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Youth Expo to offer summer activities



FORT SILL, Okla. (March 20, 2014) -- With the school year winding down and summer fast approaching, many parents are considering what their kids will do this summer.

"Traditionally, social service organizations note a rise in reports of child neglect during the summer months due to parent's perception of a lack of appropriate and affordable supervision options available to them," said Michael Collins, Family Advocacy Program prevention specialist at Army Community Service.

He said military families, due to high volume permanent change of station moves during the summer, are most susceptible to a lack of awareness of the wide variety of activities available locally during school breaks.

To minimize these risks, Fort Sill Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation will host the Youth Summertime Activities and Job Expo March 29 from 1-4 p.m. at the Graham Resiliency Training Campus. The expo, which precedes April, Child Abuse Prevention Month and Month of the Military Child, offers parents many summer-time options for children and targets teens by offering assistance with job and summer camp opportunities.

The free event, which is open to the public, will have four main areas of focus for children ages 3 to 17, young adults ages 18 and 19 and their parents: Summer fun, education preparation, volunteer opportunities and job assistance.

"This is a win-win because parents can reduce their stress by planning ahead financially and time wise, with an idea of activities to ensure their child can get plugged in over the summer months," he said. "It's also great for parents who have their children over the summer months and aren't sure what to do with them during the day while they are at work. This expo can make the summer worry-free and stress-free so parents can focus on spending quality time with their child."

A variety of organizations will set up table displays representing on- and off-post, free and fee-for-service activities, colleges, day and resident camps, volunteer activities and teen employers.

COULDA, WOULD, SHOULD

"Sometimes parents get to the end of summer and have the regrets of, 'I wish I would have done more with the kids or I wish I would have signed him or her up for that camp,'" said Collins. "The intent of the expo is to offer a multitude of things to parents: including giving them the opportunity to plan ahead for the summer; to plan within their budget since many of the activities are free; and to keep their kids active because active kids are healthy kids." Collins said "We're hoping parents don't just leave their kids at home and come to the expo;

we want them to come together so they can all get information on the different programs available. It's a great opportunity for parents and their children to decide on opportunities they can share, volunteer opportunities and what the children are interested in."

FITNESS, TOO

The expo offers a multi-level approach to youth wellness with fitness programs to keep a child fit during the summer months.

"A lot of children's fitness revolves around sports and when they are out of school for the summer they aren't involved in those sports so several sports programs will be there, Kid Fit of Fort Sill and FitKids of Southwest Oklahoma," he said.

According to Collins, today's youth have less social connection than children in the past.

"There is a noticeable reduction in social connection for youth, not just in the summer but all the time because they have more screen time at home and aren't as likely to get out and get involved," he said. "The expo offers various opportunities for youth to make friends and be engaged and productive."

Collins said bored kids or kids with nothing to do are more likely to get in trouble with mom or dad or get in trouble with the law. "So absolutely keeping the kids' active is good for their health, their minds, their social skills and good for their relationship with their parents," he said.

One of the top concerns of educators and literacy experts regarding an extended break is the likelihood of students experiencing summer set-back upon return to studies in the fall.

"I believe parents want to do things like this they just don't know what's available or where to find it. This expo will be a very good sampling of what's available during the summer months between Wichita Falls and Oklahoma City. This is all in one place with camps, volunteer opportunities and job opportunities," he said.

Parents and children will have the opportunity to ask questions and gather information, including applications, directly from a representative of the organization providing the activity.

VOLUNTEERS

"When you are active and involved, whether it is with an activity or by volunteering, it's good for you, good for your community, good for your family and also good for your resume," said Collins. "So when these kids try to get jobs in the next couple years they will have experience for their resume or their college application. They will be able to make an impact," he said.

ORGANIZATIONS

Organizations include Cameron University, Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge, Museum of the Great Plains, Fort Sill Hired Program and volunteer programs from post and the United Way.

The groups will offer information on sports camp, learning camps, activity camps and some one-day events and some reoccurring events. "There's something for everyone," said Collins.

There will be sports and activities, art, volunteer opportunities, the library will be there with the different reading programs available during the summer months."

OTHER AGENCIES

In addition to the activities, there will be agencies coming to talk about specific job opportunities for teens. The Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America and 4H will be there and the National Guard and the Reserve will be there. Also manning booths at the expo are Child, Youth and School Services and Outdoor Recreation.

CYSS will also highlight the Month of the Military Child activities held during April and spring break opportunities for kids. For more information, call Collins at 580-442-0641/4916.