and private support at the community level for the social and mental well-being of military children. Potential activities that units may undertake:**

Convening ALA KIDDS community groups that meet to identify ways to better address the needs of military children. Meeting participants could include:

- Give an Hour or other mental health organization volunteers
- Military parents
- Representatives from Boys and Girls Clubs
- Big Brothers and Sisters (BBBS)
- School counselors, teachers, or other representatives
- Guard/Reserve Family Readiness Group representatives
- Operation Military Kids representatives
- Any other individual, group, or organization with a stake in military child wellness

Developing and implementing ALA KIDDS public awareness events to raise community knowledge and support of military children. Events could include the following:

- Participation in National Children’s Mental Health Awareness Day in May (link in resources section)
- Community events and gatherings that bring together military and non-military families, such as unit-hosted dinners, game nights, community fairs, charity walk/runs, etc.
- Public awareness information campaigns, including newsletter stories, news releases, discussions on social networking sites (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, blogs, website postings), etc.

- b. **Hosting family resources and services fairs to introduce military families to mental health and social support services in their community, as well as military family support and Juniors program of the Auxiliary and Legion. Participants could include the following:**

- Give An Hour
- Big Brothers/Big Sisters
- Boys and Girls Club
- Operation: Military Kids
- Faith-based organizations

- c. **Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America Military Mentoring Program – The Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America (BBBS) Military Mentoring Program (MMP) offers one-to-one mentoring to children and youth of military families. Potential activities that units may consider:**

- Work with the local BBBS organization to create educational or recreational group event for unmatched military children.
- Support the military mentoring program of the BBBS by sponsoring, organizing or delivering a REACH activity to youth enrolled in a BBBS. REACH activities are structured group activities that BBBS agencies organize and deliver for their youth.

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# Children & Youth

The activities focus on developmental goals in five areas: Recreation, Educational & Career, Arts & Culture, Civic Engagement, and Health & Fitness.

- Recruit Auxiliary and Legion members to do community-based (one-to-one) and school mentoring for military children and youth.
- Invite your local BBBS to a Legion Family event to explain how members can become BBBS mentors.
- Offer opportunities for members who want to do a volunteer project but can't attend meetings.
- Reach out to other service organizations to better serve the unmatched military children and youth populations.

**d. Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) Military Programs – BGCA provides services to military children and youth at youth centers on military installations and through outreach to traditional community centers. Potential activities that units may undertake with a BGCA military club or traditional club include the following:**

- Initiate joint service projects for Juniors and BGCA military children; peer mentoring with Junior members and BGCA military children.
- Sponsor or organize educational or recreational events for BGCA military clubs or traditional clubs.
- Market Auxiliary and Legion scholarships and Americanism opportunities to BGCA military children and youth.

**e. Operation: Military Kids (OMK) – OMK supports military children and youth through community awareness, community capacity building and outreach support services. Potential activities that units may undertake with OMK include the following:**

- Sponsorship or organization of a youth outreach service program.
- Promotion of the Speak Out for Military Kids project.
- Assemble Hero Packs at Junior meetings and/or Girls State session. This is a hands-on expression of support for military families, children and youth.
- Sponsorship of an OMK camp in your department.
- Raise community awareness of the needs of military children and the need for communities to build their capacity to deliver outreach services. Applicable community partners might include BGCA and BBBS.

2. **Objective:** Department or Unit Innovative Activity – Auxiliary Departments and Units, along with their Legion Family may undertake a military Children & Youth program or activity other than a national Auxiliary-supported program/activity. The program/activity should have military children and youth as its target population. The Department or Unit should demonstrate that the program/activity is innovative in nature or responsive to an explicit unmet need among military children and youth. Some state programs to reference include the following:

- Army Reserve Enrichment Camp

3. **Objective:** Support the implementation of Children & Youth programs of The American Legion.

**Action Steps:** Visit [www.legion.org/youth/publications](http://www.legion.org/youth/publications) for information on Gateway Drugs, Suicide Warning Signs, Halloween Safety and Missing Children.

## Programs and Activities

### April is Children & Youth Month

During this time, The American Legion Family emphasizes its commitment to our nation's children. Visit [www.legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/cybroch\\_aprilmonth.pdf](http://www.legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/cybroch_aprilmonth.pdf) for more information.

