

# South Dakota National Guard Child & Youth Program



Annual Report 2021



## CHILD & YOUTH PROGRAM MISSION

To support the social, emotional, and academic needs of military children and youth throughout South Dakota.

## CHILD & YOUTH PROGRAM GOALS

- ◆ Develop and implement programs and activities that promote leadership and resilience, life skills and character development, build confidence, and facilitate ongoing connections.
- ◆ Provide resources/information to military youth, their families, schools, and communities.
- ◆ Enlist community support and partner with other organizations that serve youth as well.

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*There are more than 6,400 military youth in South Dakota*

*Over 3,800 of these youth are affiliated with the South Dakota Army and Air National Guard*

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### Youth and Teens Served (Programs, Events, and Month of the Military Child)

<u>Total by Service Branch</u>	<u>Total by Service Branch with Ages</u>			
• 4,525 ARNG Youth	ARNG	Ages 0-5 : 850	Ages 6-12: 1,649	Ages 13-18: 748
• 648 ANG Youth	ANG	Ages 0-5 : 11	Ages 6-12: 41	Ages 13-18: 35
• 5 Army Youth	Army	Ages 0-5 : 0	Ages 6-12: 5	Ages 13-18: 0
• 9 Air Force Youth	Air Force	Ages 0-5 : 0	Ages 6-12: 6	Ages 13-18: 3
• 4 Other Youth	Other	Ages 0-5 : 0	Ages 6-12: 4	Ages 13-18: 0

### Adults Served (Programs, Events, and Month of the Military Child)

- Service Members & Family Members: Army Guard - 3,292 / Air Guard - 600 / Army - 7 / Air Force - 16 / Other - 302

### Volunteers

- 59 adult & teen volunteers assisted with 7 Child & Youth Program events, contributing 2,153 volunteer hours

## 2021 Highlights

- Over 370 Child & Youth programming hours.
- Volunteers contributed 2,153 volunteer hours, assisting with planning and coordinating events behind the scenes, as well as working directly with youth.
- Monthly outreach and resource mail outs to a total of 155 families with youth from 3 deployed units.
- Youth programming/activities for 2 Post-Deployment Yellow Ribbon events.
- Mailed 3 Resilience/Activity Boxes to 179 families, totaling 379 youth and 278 adults.
- Reading & Resilience virtual event with the Youth Council, with books sent to 25 families, to include 50 youth and 37 adults.
- Mail out to 1,790 Army Guard, Air Guard, and Survivor Families for Month of the Military Child in April. Over 260 military youth and family members participated in MOMC activities.
- 10 SDNG Youth Council members attended the ninth Region 8 Youth Leadership Summit. South Dakota was the host state this year, with 23 Region 8 teens in attendance.
- 46 Campers & 8 Junior Counselors attended “Heroes in Disguise” Youth Camp.
- 37 Campers participated in “Explore” Youth Camp.
- Active Youth Council with 15 members - 13 Army Guard and 2 Air Guard teens. Youth Council members logged 1,750 volunteer hours, to include travel, conference calls, quarterly meetings/trainings, and event setup/participation.
- 5 Master Resiliency Trainings (MRT) with 95 teens through Youth Council meetings/conference calls, the Region 8 Youth Leadership Summit, a Yellow Ribbon event, and Youth Camps. Modules covered include Hunt the Good Stuff, Energy Management, Problem Solving, Identifying Character Strengths, and Character Strengths: Challenges and Leadership.
- ARNG CYS resilience/activity packets sent to 155 families throughout the year, highlighting the resilience skills of Hunt the Good Stuff, Energy Management, Mental Games, Problem Solving, Optimism, Goal Setting, Real-Time Resilience, ATC, Avoiding Thinking Traps, Identifying Character Strengths, Active Constructive Responding, and Assertive Communication. In addition to these skills, several other resilience skills were also featured on our SDNG Youth Program Facebook page.
- Provided a total of 19,238 resources/referrals to youth and families, as well as continuing to increase social media outreach.
- Collaboration with our Region 8 counterparts on virtual events.
- Team role within Service Member & Family Support, to include partnered events.



### **Best Practices - SD Military Youth Camps**

“Heroes in Disguise” Camp was a whirlwind of fun! It was so nice to be back at Youth Camp again with our Campers! 46 campers, ages 9-11, and 8 junior counselors, ages 15-17, spent the week at Storm Mountain learning about military values, team building, resilience and communication skills, marching, formation, and honoring the flag. Campers were able to “Hunt the Good Stuff” and logged it daily in their journals. They discussed that there are Heroes all around us - seen and unseen - you don’t have to search far! Campers also learned that they can be heroes to others as well.

“Explore” Camp was filled with Harry Potter wizarding magic for our military youth. 37 wizards, ages 12-14, spent the week at Dakota Frontier Camp exploring leadership, resilience, military values, flag etiquette, teamwork, hunting the good stuff, and character strengths. They challenged themselves to write and create House songs through “Say it with Music,” and participated in Hogwarts rotations, to include Potions, Divination/ Mindfulness, the Care of Magical Creatures, Escape Boxes, and the Quidditch Cup. Hands-on military stations with the 881<sup>st</sup> continue to be a favorite!

This summer was our 20th summer of hosting Youth Camp. It continues to be a privilege for us to see campers, families, and volunteers return throughout the years and to witness first-hand the growth and the connections they've made with each other.

