



American Legion Department of Colorado

Children and Youth Program

I. History

The American Legion has a strong dedication to supporting our nation's youth. The organization was founded on the principle in 1919, when Children & Youth was declared one of the Legion's four pillars. In the years since, a number of youth-oriented programs have been developed internally. Additionally, the Legion collaborates with outside organizations that focus on supporting young people.



The National Commission on Children & Youth is at the center of the Legion's youth-support efforts. The commission meets annually to decide the direction of the Children & Youth Division, which has three main objectives: to strengthen families, to support quality organizations that provide services to young people, and to maintain well-rounded initiatives that meet the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual needs of our nation's youth.

Internally managed programs include the Family Support Network and Temporary Financial Assistance. Both provide relief for military families with minor children who are struggling with the challenges of being without a deployed parent. The Legion also maintains Youth Suicide Prevention and Halloween Safety programs.

Externally, the Legion partners with the Children's Organ Transplant Association (COTA) and Operation: Military Kids. COTA provides fundraising assistance and support to families with children who need or have had life-saving organ transplants. Operation: Military Kids is a U.S. Army initiative that supports children and youth affected by a parent's deployment..

II. Colorado Mission Statement

A. American Legion Department of Colorado Children and Youth programs are designed to focus on the children of Colorado veterans.

Our main objectives are to:

1. Keep both military and veteran's families together with support from our volunteer base in all Colorado Communities,
2. Provide financial assistance to families with children in need of basic life's necessities,
3. Provide ready referrals to families with physical, emotional or spiritual needs beyond the capabilities of the resources of the Department of Children and Youth Committee.

III. Narrative

A. The Department Children and Youth Committee is charged with developing programs and procedures for helping to promote an increased awareness in our local communities of the important American Legion programs aimed at the health and welfare of our nation's youth. It is generally recognized that the real value of the organization exists at the local post level. All youth program efforts must be concentrated at that level.

B. Every post is granted a charter with the understanding that the leaders of that post will actively support and promote the primary aims and purposes of the organization as detailed by the "Four Pillars" vision of our founders. **One of the most crucial elements is an active membership base, including Legion, Auxiliary and SAL, involved in the successfully management and promotion of our four pillars programs.** Children and Youth programs at the post level should be mandatory for

involvement by the post. Support of the Four Pillars is essentially their only real mission under the provisions of their charter.

C. The Department Children and Youth Committee must develop annually a strategic plan as a guideline for the posts and districts to follow as they manage youth programs at their levels. The committee can only “urge and encourage” our posts to utilize the provisions of the plan. The plan essentially becomes a “vision for the future.” The committee then becomes the primary salesman for that vision. The plan must address, at the minimum, the five most important elements of a successful youth program.

- 1. Identify issues and concerns**
- 2. Develop written guidelines to address those issues**
- 3. Assemble the resources; i.e., people, money, equipment**
- 4. Distribute the plan for implementation at all levels**
- 5. Track the progress and adjust as necessary**

D. It must be recognized that any plan is not static but dynamic. The committee must constantly review all elements and make adjustments as necessary.

E. Communication will be the absolute key to a successful youth plan. The committee must develop the communication strategies to effectively communicate all elements of the plan to the widest possible segment of our membership base. Communication elements should include, but not be limited to the following:

- 1. Attendance by committee members at the Department Convention and Mid Year conference;**
- 2. Representatives of the committee should attend the District Conventions in their assigned area of responsibility;**
- 3. Committee members should be present at any training activities conducted by the Department Leadership Committee; The committee should use current technology to promote and support their efforts including email, blogs, web pages, conference calling, video conferencing, etc.**

IV. Goals

A. Fund Raising

- 1. Conduct annual Department level fund raising event for Colorado Veterans Kids Fund (CVKF)**
- 2. Encourage Posts, Units and Squadrons to conduct fund raising events at their level to support the CVKF**

