

**Title: Georgia 4-H Shooting Sports Program (Project SAFE)**

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**Summary:** The Georgia 4-H Shooting Sports program (Project SAFE) offered youth the opportunity to meet and engage in positive learning experiences when many of their normal activities were disrupted by the COVID-19 Pandemic during the first half of 2021.

**Situation:** While Georgia COVID case numbers began to decline in August 2020, significant precautions remained in place. Many schools met virtually, and Georgia 4-H had to shift program delivery to stay in contact with youth. In a normal program year over 200 adult volunteers are trained as 4-H Certified Shooting Sports Coaches during three weekend training sessions. Only 54 coaches were trained during the August, October and November 2020 trainings. A sharp December increase in COVID-19 cases forced the postponement or cancellation of a number of Georgia 4-H Events. The extremely popular 4-H Indoor Archery Match (over 800 youth participate annually) scheduled for mid-January was redesigned as an outdoor match at Rock Eagle 4-H Center and ultimately held as a virtual event. Youth in small groups shot locally and electronically submitted scores. Improving case numbers opened the door for in-person statewide matches beginning in March 2021.

**Response:** Research shows that “belonging” is one of the four essential elements of youth development. After missing all state matches in 2020, bringing youth, coaches, and families back together was essential in reaching some sense of normalcy. Everyone needed to gather to reinforce that “we are Georgia 4-H.” However, 4-H matches would have to follow UGA approved health-protecting practices in order to be held. Matches required major adjustments to manage distancing and everyone attending wore masks. Youth on the firing line did not wear masks to avoid greater harm from bowstrings catching on masks and eyeglasses fogging while shooting bows or firearms. Only one family member per participant could attend matches. Overnight lodging and food services were eliminated. County groups were assigned arrival, shooting and departure times to limit numbers onsite and maintain distancing.

**Results/Impacts:** Seven statewide Project SAFE matches were held between March 20 and May 30, 2021. Participation ranged from 45 to 82% of attendance at similar 2019 matches. Nevertheless, 1538 youth were able to enjoy their shooting sports discipline and compete with their peers from all over Georgia. Youth, coaches and family members continuously expressed their joy in being together again. While COVID-19 precautions changed match operations, overwhelmingly the 4-H family adjusted to the changes with great attitudes.

Belonging is not just an academic concept.