Hero Packs

BACKGROUND INFORMATION
Operation Military Kids is a nationwide program to support military youth before, during, and after a parent deploys in support of the Global War on Terrorism. Hero Packs are part of the Operation Military Kids program and are a way to say thank you to military youth with a deployed parent. The Hero Pack is a backpack filled by youth with toys and items designed to help connect kids with their deployed parent. They deliver a salute to military youth for their strength and sacrifices while parents are deployed. Mom’s and Dad’s miss key life events while preserving our freedom and safety. Kids also have to assume more responsibilities while the parent is away.

Who can participate? Any organization or group can help assemble Hero Packs, donate items, or write letters of support.

Why participate in Hero Pack program? The hero pack represents a hand delivered salute to military children for their strength and sacrifices while a parent is deployed. The lives of these youth are changed dramatically when a parent is deployed. Their parent leaves the family for extended and often dangerous assignments adding stress to the family. Hero Packs recognize the strengths of military-connected youth; provide a symbol of thanks to youth for the sacrifices they make when their parents are deployed; and provide the tools to help “suddenly military” youth stay connected with their absent parent. Participating in this program helps educate the non-military community about the challenges “suddenly military” families are facing to support the Global War on Terrorism.

Who receives Hero Packs? Hero Packs are provided to military youth from any military branch (Army, Navy, Marine, Air Force, Coast Guard) and any component (Active Duty, National Guard, Reserve).

What’s in it for me? As a volunteer participating in the Hero Pack program, you are performing a valuable community service. As you participate in this community service project, you can take pride in the support you are providing. You are:

- Helping military members be able to focus on their mission knowing their children are in safe and supportive environments with caring community members.
- Showing loyalty to other young people who are having unique experiences, feelings and stresses in their lives.
- Showing appreciation for military families who are separated by duty in an effort to preserve our freedoms and safety.
- Showing you care by writing letters expressing gratitude for the military families’ sacrifice and knowing it is a situation one cannot really understand without experiencing the separation firsthand.
- Expressing good citizenship showing pride and respect in what military members are doing to defend and protect us all.

Source: Operation Military Kids Hero Pack Manual
HERO PACKS

What are Hero Packs? - Hero Packs consist of a backpack itself and its contents.

Backpacks - Backpacks can be purchased or made. Sewing simple pull-string bags is an easy, affordable, and fun way to create bags necessary for the packs. Some clubs have used fancy pillowcases as bags, providing the pack recipients with markers to decorate the bags before sending them overseas to their deployed parent.

Contents - Contents include fun items, communication tools, support literature and appreciation letters.

- Fun items are things military children can enjoy with their siblings, other parent, or friends. Fun items, such as a stuffed animal or Frisbee, are there simply to bring joy to the affected youth.

- Communication tools are meant to help encourage a connection between the deployed parent and their child. Cameras, photo paper, scrapbooks, photo albums, journals, scrapbooking supplies would all be items to include for communication. For instance, the camera can be used to capture memories the child may wish to share with their parent either by mailing the pictures immediately or saving them in the photo album/scrapbook or picture frame until reunion.

Informational brochures (support literature) on various partner organizations can be included. This is support information for the family and identifies resource information. This information is available from partners or from the OMK contact. A sample list includes (but is not limited to):

- OMK Information card/OMK information and resources specific to the state and/or community
- 4-H club program information/contact information for UF/IFAS Extension county offices
- Boys & Girls Clubs of America program information
- Program information for The American Legion
- Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) “staying involved in your child’s education during deployment” booklet
- MilitaryOneSource Information (http://www.militaryonesource.com)
- Local Partner information

Handwritten appreciation letters – These letters should be written to the child and to their deployed family member thanking them for their service and sacrifices to our country. You may also consider collecting letters of encouragement from local partners or businesses that have donated items for the Hero Packs.
LETTERS TO INCLUDE IN HERO PACK
You can write a letter to the deploying military member or to the youth.

Some general comments:
- Keep the letter positive, politically neutral and do not include personal identifying information (phone number, address, email). It is ok to use first name and group affiliation (4-H club, school, scout group).
- Have fun and thank our everyday Heroes. Write from the heart.
- Think about what you would say to a military youth/parent if you were to talk in person. That would be appropriate in a letter also.
- Share a personal experience you have done recently (4-H, scout, Keystone, etc).
- Encourage the military youth and family to join partner programming in their area. For example, if you are a 4-H member and write positive things about what you have done in 4-H they may be encouraged to participate in a local 4-H club. After you share your experience you may want to include an invitation to participate in their local organization.
- Good words to use: grateful, most appreciated, sacrifice, unselfish, service, patriotism, national honor, pride, love of country, devotion to freedom, token of appreciation, small symbol of support.
- Thank the youth for the sacrifices they are making – remind the military youth that they are Heroes too.
- Do not tell the military youth how bad you think their situation is or how sorry you may feel for them.
- Do not tell them everything will be ok or their parent will return safely.

