



## **4-H Teen Programming**

### **Situation:**

In August of 2002, the Sullivan County Task Force compiled an inventory of youth needs with regard to substance abuse behavior. Task Force findings showed most risk factors that contribute to substance abuse among young people were prevalent in the county. Among the factors identified were family problems, ready availability of all kinds of drugs (including heroin), low employment opportunities for youth and their parents, and a social culture that, at some levels, accepts the sale of drugs as a way to augment low wages.

According to Kids Count 2005, Newport ranked among the poorest communities (6<sup>th</sup>) in New Hampshire, with a high school drop out rate of 19.2 percent, seven percent higher than the state average. Newport has the fifth highest teen birth rate in the state. Claremont ranked 11th and Unity 16th (out of the 234 cities and towns in New Hampshire.)

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

Teen pregnancy and substance abuse decreases the likelihood a youth will graduate from high school and increases health costs and the likelihood a teen will end up in a detention facility. Programs promoting healthy behavior decrease the risk a teen will abuse alcohol or illegal drugs. Prevention of just one case of adult alcohol abuse conservatively saves the county \$119,633.

### **UNH Cooperative Extension's Response:**

In addition to traditional 4-H clubs, UNH Cooperative Extension educators and specialists develop partnerships to address teen and substance abuse issues in the county, and work with teen centers in Newport and Claremont. These educators also organized or enhanced after-school programming in Claremont, Cornish, Charlestown and Newport.

The Sullivan County 4-H Teen Club provides opportunities for teens to practice leadership skills, community service and to learn about the United States through teen exchanges. About 30 teens participate in the club each year and organize exchange trips every two years. Teens also give back to the community by providing games and face painting at town events, putting together backpacks for children in military families, and doing programs for senior citizens.

4-H Health Rocks is a prevention strategy aimed at preventing the use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs among teens and younger students. Piloted in Mississippi, it is now used in many other states with an emphasis on teens teaching other youth as peer educators. Twenty-eight teens and seven adults attended a training session in Sullivan County in 2008 and subsequently delivered the six-week program to 285 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders in Claremont, Charlestown, Sunapee, Newport and Unity. Health Rocks is a youth/adult partnership that empowers teens to realize they can make a difference in their community. In turn, the community begins to see teens as a resource. The local substance abuse coalition, "Communities United for Substance Abuse Prevention," has recognized this and is now starting a "Youth Council" to work on substance abuse prevention. The schools and after-school administrators are very supportive of the program and requested it continue.

### **How We Make a Difference:**

The Claremont and Newport Teen Centers began with funds from the Workforce Opportunities grant which Sullivan County 4-H Youth Development Educator Nancy Berry and Extension Specialist Paula Gregory helped write. From 2003-2006, Claremont and Newport programs received \$536,284 in support. The Newport Teen Center director attributes the success and sustainability of the center to the youth and adult partnership training they received through 4-H.

With a \$9,000 JCPenney grant through 4-H, the Newport Teen Center served 90 new teens during the 2007-2008 school year. Each teen's family received a \$50 gift card to buy school clothes and supplies at JCPenney. This support made a big difference in many low income families in Newport.

All teens who filled out a post-workshop survey after teaching Health Rocks felt they had improved on several leadership skills such as the ability to organize information, lead discussions, and work as a team. They also improved teaching skills such as identifying resources, keeping written records and speaking in front of a group. They also felt their parents or other adults think “it is wrong or somewhat wrong for someone their age to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, smoke marijuana, or misuse prescription drugs.” Research shows when teens teach programs such as Health Rocks, the program has an even greater influence on their own beliefs and actions regarding substance abuse.