



4-H Youth Development Program Rebecca Levesque, Extension Educator

Situation: The economic climate of the county, state, and federal supporters has led to much scrutiny of social programs for youth and families supporting a greater need for creative collaborations. Unfortunately, this reduces the support available to high risk families. Unemployment is still very high increasing family stress and pro-social behavior. It is critical at this time that the structure of UNH 4-H Youth Development programs are maintained and expanded in order to meet the escalating needs of the families in our communities.

National 4-H Council supported a longitudinal study at Tufts University by Richard Lerner, director of the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development called “The Positive Development of Youth: Technical Report.” Participants included about 4,000 diverse adolescents with varying levels of involvement in community-based programs, such as 4-H clubs, Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCA, and Scouting that participate in this study. One goal of the study was to assess the effects of participation in 4-H by a non-biased party. Among the youth studied, 20% are from the Northeast and 40% of those are in rural communities. The reported results showed 4-H youth had higher Positive Youth Development (PYD), contribution, and lower risk and problem behaviors and depressive symptom levels. 4-H youth have higher grades, emotional school engagement, and expectations for going to college. Youth in 4-H also reported slightly more mentors than non-4-H youth. The complete study report can be found at <http://ase.tufts.edu/iaryd/documents/4HStudyAnnualReport2008.pdf>.

Program Demographics: Belknap County 4-H has a membership of 231 youth of which 167 are in K-8th grade, 64 teens are in 9th – 12th grade. There are 117 female volunteers and 46 males where a total of 30 have mentored youth for 15 or more years. 21 4-H groups are open to all youth throughout the county and an additional 5 family’s work independently on projects. Underserved audiences are encouraged to participate in traditional programs. 3 Nepalese teens attended Teen (leadership) Conference at UNH, 8 Nepalese youth have joined the county Teen Club, and efforts to connect military youth are underway to offer support to families with deployed members. 4-H members raised \$4,478.50 from cookie sales and donations for the Belknap County 4-H Foundation to support activities and scholarships. The 4-H Fair had another successful year highlighting our agriculture and environmental science roots. This is the only fair in the state that is non-profit and is completely organized and run by volunteers for the community.

Program Description: Critical program components include juried 4-H curriculum, educational events and activities with a focus on civic education, communication, family sciences, environmental science, healthy lifestyles, leadership, plants and animals, and science and technology. 191 adults and 65 teen volunteers were training in positive youth development, leadership, and project specific instruction. Community groups offer hands on learning and critical thinking skills in projects of interest. County events provide opportunities for youth to practice skills and increase communication and personal development skills. State, Regional, and National opportunities offer youth higher learning opportunities in career decisions, and workforce prep to name a few. The flexibility of 4-H allows groups to utilize resources the way that will benefit their specific group.

Impacts: Here are a few quotes from parents and youth self reporting on evaluations:

“Responsibility, determination, goal setting, leadership, cooperation and social skills are just a few of the many life skills my daughter has learned in the dog and cavy/rabbit projects.”

“My girls are now grown, but I can see the influence of 4-H in everything they do! They are self confident, independent, involved in their community, kind, and step up to the plate to leadership roles when needed.”

“My daughter was having problems in school and was very unhappy to be there. She hopes to become a large animal Vet or Vet Tech. so her school contacted the 4-H office where she found a mentor to help with her goal. She started working independently with the local working steer 3 days a week. After a few weeks at the farm she was walking around school smiling. The school counselor was so impressed that they gave her full credit for doing the animal science program and is seeking a grant to sustain the learning opportunity in future years.