

# 4-H The Power of **YOUth**

4-H is a community of young people across America who are learning leadership, citizenship, and life skills.

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### 4-H Youth Volunteer 400,000 Hours

4-H's *Engaging Youth, Serving Community Year 5 (EYSC5)* program awarded 12 land-grant institutions in 11 states funding to implement and evaluate youth-facilitated community issues forums with action plans. *EYSC5* continued work started with *EYSC4*. Results in year 2 nearly doubled that of year 1:

- Over **1,000 youth** in **63 targeted rural communities** participated on local leadership teams with 40% as new participants. The youth partnered with **650 adults**.
- These youth-adult partnership teams engaged an additional **5,640 youth and adults** to implement action plans to solve priority community issues.
- They volunteered a total of **416,262 hours**; using the Independent Sector Index value of \$18.77 per hour of volunteer time, this represents **\$7,813,228 of in-kind support**.
- Participants represented diverse populations with 22% African-American, 16% Latino/Hispanic, and 8% Native American.
- They collaborated with over **600 partners** to identify and solve community issues, including government agencies, school systems, and community organizations.
- Grant money was leveraged **28:1** through cash and in-kind support.

The *EYSC* program is funded through the Rural Youth Development Program provided by CSREES/ USDA through National 4-H Council. USDA's national collaborative partners in the RYD Grant Program are 4-H, FFA, and Girl Scouts of the USA (GSUSA). ■

### Cultural Heritage Project Strengthens Texas Community



Catherine Spears, a young 4-H'er, interviews a Kendleton, Texas community resident in front of a local artifact at the Fort Bend County Heritage Museum.



Kendleton community leadership team records details of pieces collected for the community's cultural heritage day.

When young *EYSC* members in Kendleton, Texas held a meeting with local youth, teachers, volunteers, and the town mayor to see how they could strengthen their community, the vote was overwhelmingly in favor of preserving Kendleton's cultural heritage.

So the *EYSC* team got to work, joining forces with the Fort Bend County (FBC) Heritage Museum and organizing a cultural heritage day for their entire community to enjoy. They started by collecting artifacts and memorabilia to represent the cultural diversity of their community and increasing resources available to foster knowledge of African American culture.

Working together, *EYSC* members partnered with volunteers, community boards, and local political leaders to raise additional money, gather historical artifacts, and design a fun, creative, and user-friendly exhibit space. They also promoted the event to their friends and neighbors as well as to local businesses, churches, schools, and clubs.

The results were even greater than they expected. *EYSC* members rounded up more than 150 residents to attend the cultural heritage day, and they interviewed local politicians and power brokers to see why it was important to preserve their cultural artifacts and keep historic knowledge alive.

Katheryn Melton, a young *EYSC* member, had the opportunity to interview a retired county Extension Agent in Kendleton. "He gave me a wealth of information that helped me to understand the cultural heritage of our community," said Melton.

Today the *EYSC* team is visiting more museums in the area to gain inspiration on how to display artifacts, memorabilia, and youth artwork for an upcoming open house at the FBC Heritage Museum. With sponsors and collaborators excited about the project's proven ability to promote tourism and bring the community together, *EYSC* youth and volunteers are confident that the project will continue to be a success. ■

## Planting Trees and Helping Communities, 4-H Style

When fires, floods, and ice storms struck Creek County, Oklahoma, the community lost thousands of trees in their beloved parks, schoolyards, and camps. Because the trees had meant so much to the community, 4-H members knew that their revival would inspire citizens to initiate more environmental restoration projects and rebuild their community's infrastructure.

With that in mind, Creek County EYSC project members teamed up with community volunteers and a local nursery to lead an intensive rehabilitation project in six different areas of their county. Together they replanted trees, cleared washed-out debris, and refurbished flowerbeds in some of the community's hardest hit areas. Overall, 4-H members and volunteers contributed an impressive \$65,000 of in-kind support to their community. More importantly, they developed a sense of civic pride by diving head first into hands-on learning and leadership activities.

