
Title: Supporting a Healthy 4-H Environment

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Summary: Georgia 4-H Healthy Living Programs help youth learn about nutrition, health, and fitness to promote overall balanced, healthy lifestyles. The lessons Georgia 4-H teaches in the classroom, after school, or at 4-H events can be supported by the environment in which they occur, or the impact of 4-H Healthy Living programs can be inadvertently diminished through inconsistent messaging and environments that do not support health. Over the past year, two small but impactful programs have helped Georgia 4-H take steps towards creating a healthier 4-H environment that supports the goals of 4-H Healthy Living programs.

Situation: In Georgia 4-H, we teach, lead, and learn about “healthy living”, but sometimes the environment of a 4-H event or program can make that difficult. At many 4-H events, sugar sweetened beverages are available and sometimes are very easy to access. Less healthy snacks, like chips and cookies, are often also frequently available.

Response:

Six Georgia youth attended the National Youth Summit on Healthy Living at the National 4-H Conference Center in Chevy Chase Maryland. The team, selected from Georgia 4-H Healthy Living Ambassadors and Health Rocks Action Leaders, came from different areas of the state: Carlissa Stewart and Caroline Lord of Ben Hill County; Kaleigh Jordan of Johnson County; Kennedy Deveaux and Kayla Faulks of Cobb County; and Tianna Ramey of Habersham County. At the summit, the team participated in workshops to learn more about nutrition, mental health, drug prevention, and many other health topics. Part of the summit included a challenge: create a community action plan to address a health issue in the community. The Georgia team realized that their shared community was their 4-H community. The team of 4-H'ers noticed that at many 4-H events, sugar sweetened beverages are available and sometimes are very easy to access, even easier than water. Less healthy snacks, like chips and cookies, are often also frequently available. As a response, the group created the “Keeping Things Just Peachy: Healthier options at Georgia 4-H events” Youth Community Action Plan. The plan’s primary goal was to provide and promote healthier snacks and drinks at Georgia 4-H state events and build support for long-term changes in the future. With help from adult leaders, the team’s plan was submitted for funding. The team was awarded a \$500 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation through the National 4-H Council to encourage healthier living for fellow 4-H members. At Georgia 4-H Senior Conference, the team distributed water bottles to promote drinking water instead of sugary drinks. A survey was conducted to find out if 4-H'ers were interested in healthier snacks and drinks at state 4-H events. 360 4-H'ers took the survey, which helped to guide future plans: 89% of 4-H'ers surveyed think it is important or very important to have healthy snacks at 4-H events. 90% of 4-H'ers surveyed think that having healthier options for snacks and drinks at 4-H events would help them make healthier choices. Top Healthy Snacks that youth want include fresh fruit, fresh vegetables, dried fruit, trail Mix, granola bars. Top ways that youth said would help them drink more water at 4-H events included water bottle refilling stations, reusable water bottles, and flavored water options.

At the same time that this group of young people was developing plans to improve healthy offerings at state events, 4-H faculty and staff were also invested in learning more about supporting health through environmental change. A training focused on creating a healthier 4-H environment was offered to 4-H faculty and staff. Topics included healthy snacks at events, how to use principals of behavioral economics to increase acceptance of those healthier items, incorporating physical activity in lessons and activities, and promoting and selecting healthier 4-H fundraisers.

Results/Impact:

The team of 4-H'ers plans became a reality at Georgia 4-H State Council, 2019. They shared their Action Plan at the opening assembly and encouraged 4-H'ers to drink water and choose healthy snacks. At State Council, there was signage on water coolers to encourage 4-H'ers to drink more water. The team also sponsored a Healthy Snack Break with fresh fruit, water, and granola bars at the Saturday night dance with signs that promoted healthy snacks and drinks. The healthy snacks were a big hit- by the end of the night, it was all gone. At State Council, 477 4-H'ers were reached through promotional signage and the healthy snack break, and 74% of 4-H'ers at the event indicated that they would like to have more healthy snack breaks at state 4-H events.

Of the faculty and staff that participated in the "Creating a Healthy 4-H Environment" training, %100 agreed that the information was helpful and that they planned to use it within the next six months. Participants also shared ways that they promote health at 4-H events and activities now, and brainstormed ideas for the future, including "water bars" at County Council meetings, attractively displaying healthy snack options, and incorporating physical activity in to lessons. The success of these programs focused on incorporating health into 4-H events beyond traditional lessons and activities shows that Georgia 4-H'ers are ready to embrace the fourth H, Health, in meaningful ways in their everyday life.