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# Children & Youth

## Youth Hero Award – Local/Unit and National Level

A national award for youth, under 18 years of age, who perform a heroic act of physical valor. Nominations are to be completed at Unit level and mailed to the Department Secretary, who certifies and mails the application to National Headquarters. (Applications should not be mailed directly to National Headquarters.) The National President will sign the award certificate and it will be returned to the Unit to be presented on behalf of the Unit and the National Organization. Department Children & Youth Chairmen should be notified of the award. Recipients are awarded a certificate and Youth Hero Award Medal.

## Good Deed Award – Local/Unit and National Level

An award for youth, under 18 years of age, who do not meet the Youth Hero Award criteria but who are great examples of community service. This award is submitted on the same nomination form as the Youth Hero Award.

## **Children & Youth Awards**

### 1. Best Overall Program - Department Award

A citation plaque will be awarded to the Department Chairman in each Division conducting the best overall promotion of the Children & Youth program. Entry must be in narrative form, not to exceed 1,000 words, and may include pictures, news articles, press releases, etc. A cover sheet, including the name of the award and name and contact information for the Department C&Y Chairman, should be included. All entries must be mailed to the appropriate Divisional Chairman by June 1, 2012.

### 2. Outstanding Promotion of Supporting Activities – Unit Award

A citation plaque will be awarded to the Unit Children & Youth Chairman in each Division for the most outstanding program promoting the Children & Youth program activities. Entry must be in narrative form, not to exceed 1,000 words, and may include pictures, news articles, press releases, etc. A cover sheet, including the name of the award, Department, and name and contact information for the Unit C&Y Chairman, should be included. All entries must be mailed to the appropriate Divisional Chairman by June 1, 2012.

### 3. “Honoring Their Service” Award

The children of military parents and of activated Guard and Reservists are also “serving” their country. We can honor their service by providing support for these children. A plaque citation will be awarded to a Unit in each Division with the best innovative program supporting military children. Entry must be in narrative form, not to exceed 1,000 words, and may include pictures, news articles, press releases, etc. A cover sheet, including the name of the award, Department, and name and contact information for the Unit C&Y Chairman, should be included. All entries must be mailed to the appropriate Divisional Chairman by June 1, 2012.

## **Resources**

1. Operation: Military Kids (American Legion Family National Partner) [www.operationmilitarykids.org](http://www.operationmilitarykids.org)
  2. Big Brothers Big Sisters: [www.bbbs.org](http://www.bbbs.org)
  3. Boys & Girls Clubs of America: [www.bgca.org](http://www.bgca.org)
  4. The American Legion Children & Youth Programs: [www.legion.org](http://www.legion.org)
  5. The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation: [www.legion.org/cwf/](http://www.legion.org/cwf/)
- See program page on [www.ALAforVeterans.org](http://www.ALAforVeterans.org) for additional resources.

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  4. The American Legion Children & Youth Programs: [www.legion.org](http://www.legion.org)
  5. The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation: [www.legion.org/cwf/](http://www.legion.org/cwf/)
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**Committee:**

## Children & Youth

**Submitted by:**

Janet Jefford

**Contact Information for Questions:**

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**Objective:**

#1 Develop, implement, and monitor programs and activities that contribute to the physical, mental, and emotional health and wellness of children and youth of military families.

**Step-by-Step Instructions:**

The American Legion Auxiliary needs to be a strong source of care and support for military families. Suicide and depression have become real problems among military children. Military children whose parents are deployed are using mental health services at a rate three and a half times higher than their civilian counterparts. Who better to adopt these military families than a force of more than 850,000 ALA members who are experts on life as a family member of a veteran? What can you do?

- Increase community awareness and help to build public support.
  - Facilitate and host a community meeting. Invite all local groups or organizations that can be identified as community partners or stakeholders. Invite Family Support Groups and Family Readiness Groups from the National Guard, local Reserve units or military bases or installations. Invite school counselors and teachers along with military families. Work together to find ways to support these children and their families.
  - Increase community awareness using your Auxiliary or Legion website. Provide links to the American Legion Auxiliary Gateway to Services and other organizations that provide services to support the well-being of military children.
  - Download and distribute The American Legion publications *Warning Signs of Youth Suicide* (24-005) and *Gateway Drugs* (24-006) available at [www.legion.org/publications](http://www.legion.org/publications).
- Develop relationships between Legion Family members and military children and families, and children of veterans.
  - Create a one-on-one mentoring program for military and veteran children.
    - § Contact your local Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Tell them you are interested in setting up a meeting between them and local military and veteran children and families to create a mentoring program specifically designed for these children. Invite your Post, Unit, and SAL members to attend. Invite local military and veteran families by advertising the meeting. Be creative: Use church bulletins, brochures sent to Guard and Reserve units, posters in grocery stores, editorial in newspapers, etc.
    - § Use the meeting as a forum to increase awareness of the unique needs of these children and discuss ways that you can use the Big Brothers/Big Sisters mentoring model to connect with these children.
  - Reach out to local Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA) to find out if they have a military program in your area. Set up a meeting. Find out what their needs are and how you can help. Adopt a BGCA military club. Host holiday parties throughout the year.
- Become an advocate and active participant in Operation: Military Kids (OMK).
  - Go to the OMK website at [www.operationmilitarykids.org](http://www.operationmilitarykids.org) and click on "state information" and then click on your state to find your state OMK representative. He/she can give you the contact information for your local OMK representative. Call and tell him/her that your