B. Programs implementation

- 1. To encourage all Posts, Units and Squadrons to actively participate, sponsor or promote at least one recognized American Legion Children and Youth program.**
- 2. Maintain and provide source documents for all Children and Youth program activities**
- 3. Provide electronic channels for communication with all involved in Children and Youth programs**
- 4. To track progress of all activities through the use of annual reporting procedures**

V. Activities

A. Meetings

1. Department Convention Awards and recognition event
2. Mid Year - Fund raising event
3. Planning - identify new members
4. Training
 - a) Legion College
 - b) Fall Conferences
5. Monthly Meeting dates, times, places and method (adjusted as necessary)
 - a) July _____
 - b) August _____
 - c) September _____
 - d) October _____
 - e) November _____
 - f) December _____
 - g) January _____
 - h) February _____
 - i) March _____
 - j) April ___(Children and Youth Month_____
 - k) May _____

B. Budget

1. Determine operating budget for all department level activities
2. Set annual goal for raising money for the CVKF

C. Awards and Recognition

1. Best annual narrative report

2. Most money raised at local level
3. Most innovative community support program
4. Children and Youth Champion of the Year

VI. Fund Raising

A. Colorado Veterans Kids Fund

1. Auctions,
2. Appeal letters,
3. Raffles,
4. Other.

VII. Commitment

- A. Obtain Letters of support from Posts, Units and Squadrons that they will actively participate in Children and Youth programs.**
- B. Encourage Posts, Units and Squadrons to write resolutions of support, advocating or changing C&Y policies.**

VIII. Individual Programs

- A. Provide assistance through the Colorado Veterans Kids Fund**
- B. Teen Suicide,**
- C. Scholarships,**
- D. Drug and alcohol prevention programs,**
- E. Peer to Peer counseling,**
- F. Child abuse,**
- G. Bullying,**
- H. Child Welfare Foundation,**

I. Others as determined by the Committee.

IX. Committee structure

A. The Department Commander will annual appoint the Standing Children and Youth Committee consisting of the following at a minimum:

- 1. Chairman**
- 2. Vice Chairman**
- 3. Recording secretary**
- 4. Members at large**
- 5. The appointed chairman will appoint sub-committees as desired by the full committee (examples)**
 - a) Fund raising**
 - b) Communications**
 - c) Annual reporting**
 - d) Awards and recognition**
 - e) Other as desired**

X. Duties

A. Chairman

- 1. The Chairman will immediately call the full committee together immediately after his/her appointment to begin the planning and implementation for the Children and Youth activities for the membership year.**
- 2. The Chairman will appoint any sub-committees necessary to fully implement the plan.**
- 3. The Chairman will monitor all activities of the committee and keep in constant communication to assure the plan is on track.**

4. The Chairman will report to the Department Commander on a frequent basis and discuss any issues that need additional leadership from other elements of the organization.

5. The Chairman will assign individual members to areas of the state as coordinators between the full committee and the posts, units and squadrons in their assigned area of responsibility.

B. Vice Chairman

1. The Vice Chairman must be ready to assist the Chairman and to assume the Chairman's duties when the need arises.

C. Recording Secretary

1. The Recording Secretary will keep a complete and accurate record of all meetings and correspondence initiated by the committee and will receive and file the annual reports submitted by posts, units and squadrons.

XI. Conclusion

A. The Children and Youth programs are one of the Four Pillars of the organization as envisioned by our founding fathers. As such they must play a prominent role in the total structure of the American Legion Department of Colorado. Not only will the committee's work impact and affect thousands of children and their families but it will do much to keep the organization strong in terms of membership. Community involvement in these programs can only enhance the image of the American Legion at the local levels. Keeping the organization strong in C&Y programs will help to support the other three pillars. The overall mission of the American Legion is to keep us strong in terms of membership and assets so that we can continue our mission as defined by the Four Pillars. As long as veterans and their families are part of this great nation there will be a need for a strong and viable Children and Youth program.