

Situation:

Positive youth development is the conceptual foundation of the 4-H Youth Development program – helping young people develop critical life skills universally recognized as the essential foundation for healthy and productive adult lives.

Sullivan County has seven communities that rate among the highest in the state for risk factors such as teen birth rate, child death rate, and high school drop out rate. The 2008 Kids Count New Hampshire data shows significant numbers of children in these communities live in poverty, rely on food stamps to cover basic nutritional needs, and their families frequently struggle to meet a “basic needs” family budget. They go to high schools where almost one in five students drops out before graduation. They endure higher rates of abuse and neglect as well as higher rates of infant and child death. “Most of these data show that the disparity among (these communities) is not getting better, or if there are signs of improvement, significant disparity still exists.” (Kids Count NH 2008)

Youth 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 regularly attending youth 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 apply concepts they learn in school. Nancy Berry and Robin Luther, 4-H Youth Development Extension Educators, work with Sullivan County communities in forming collaborative approaches to meet needs for quality programs during out-of-school time.

Sullivan County 4-H programs include a variety of educational experiences, such as animal science programs that teach youth responsibility and teamwork through the care of their animals, keeping records, exhibiting at the fair, and competing in quiz bowls and judging contests. Youth learn about health and food preparation when they participate in International Foods and County Activity Days, where 4-H members share their skills and interests through demonstrations, poster design, and photography.

There are 97 active, screened and trained 4-H volunteers mentoring 333 youth in small groups throughout the county, where children learn important life skills in a safe, caring group environment. Volunteers working with these clubs contributed approximately 3,977 hours of their time during the 2007-08 school year. This represents a cost benefit to the county of \$77,591 when calculated at the 2007 value of \$19.51/hour for volunteer time (independentsector.org).

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, teaching youth important life skills such as communication, leadership, and teamwork.

Virtually all 4-H youth in Sullivan County were involved in at least one community service project this past year. Youth and adults contributing 2,138 hours completed 35 service projects. When leaders talk to 4-H’ers about their involvement in community service, they discovered youth “are happy to realize that they have skills to share in a grown-up community.” The work of 4-H members, volunteers and staff helped raise \$11,300 last year to support Sullivan County youth and adult participation in 4-H camp, regional and state events, and training programs.

After a successful Extension-supported Children Youth and Families At Risk (CYFAR) project in Claremont, and support from UNH Cooperative Extension and other partners, Newport received five years of funding in 2007 through a 21st Century grant for the Newport Out of School Time (N.O.S.T.) program. Annual funding amounts range from \$300,000 the first year to \$196,000 in the fifth year. This grant supports high quality out-of-school time programs for students from kindergarten through eighth grade. In addition, a summer day camp program in

2008 provided quality, structured summer activities for youth. 4-H Youth Development Extension Educator Robin Luther serves on the N.O.S.T. advisory board. N.O.S.T.'s goals include increased academic achievement through homework help and tutoring, increased positive social behaviors, and an increase in community and family connections through community service and family activities.

The long-term impact of 4-H Youth Development programs is best communicated by the youth themselves. One Sullivan County teen indicates, *"I have taken the values and teachings that I learn in 4-H and brought them to my life. Dealing with peer pressure has been easier for me with 4-H at my side. I know I have a community behind me and that I have a supportive base to fall back on. In short, pledging to clearer thinking has helped me on a small and large scale—clearing my mind for a better future. I have completed countless craft projects, snapped hundreds of photos and gained a confidence in myself that I will keep forever."*

References:

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 University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension is an equal opportunity educator and employer.
University of New Hampshire, U.S. Department of Agriculture and N.H. counties cooperating.***