

Strengthening Community

By Becky Colpitts, UNH Cooperative Extension, Volunteer Management Program Assistant

Growing up on a small diversified farm in Ohio my family relied on our Extension Office to help enhance our quality of life. My father worked closely with our Agriculture Agent in his farm planning and marketing, soil conservation, healthy animal production and forest management. My mother called on Extension frequently with questions ranging from preserving our food, gardening, sewing, and managing our home. They depended on the Extension's scientific, research-based information to further their personal life goals. They closed the loop by giving back. Both were 4-H leaders and volunteered their time to many of the Extension's outreach programs. Connections and lifelong friends were made locally, nationally and internationally, as my father taught farming groups from Africa the soil conservation techniques he had learned through the Extension system. This created a strong knit community where I grew and thrived, becoming a 4-H member, leader, and now the new Volunteer Management Program Assistant (VMPA) here at your local Extension office.

As the VMPA I am here to support the volunteers in the Master Gardening Program and the 4-H Youth Development program. My job is to help make the volunteers' experience easy and enjoyable, so that they can concentrate on sharing their skills and passion without feeling overwhelmed by the details. A volunteer might call on me to help organize a workshop or a presentation or look for a training workshop to enhance their skills. Help might be needed in procuring the materials and the space to meet. A volunteer might want help getting the word out to the public of what they are willingly offering. Maybe connections need to be made with other community members and, of course, help with accessing objective, scientifically-based research to support the volunteer's effort. I am here to "Make the Best Better" as the 4-H motto goes. Our volunteers give their best and I can be of service in making the volunteering experience better or at least easier!

In my new position I have already met an amazing group of Master Gardeners. The Master Gardeners can be found around our county at farmer's markets, leading children and adult workshops, landscaping and creating beauty at our County Complex, the Town of Woodstock, and the Enfield Shaker Museum. They are growing food at community gardens such as the one in Alexandria. They are there at the Grafton County Conservation District Plant Sale to answer your planting questions. This summer you can connect with them at our Summer Gardening Workshop series which has a children's workshop running at the same time as the adult workshop. The Master Gardeners volunteer their time and strengthen our community through their knowledge of plants. If you would like information about becoming a Master Gardener or have a question for a Master Gardener please go to the UNH website at extension.unh.edu and click on "Gardening", scroll down to the "Additional Programs" box at the bottom of the page.

I had the privilege of helping 4-H volunteers run workshops and activities at the recent Grafton County 4-H Food Show at the Haverhill Cooperative Middle School. As a former 4-H leader, it was good to be reconnected to the many wonderful 4-H families and volunteers. After seeing the youths' accomplishments in the area of Public Speaking and Food and Nutrition, I left with a full belly of nutritious, delicious food and the knowledge that our future is in good hands.

Here in Grafton County we have an astounding group of young people who are making a positive impact on our world. 4-Hers are involved in local clubs, family clubs, after-school programs, and

community service, as they too complete the loop of receiving and giving. One 4-H youth serves on our County Advisory Council. She represents the 4-H youth with dignity and respect for the position she holds. 4-H volunteers offer youth guidance in specific project areas and in developing life skills that enable them to become contributing, productive citizens. 4-H offers an exemplary volunteer training program, accessible on-line from the comfort of your own home or local library. I found the information in this training useful for the 4-H volunteer and useful for running groups, workshops and demonstrations in any arena. If you would like more information about the 4-H program please go to <http://extension.unh.edu>. Click "4-H Youth" on the left side of the page. I have seen firsthand the life-enhancing quality experiences 4-H offers to youth ages 5 - 18. I invite you to enjoy exploring the website. Volunteer information is on the 4-H Youth page, on the right side of the page.

If you would prefer to talk us in person about 4-H, Master Gardeners, Agriculture, Wildlife, Forestry, or Family and Consumer resources please call us Monday through Friday, 8am - 4pm at (603)787-6944. Allow the people here at the Extension Office to enhance your life experience!