

4-H Shooting Sports - A way to keep kids safe around firearms

by Kathleen Jablonski, 4-H Youth Development Extension Educator

I was one of those moms who didn't want my son to have anything to do with learning about firearms and hunting. Living in northern Maine as we did, that was not an option. Luckily, I was able to find a safe way for him to learn about firearm safety and how to properly handle a firearm through a program with his youth group. To this day I'm glad I did. During this program, Mike learned about firearm safety and was able to develop his skills in this lifelong sport. He continues to be an avid outdoorsman and hunter.

Shooting sports training, however, goes beyond hunting. It is a method to teach young people personal responsibility for themselves and others, it is a way for youth to build confidence and skills in a project area, and it keeps kids involved in a positive youth development activity with an adult mentor. This unique sport can be enjoyed year round and can continue to be developed well into adulthood. Through continued participation, youth can develop concentration skills that can transfer to other walks of their life.

As an adult volunteer, **you** can help provide that same opportunity for our area youth through the Grafton County 4-H Shooting Sports project. Teaching youth safety around firearms, how to handle a firearm properly, what the safety protocol is for firearm use, how to clean and store firearms, as well as countless life skills.

Prior to educating youth, volunteers must first attend the 4-H Shooting Sports Leader Training. During this training each leader takes a specific training track: rifle, pistol, or shotgun. An adult leader or a junior leader may also participate in the archery discipline. Larry Barker, 4-H Extension Educator in Coos County, organizes a once a year training session for leaders or potential leaders on how to teach shooting sports to youth. This year, the training is being held the weekend of May 15 and 16, 2010 at the 4-H Youth Center in New Boston, NH. (Leaders may also attend trainings in Vermont or Maine and receive reciprocal certification.) In order to become a leader, there is a screening process to complete with the county Extension Educator for 4-H Youth Development before attending the Shooting Sports training weekend.

Following training, leaders can form a project group or a specialty club where youth are taught the basics of firearm safety and have an opportunity to learn how to shoot properly. From there, county and regional competitions can be formed, and youth can even earn qualifications for national events. Properly screened Grafton County 4-H leaders can borrow equipment for 4-H club use.

Interested in becoming a leader to guide youth in safe shooting practices? Contact Kathleen Jablonski at the UNHCE Grafton County office at 787-6944 or email her at: Kathleen.jablonski@unh.edu. The office is located at 3855 Dartmouth College Highway, North Haverhill, NH 03774 in the Grafton County Administration Building.