

Situation:

Young adults are better prepared to acquire and retain employment, live on their own, raise a family, and participate in their community when they learn and practice basic skills through 4-H Youth Development. These skills include effective communication, goal setting, decision making, problem solving, leadership and conflict resolution. The United States is falling dangerously behind other nations in developing its future workforce of scientists, engineers, and technology experts. A recent New Hampshire publication states “that 75% of New Hampshire youth are inadequately prepared in science.” 4-H Youth Development programs teach science and technology through hands-on, experiential learning.

Youth also benefit from participation in well-supervised, high quality out-of-school time experiences, including 4-H groups, camps and afterschool programs. A recent New Hampshire study of state- and federally-funded, academically-focused afterschool programs found that more than half of youth regular attending these programs improved both academically and behaviorally (Frankel, Streitburger, & Goldman, 2008).

UNH Cooperative Extension’s Response:

With a focus on belonging, mastery, independence and generosity, the 4-H Youth Development program works with community volunteers to help youth develop this essential skill base. Many 4-H projects have a strong foundation in the sciences, helping youth to apply concepts they are learning in school. Linda Willard, 4-H Youth Development Educational Program Coordinator assisted Strafford County communities in forming collaborative approaches to meeting needs for quality programs during out-of-school time.

There are 214 active, screened and trained 4-H volunteers mentoring 336 youth in small groups throughout the county, where children are learning important life skills in a safe, caring group environment. These volunteers contributed an estimated total of 1,494 hours in 2008 toward the program. This represents a cost benefit to the county of \$29,148 when calculated at the 2007 value of \$19.51/hour for volunteer time (independentsector.org). One long-time 4-H volunteer noted, *“Adult volunteers, trained at the county level and supported by the County Educator, make 4-H a great investment for the county. You pay for part of one educator as well as her office and you get a huge network of volunteers who are able to reach youth in multiple communities.”*

Strafford county 4-H has been a leader in the introduction of Science, Engineering and Technology programming. Plans are being made to implement a community-based wind energy program for youth in Strafford County. Additionally, in partnership with the UNH Cooperative Extension Sea Grant program, Strafford’s 4-H program implemented non-formal marine education in the county. One example of showcasing these marine efforts has been the Rochester Fair, where Extension’s marine displays are visited by upwards of 3,000 youth during school visits and numerous community groups. Requests from teachers for 4-H curricula and information resulted in 38 packets of information being distributed.

Linda Willard, Strafford County’s 4-H Youth Development Program Coordinator also has developed partnerships to establish or enhance afterschool programs in Dover. Through a partnership with National 4-H Council, JCPenney Afterschool, and community afterschool programs, the 130 youth attending the Seymour Osman Community Center (SOCC) in Dover have benefited from 4-H programs and activities offered at the center. Fifty children participated during the 2007-08 school year through a \$25,000 grant from the National 4-H Council and JCPenney 4-H Afterschool Program. This program requires a partnership between the afterschool program and the county 4-H Youth Development program, and targets children who would not be able to attend without this support. Another \$22,500 has been received for 50 children to attend during the 2008-09 school year. With a focus on youth with limited resources and parental involvement, the project gives youth the chance to learn, create, problem solve and experience life skills that had not been tapped into in such a rewarding way before.

Strafford County 4-H implemented a youth gardening program which effectively introduced agriculture, science, nutrition and youth development skills to numerous youth in the county. In partnership with the Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners, garden plots are planned, sowed, cultivated and harvested, further developing a sense of adult partnership for the youth. The efforts of the Strafford County 4-H gardening program have been

recognized at the state level and will serve as a catalyst to implement a statewide, national Junior Master Gardner program.

How We Make a Difference:

UNH Cooperative Extension's 4-H Youth Development program makes an impact on the youth, families and communities they serve. A Strafford County 4-H parent said, *"Our youngest son was born with significant neurological disabilities that impact his school life and social life. One of the most important parts of his life is his participation in our local sheep club and in 4-H fairs throughout the state. With the help of Cooperative Extension staff and volunteers our son has gained great confidence and developed life skills that enable him to be more successful in school."*

Twenty youth and 9 adults participated in the 2008 Kids Can Grow youth gardening program, where they worked together to grow produce for the Riverside Rest Home in a community garden, and also grew gardens of their homes, with the help of a Master Gardener mentor.

In 2008, 4-H volunteers from Strafford County reported that over half (87 out of a potential 159 youth in the groups that reported) the youth participants had adopted a new skill learned from 4-H, particularly in the area of leadership. One 4-H volunteer noted, *"I've seen teenagers patiently teach a 5 year-old to drum, or build a wooden toy. I've seen kids help each other and parents stand back and be amazed at what their children have achieved. A child who benefits from the 4-H experience will be a grownup who is involved in his community and who takes action when others sit and watch from the sidelines"*.

Some comments from the after-school program's positive effect:

- "The program gave over 50 children from families with limited resources the chance to learn, create, problem solve and experience life skills that had not been tapped into in such a rewarding way before. These participants have begun to encourage others to also have fun with the programs offered."
- "One child has shared that he has found a way to spend time with his mom by helping her cook and bake because of his participation in the 4-H Favorite Foods Festival. He is so excited about how this can be done as a career, having never thought about food and the process of creating dishes in this way before."
- "Participants in the 4-H Photography program got to know each other well as they used the medium of photography to explore their own unique home and family environments. Through this...they learned to recognize the commonalities among them and to respect the differences between them."

Why is this important?

- A national evaluation (Evaluations Backgrounder) found that regular participation in high-quality afterschool programs is linked to "reductions in behavior problems among disadvantaged students," including "significant reductions in aggressive behaviors with peers," "reductions in misconduct," and "reduced use of drugs and alcohol."
- An evaluation of The After-School Corporation's (TASC's) program concluded that "staff, students, and parents provided examples of student improvements that they attributed to the afterschool program. Among the most common were improvements in students' social skills, including the ability to maintain self-control, make constructive choices about their behavior, and avoid fights."

References:

- *Evaluations Backgrounder: A Summary of Formal Evaluations of Afterschool Programs.*
<http://afterschoolalliance.org/researchReports.cfm>
- Frankel, S.L., Ph.D.; Streitburger, K.; & Goldman, E. (2008). *Afterschool Learning: A Study of Academically Focused Afterschool Programs in New Hampshire.* Available online at http://www.plustime.org/pdf/Plus_Time_Programs.pdf
- *The Positive Development of Youth: the study of positive youth development: report of findings from the first four waves of data collection: 2002-2006.* (2008). Massachusetts: Tufts University. Available online at <http://ase.tufts.edu/iard/documents/4HStudyAnnualReport2008.pdf>

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