Source: Operation Military Kids Hero Pack Manual
Sample letters for military youth

Hi,
Thank you for supporting our country. I really appreciate all the services and sacrifices that you are making while your parent is gone. This Hero Pack is for you because you are one of my Heroes. Yes, you and your parents are heroes for making such a big contribution to our country. I hope you can use some of the items in this care package to keep in contact with your parent while they are gone.

My 4-H club made this Hero Pack for you. As a member of 4-H, which is a youth organization open to everyone 5 to 19 years, I ……[add information about what your club/group does and let them know they can participate in their local group.] I think you would have fun participating in 4-H. It’s a great way to meet new friends and learn lots of cool stuff!

Thanks for being a Hero!
Your first name / organization

I really appreciate all of the work your mom or dad puts in the armed forces. I know that I will always have freedoms because of your mom or dad. I really appreciate them because they are improving the lives of many people around the world and help provide safety for me. I also appreciate the sacrifices you are making. You are my Hero. That’s why I made this pack for you. I hope you can use the items to stay in touch with your mom or dad.

Thank you for being a Hero!
First name/organization

I think your parent is helping make the world a better place and for that they are Heroes. You are also a Hero because of the sacrifices you are making. I hope you can use some of these items to stay in touch and others just to enjoy.

Thanks for being a Hero!
First name/organization
Sample cards for military youth

Materials needed:
Cardstock
Scissors

Cut cardstock in half. Fold each section in half. Makes 2 cards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outside</th>
<th>Suggested inside</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>![Image]</td>
<td>You’re 1\textsuperscript{st} place in my book! Thank you for your sacrifice. Name/organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Image]</td>
<td>Thank you for having a \textbf{patriotic heart.} Name/organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>![Image]</td>
<td>… from the bottom of my \textbf{heart!} Thank you for your service. Name/organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside</td>
<td>Suggested inside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Outdoors" /></td>
<td><strong>You’re one in a million!!</strong> Thank you for your sacrifice. Name/organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Outside" /></td>
<td>You deserve a <strong>blue</strong> ribbon! Thank you for your sacrifice. Name/organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Outside" /></td>
<td>You’re a <strong>blue ribbon</strong> kid. Thank you so much for your tireless patriotism to our county. Name/organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Outside" /></td>
<td><strong>U</strong> stand out in a crowd. Thank you for your sacrifice. Name/organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Outside" /></td>
<td><strong>You’re one in a million!!</strong> Thank you for your sacrifice. Name/organization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HERO PACK DONATION ITEMS

**Donation Items** can be included in Hero Packs. Really any item that is youth-friendly (it can have a marketing/business logo if it is youth friendly) can be included. Examples for the different categories are listed below:

**Fun items** – any non-breakable youth appropriate items simply to bring joy to the youth
- Stuffed animals
- Toys, Yoyos
- Banks
- Coupons for free stuff
- Art & Craft Kits
- Science Kits
- DVD’s
- CD’s
- MP3 player
- Playdough
- Bubbles
- Lip Balm
- Musical instrument – recorder, maracca
- Stress Ball
- Small Games, travel, Rubik’s cube, cards
- Coloring books
- Crayons, markers, colored pencils
- Books, comic books
- Puzzles (includes puzzle books)
- Balls (small to fit in pack or a beach ball that can be inflated)
- Frisbees, Kites
- Stickers
- Lanyards

**Items to stay connected** – any item to help the youth share experiences with the deployed parent
- Disposable camera (to take pictures to share with the military parent)
- Journal (to write what has happened – helps them remember so they can talk to the parent. Journal could be words or pictures the youth draws.)
- Stationary, paper
- Scrapbook items
- Pens, pencils, markers (to write letters, draw pictures)
- Communication box (Youth can write items on paper and place paper in the container. They can refer to these notes when writing or talking to the deployed parent. It helps them remember.)
- Photo album/scrapbook (to organize all those photos and drawings)
- Postage stamps

Source: Operation Military Kids Hero Pack Manual