



**Situation:**

The basis for UNH Cooperative Extension's 4-H Youth Development program is youth development research – helping young people develop and practice life skills that lead to becoming healthy and productive adults. Research shows well-supervised, high quality out-of-school time experiences, including 4-H groups, camps and afterschool programs have a strong positive impact on youth.

Based on a recent youth study conducted by Tufts University, youth involved in 4-H programs (compared to youth participating in other out-of-school programs such as sports, arts, school clubs, religious groups and other community organizations) have higher grades, greater emotional engagement in school, are more likely to see themselves as going to college, and are more likely to be involved in civic activities.  
(<http://4-h.uwo.edu/4HStudyAnnualReport.pdf>)

**UNH Cooperative Extension's Public Value:**

Through 4-H Youth Development, screened and trained volunteers guide youth in acquiring and practicing critical life skills in positive environments that meet their developmental needs. 4-H gives youth the skills, confidence and character to become healthy contributing adults, resulting in more success in acquiring and retaining employment, living on their own, starting a family and becoming involved in their community.

**UNH Cooperative Extension's Response:**

Using a research-based, proven model, the 4-H Youth Development program works with community volunteers to help youth develop these essential skills. The model has also successfully supported youth at risk in developing these essential skills. Many 4-H projects have a strong science foundation, helping youth apply concepts they learn in school.

Afterschool programs help address the critical child care issue in the region. The Cheshire County Afterschool Network (CCAN), organized in 2003 by Lauren Bressett, former 4-H Youth Development Educator, continues to support collaboration and strengthening of programs throughout the region. Extension provides ongoing technical consultation in areas such as organizational structure, staff training, evaluation and program environment. The network formalized its organizational structure in 2008 and committees are currently at work on grant templates and joint training opportunities. The network organized a conference training 48 afterschool staff. Twelve current sites/organizations currently report the collaboration strengthens and enriches their individual programs.

State and Cheshire County Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development staff also developed partnerships to establish or enhance five afterschool programs serving youth from Marlborough, Harrisville, Hinsdale, Keene, Gilsum, Nelson, Sullivan, Troy and Winchester. Through a partnership with National 4-H Council and JCPenney Afterschool, 155 children received scholarships during the 2007-08 school year totaling \$86,871.

The JC Penny program requires a partnership between the afterschool program and the county 4-H Youth Development program, and targets children who wouldn't be able to attend without this support. With a focus on youth with limited resources and parental involvement, the project gives these youth the chance to learn, create, problem solve and experience life skills that otherwise wouldn't have been available to them. \$74,565 in scholarships has been obtained for the 2008-09 year.

There are 211 active, screened and trained 4-H volunteers mentoring 643 youth in small groups and assisting with afterschool programs throughout the county, where children learn important life skills in a safe, caring group environment. Volunteers working with these clubs contributed approximately 6,885 hours of their time during the 2007-08 school year. This represents a cost benefit to the county of \$134,326 when calculated at the 2007 value of \$19.51/hour for volunteer time (independentsector.org).

A majority of 4-H youth participated in at least one county 4-H event, and one-third participated in at least one state event. These activities reinforced a sense of belonging to something larger than their own local 4-H group. They also provided opportunities for youth to gain experience meeting youth from other communities, learn how to be part of an organized activity, and share knowledge and skills with others.

## How We Make a Difference:

- 4-H staff assisted two communities in applying for 21<sup>st</sup> Century grants for afterschool programs. Hinsdale received a \$200,000 grant, renewable for five years.
- Over 69 hours of training reaching 373 people was provided in topics including teen risk behavior, understanding and working with adolescents, positive youth development, behavior management and best practices in youth programming. Some community actions planned as a result of the sessions included changes to curriculum and/or programs, parenting sessions, work teams established, and community actions implemented. One program coordinator wrote, *“You have this incredible ability to pick the best kernels of information for your audiences.”*
- In 2008, 4-H volunteers from Cheshire County (representing 51 percent of the enrolled youth) reported three-quarters of 4-H youth learned a new skill and/or improved skills. Volunteers also reported over half were able to demonstrate skills learned through 4-H.
- For half the 4-H youth, their experiences in 4-H raised aspirations for their future as they gained confidence and tried new things.
- The 4-H experience provides a foundation for future success as youth learn about careers and develop basic workforce skills. As evidence of how the 4-H program can work with all youth, at one of the state contests in 2008, five of the eight members representing Cheshire County would be classified as youth at risk. Youth with eating disorders, those who had attempted suicide, been afflicted with mental illness, and experienced learning challenges found that in 4-H they could set challenging but attainable goals, and that 4-H leaders were encouraging and caring about their efforts. Being asked to represent the county was an important event in their lives. For these youth, having their team win the state contest was “priceless.” Three youth went on to represent New Hampshire in a national competition, an experience they never dreamed would or could happen. Families appreciated just how valuable this was to their children. One mother said, *“His new found confidence and responsibility continues to amaze me. This has been such a huge positive in his life.”*
- 4-H volunteers believe over two-thirds of 4-H youth influenced others. This is often a result of changes in behavior as youth accept responsibility and become a role model for younger 4-H members. It can also extend to greater influence over peers and family members.
- The 4-H experience provides a foundation for future success as youth develop and practice critical skills for self-discipline and become more independent, as evidenced by testimonials from 4-H volunteers, parents and 4-H alumni:
  - *“4-H came at the perfect time in my life. I was really having a hard time and school was a nightmare. My 4-H leaders were so encouraging, really seemed to know when to support me and when to nudge me on. I can’t imagine what I would have been like without 4-H. I am looking forward to college this fall and know that, even more than the subject knowledge I gained from school, I will be using those everyday skills – organizing, being responsible, communicating, taking advantage of opportunities and trusting myself – that 4-H gave me.”* 18-year-old 4-Her
  - Another Cheshire County 4-H Alumni notes, *“I am where I am today because of 4-H. I have gained the communication skills to advocate for myself to receive a full scholarship to a University. I have also had the confidence to present my case for financial need.”*
- 4-H provides youth with community service learning opportunities that help them learn responsibilities of citizenship and become contributing and connected members of society. All reporting groups indicated the group members had planned and completed one or more community service projects during the past year.
  - *“They learned that it is not about the amount of what you do, but the act of what you do that can impact a person or community.”* 4-H volunteer