"I am very proud to be a 4-H educator," said Jim Rexwinkle, who worked closely with 4-H members on the Creek County EYSC project. "Projects like this make it worth all the hard work."

Their next step? Creek County EYSC members have built a coalition with the Sapulpa Pride, Creek Nation, Creek County Master Gardner's, and other civic organizations to develop a three-phase project. To start, 4-H clubs planted redbud trees in local parks and schools throughout Creek County to celebrate the Oklahoma 4-H



As part of an environmental restoration project in their community, 4-H youth in Oklahoma plant trees with the help of volunteers.



Centennial. They then planted 260 trees along a major highway to cover an old abandoned glass manufacturing factory. The last phase of the project involves planting another 50 trees in 2009, and from there, the sky's the limit. ■



Delaware 4-H members led youth forums to address school violence and gang activity in their Sussex County community.

## 4-H Forums Diffuse Violence in Delaware Communities

In Sussex County, Delaware, school violence and gang activities were on the rise. School officials were concerned that violence would reach an all-time peak if someone didn't intervene. That's when 4-H members stepped in.

With the overarching goal of reducing school and gang violence, 4-H members at Cape Henlopen High School organized a series of youth forums to encourage open dialogue among young people with a history of violence and gang affiliation. During the forums, teens voiced their problems and disagreements with one another and took part in youth-led discussions and brainstorming sessions.

Thus far, the forums have made a huge impact. Not only did Cape Henlopen High School record a 20 percent drop in referrals and suspensions, but they also noted that the forums equipped students with the skills needed to prevent future violence, such as open communication, conflict resolution, and cultural understanding.

"It is time that the youth have a voice in what goes on around here," said Ashley Boyer, EYSC member. "Maybe now we can start to make a real difference in our school and community."

Fellow EYSC member Montoz Hall agreed: "Kids feel safer coming to school now."

With the great success of their 4-H project, EYSC members have expanded their youth-led forums to other schools in their rural community. They've also created an ambitious action plan to teach conflict resolution skills on an ongoing basis in after-school programs across the county. ■

## 4-H Member Advocates for Teen Mothers

As an active 4-H member, Jennifer Bates dedicated much of her life to the 4-H mission. Whether it was attending National 4-H Conference or lobbying for greater funding for Native American 4-H programs, Jennifer always succeeded and went above and beyond expectations. And when she discovered that she was pregnant, that didn't change. Rather than getting discouraged and dropping out of high school, Jennifer decided to advocate for pregnant teens who, like her, were struggling to complete their degrees.

Soon after discovering her pregnancy, Jennifer realized that her school district had limited services for pregnant teens. After interviewing other pregnant students, she found that many teens were forced to drop out of school due to excessive absences because of pregnancy, birthing and infant care complications.

Vowing to change that outcome, Jennifer formed a coalition with other teens and met with school officials to discuss how they could support pregnant mothers and ensure that they had adequate access to education. From there, Jennifer attended the Arizona School Board Leadership Conference and presented her issues to rural school board members and superintendents, advocating for state-wide support for teen mothers.

Thanks to Jennifer's determination and drive, school conditions improved considerably for teenage mothers. She launched a bi-weekly support group for teen parents and successfully lobbied for a school policy that gives teen parents the option of taking a maternity leave to complete their school credits from home. In addition, she helped her school district hire a full-time prevention coordinator to support pregnant teens and teen parents. With



*Jennifer Bates, Arizona 4-H'er, advocates for state-wide support of teenage mothers to gain access to education.*

all her efforts, Jennifer was able to boost graduation rates among pregnant teens while building strong leadership and advocacy skills. ■

## 4-H Teens Shape Their Futures as Active Citizens and Leaders

As soon as 4-H members in Homedale, Idaho, saw an opportunity to help youth and families in their communities, they took it. After a six percent population growth over the last five years, 4-H members saw that their rural Hispanic neighborhood lacked adequate after-school opportunities

for youth. And lack of public transportation made it difficult for teens to travel outside their town borders and pursue professional development experiences.