*continued*

*Children & Youth How To (Objective #1) continued*

Unit wants to host a Hero Pack assembly party at your next Unit meeting. Your OMK contact will supply you with the packs and some items. Hero packs are age-specific: 0-3, 3-8 and 8-16. Your Unit can supply additional applicable items if they wish. Each Hero Pack contains a personal note. Ask your Juniors to write letters or reach out to your local schools. The OMK website offers a wide range of information about the Hero Pack project and everything you need to know to get started.

- Through OMK's Speak Out for Military Kids program, you can arrange to have a military child speak at your Unit meetings about his/her experience and what you can do to support military children and their families. Invite the local community and other organizations to attend. Again, use the OMK website for information and ideas.
- Many states hold summer camps for military children. Contact your local family support program coordinator. Ask what your Unit can do to support these camps.
- Collect arts and crafts supplies during your ALA Girls State program. Include notes of thanks and support from your Girls State citizens. Involve your Juniors. Collect supplies and write thank-you notes at your Junior meetings. Maybe Junior and senior members can volunteer at the camp or at other youth activities sponsored through Family Readiness Groups or the Family Support Groups.
- Remember military kids when distributing information about your scholarship programs, Boys State/Girls State, your Americanism essay contest, and other Unit activities and programs. Bring brochures and program information to your local armory, base, or installation.



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## Children & Youth

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**Objective:**

#2 Department or Unit Innovative Activity – Auxiliary Departments and Units, along with their Legion Family may undertake a military Children & Youth program or activity other than a national Auxiliary-supported program/activity. The program/activity should have military children and youth as its target population. The Department or Unit should demonstrate that the program/activity is innovative in nature or responsive to an explicit unmet need among military children and youth.

**Step-by-Step Instructions:**

- Sponsor a "You're My Hero" event—kind of a Hero Award for military children. Present them with certificates and medals. Be creative. Ask your Junior members to participate. Use your public relations tools to inform the community. Reference the "How To Sheets" in the Public Relations Plan of Action.
- Host a movie and popcorn night for teens or a board game night.
- Collect and distribute movie passes.
- Many military kids can't afford new prom dresses. How about getting the community involved in collecting and distributing gently used prom dresses? Ask local radio stations and newspapers to donate time and space to help advertise your initiative. Get local bridal shops involved. Don't forget to involve your high school counselors. Your Unit may also want to help with transportation expense, flowers, etc.
- Contact your local homeless shelter. Ask if there are any veterans there with children. Since 1 in 5 homeless are veterans, there is a good chance they will be living in local shelters. Find out what your Unit can do to help the children.
- Maybe the best thing you can do is get your Legion Family together and brainstorm ideas that might work in your community. Sometimes your school-aged children might be your best link to finding military children in your community. Be creative. Don't be afraid to try new ideas.



**Committee:**

## Children & Youth

**Submitted by:**

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**Objective:**

#3 Support the implementation of Children & Youth programs of The American Legion.

**Step-by-Step Instructions:**

- Plan and implement a Halloween safety program for military children in your community.
  - Order the Halloween safety brochure published by The American Legion, *Halloween: Have A Safe Night (24-012)*, through Emblem Sales.
  - Call a meeting. Include the Legion Family, and don't forget your Junior members. Decide what you want to do. Here are some ideas:
    - § Hold a Trunks for Treats event for military children and children of veterans. Decorate your cars, vans and trucks, and fill them with goodies. Arrange to hold the event in the armory's parking lot or other central area. Children go trick or treating from car to car. What a fun and safe event to engage your community in!
    - § Contact local schools, libraries, and other local organizations as a place to distribute Halloween safety brochures.
    - § Open up your Post home and hold a "safe" event for Halloween.

No matter what you decide to do, plan a public relations campaign around your event. You should consider having membership applications available. Community events provide the best opportunity to sign up new members.