### **Best Practices - Resilience / Activity Boxes**

Three different resilience/activity boxes were mailed to 179 families this year: Youth Camp ‘IN, in the Fall, Hooked on Resilience, and MOMC - National Guard Child & Youth Program Museum of Natural History. Each resilience box was tailored to our South Dakota families and included several hands-on activities and supplies for youth and families to explore. The boxes also focused on resilience and mindfulness skills, gratitude, military values, art, science, money management skills, recipes, and more. The SDNG Youth Council created training videos that correlated to the highlighted activities and skills as well.

### **Response to COVID-19**

2021 has continued to be full of challenges and changes. With the pandemic, several of our in-person events were adjusted or postponed, to include our annual Trunk-or-Treat, Military Kids Days, a State Youth Symposium, and some Month of the Military Child activities. We did have the opportunity to move forward with in-person events later in the year. For these events, we followed outlined COVID-19 mitigation strategies and procedures for our participants and families.

The SDNG Youth Program continues to implement virtual opportunities and outreach to our military youth and families, to include virtual resilience and activity boxes and Reading & Resilience with the Youth Council. We continue to increase social media outreach on our SDNG Youth Program Facebook page, often incorporating resilience and mindfulness skills, various resources, and more. We send ARNG CYS monthly resilience/activity packets to our deployed families with youth, and as requested by families. We’ve also conducted virtual meetings with our Youth Council members and have collaborated with our Region 8 counterparts on virtual opportunities as well.



### **Region 8 Youth Leadership Summit**

23 teen delegates attended the 9th Region 8 Youth Leadership Summit in South Dakota. This was South Dakota's second time hosting our Region 8 counterparts with South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado teens in attendance. This was also the first major in-person event for all of us in over a year.

Our theme for Region 8 was "Moving Mountains through Character Strengths," with the focus that everyone has their own unique character strengths to be resilient, to lead and be part of a team, and to tackle the opportunities and challenges before them (such as being a military teen, dealing with a pandemic, etc.). We also focused on connection and networking, team building, Youth Council collaboration, a face mask service project for homeless Veterans, "Say it with Music" song development and creation, an aerial high ropes challenge course, and MRT Character Strengths. One of our goals is continued collaboration as a region for our Youth Councils to maintain connections and communication with each other.

There is much to be said about our military teens and their ability to adapt, overcome, challenge themselves, and be resilient.

### **SDNG Youth Council**

The SDNG Youth Council is comprised of 15 military teens who are leaders among their peers and serve as a voice for South Dakota military youth. They encompass military values and are positive mentors to others. They learn leadership skills, provide peer support, and help facilitate activities during Youth Program events.

In 2021, the Youth Council created videos for our virtual resilience/activity boxes, read books virtually to youth for Reading & Resilience with the Youth Council, promoted #HTGS (Hunt the Good Stuff) on our Facebook page, represented South Dakota as we hosted the Region 8 Youth Leadership Summit, and volunteered for Yellow Ribbon Events, an Air Guard Holiday event, and our SD Military Youth Camps.

Youth Council members received training in leadership roles, problem solving, team building, CPR/AED/First Aid Training and Certification, and Junior Counselor Training for Camp. They also completed modules of Master Resiliency Training (MRT) and logged over 1,750 volunteer hours as a group. We're looking forward to the next year with our 2021-2022 Youth Council team. This outstanding group of military teens is going places!



Started in our box of goodies- such cool activities! Thank you

#### *From Family Members (2021 Family Satisfaction Survey)*

*"I've had all 5 children in this program. My oldest is 26 and still connects with friends she made at camp. All my children have friends they made at camp. It is so important for them to have friends that know how hard a parent deployment is, because they understand. My two older children have participated in Youth Council. They have helped at many Yellow Ribbon and other ceremonies. This is something I never imagined my son doing. What a great experience this program has been for my family!"*

*"My kids enjoy the summer youth camps and this has created positive experiences. It also puts them into new environments with good people and different expectations which helps them socially and with their resiliency for future experiences."*

*"I think each virtual program kit has given them programs and opportunities to develop skills that will help them cope with separations."*

*"My kids have been involved at the Youth Council level and it really has helped with their leadership skills. With being able to work with diverse people, speaking in public, etc. Thank you for providing such a great program."*

## Partnerships

The SDNG Child & Youth Program strives to implement sustainable support networks within the community to include volunteers, schools, civic groups, and military and private organizations. These partnerships increase awareness and support for military youth and their families, as well as to help communicate the opportunities and challenges they face.

Partnerships this year include the Resilience Team within our South Dakota National Guard Psychological Health Program, our local Military Family Life Counselors (MFLC's), and the SDNG Safety & Occupational Health Office. We've also partnered with the American Red Cross, South Dakota Game Fish & Parks, and SDSU 4-H Extension.

The SDNG Resilience and MFLC Teams provided resilience and mindfulness trainings during a Yellow Ribbon event and at our SD Military Youth Camps. The SDNG Safety & Occupational Health Office provided CPR, AED, and First Aid Training to our SDNG Youth Council and Explore Youth Camp volunteers. The American Red Cross conducted Communication and Coping Skills Workshops during a post-deployment Yellow Ribbon event.

The Child & Youth Program has also connected with Service Members and local resources, such as Game Fish & Parks and 4-H, to provide hands-on opportunities and programming during our Youth Camps. Our partnership with SDSU 4-H Extension this summer allowed us to serve youth of all service branches during Youth Camp as well.



SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION



American Red Cross



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