With those issues in mind, 4-H teens initiated a low-cost after-school program for underserved youth and families, giving young people opportunities to engage in citizenship, healthy living, and science, engineering, and technology activities. With their guidance and mentorship, several youth discovered their

passion for science and started their own robotics team, eventually going on to participate in the Idaho FIRST Lego League event. By the end of the project, 4-H members had not only improved after-school education and enrichment opportunities for youth, but they had also gained leadership skills, project management skills, and confidence.

For Vanessa Sanchez, a 4-H member, the experience was no different: "The 4-H program benefited me in so many ways. I loved the fact that I was making a difference in the eyes of other kids."

The best part of the story? Because of their efforts, community leaders realized the value of teen leaders and began investing more time and funds into positive youth development programs. ■



*Attendees at Owyhee 4-H Nutritional Afterschool Workshop, a low-cost after-school program in Idaho developed by 4-H teens, learn about nutrition.*

# Rural 4-H Youth and Adults Continue to Increase Leadership Skills



An EYSC team, adults and 4-H youth partner, to plan community cultural heritage day in Texas.

The *Engaging Youth, Serving Community* project with the support of Rural Youth Development Program has been helping “youth build strong communities” since

2006. A keystone of this longitudinal project is to develop leadership and life skills so youth can work in partnership with adults to improve their lives and rural communities.

Evaluation data for EYSC5 states determined that the initial impact shown for EYSC4 was stronger with the additional leadership opportunities provided by the second year of funding. Surveys of more than 500 youth and adults on community leadership teams in 11 states showed marked and statistically significant improvements to their skill level after participating.

Of the 16 skills measured, the leadership skills with the most improvement were the abilities to:

- organize a group activity,
- lead group discussions,
- speak before a group,

- plan programs, and
- evaluate programs.

These were the most improved skills under the EYSC4 evaluation as well. Other improved leadership skills were the abilities to:

- follow a process to make decisions,
- identify resources,
- teach others,
- keep written records,
- share new ideas with others,
- organize information,
- see things objectively,
- work as a team member,
- meet with others,
- relate to people from other cultures and backgrounds, and
- establish time-use priorities.

A full copy of the EYSC5 evaluation can be found on the Rural Youth Development page at [http://4-h.org/programs\\_mission\\_mandates/ruralyouthdevelopment.html](http://4-h.org/programs_mission_mandates/ruralyouthdevelopment.html). ■

## 4-H Youth Improve Life in Rural Nebraskan Communities

Across the country, young people in 4-H are making their communities better. Going against the stereotype that youth are apathetic and hesitant to make a difference, 4-H has proven that its youth development programs strengthen both youth and their communities. With programs that build competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring attributes in young people, 4-H also helps youth develop a sixth characteristic: contribution.

And that is exactly what young people in Nebraska developed after their 4-H experience through engagement in the *Engaging Youth, Serving Community* program. Over 90 of these young leaders decided to con-

tribute to their communities by facilitating public forums and brainstorming what issues were important to them. Then, taking it a step further, they worked in partnership with adults and over 600 additional youth participants to design and lead projects that addressed those issues and led to a positive impact. Some projects focused on Hispanic voter registration, community improvements, and economic development, while others focused on more sensitive topics like youth suicide prevention. Each project targeted underserved rural communities with a population of less than 10,000 residents, and included Hispanic and Native American areas where youth



Nebraska 4-H youth members implemented an award-winning program to improve their Gering/Scottsbluff County community.

engaged disadvantaged at-risk youth and their families.

By the end of the projects, 4-H youth and partnering adults had contributed over 6,000 hours to the community projects, which added up to an excess of \$110,000 in in-kind support. The program, “Diverse Youth-Adult Partnerships in Rural Nebraska”, was awarded the “Program of Distinction” designation in 2008 by USDA and also received impressive national recognition as an awardee of the 2008 Annie E. Casey Family Strengthening Award and the MetLife Excellence in Citizenship Award. ■

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