

Title: Developing Resiliency and Life Skills in Military Dependents

Author: Laura Goss

Summary: Military dependents benefit from participation in 4-H as the program provides both educational opportunities and consistency regardless of station, installation access, or age. Georgia 4-H provided Air Force connected-dependents with 4-H Project Achievement learning opportunities and provided training and consistent communication with Air Force Child and Youth Development (CYP) staff.

Situation: When military residents relocate to Georgia due to support needs, permanent change of station, or temporary training it can impact the family's access to support and the local community. Reserve families face a unique stressor because they typically are not connected to a nearby installation when a temporary training or deployment occurs. UGA Cooperative Extension builds resiliency and support among military youth and families by being a consistent resource to military-connected families. High-quality programs are available in all Georgia counties meeting the unique needs of community members. UGA Cooperative Extension provides professional development to CYP staff to support positive youth development programs on installations in Georgia. Through the 4-H Project Achievement process and other 4-H activities across the state, young people can develop skills within a positive youth development program regardless of location.

Response: The 2020-2021 grant year focused on professional development, sharing resources, and four virtual partnership meetings to ensure positive youth development programs occurred on and off installations for military-connected youth. Quarterly meetings and the 4-H Military Outreach Programs blog shared professional development opportunities, 4-H resources, and 4-H events with military professionals and 4-H staff supporting military audiences. Also, 4-H staff mentored Air Force CYP staff and supported Air Force-connected youth with a series of 4-H Project Achievement workshops at the county level and on-installation. 4-h Project Achievement participants identify a project area, construct a plan to learn more in that area, and share what they have learned with others. In general, county, district, and state-level competitions are available to showcase participants' skills. Specifically, participants gain communication skills related to interviews, speech organization, conveying a message, and other communication skills. Because this is a 4-H core program, 4-H Project Achievement is available in all 159 counties in Georgia. Dedicated staff members and volunteers can assist military dependents whether they live on a military installation or live in a geographically dispersed area.

Results/Impacts: Lowndes, Lanier, Houston, and Cobb County 4-H programs and their local installations participated in the 2020-2021 4-H Military Partnership Grant. Air Force funded the FY21 partnership; therefore, training and supports targeted Air Force Installation staff and 4-H programs with an Air Force Base in or near the county.

During the FY21 grant cycle, over 100 military-connected youth in Lowndes, Lanier, Houston, and Cobb County participated in the Georgia 4-H Project Achievement process at the county level. Additionally, three military-connected youth in Cobb County 4-H participated in the district competition. Air Force-connected dependents received presenting, speech writing, and related communication skills through after-school workshops, in-school club meetings, and competitions. 4-H Project Achievement provided educational opportunities and connections to the youth member's local community.

Nine CYP staff received training on how to lead a face-to-face or virtual Project Achievement workshop. A recorded session or a 4-H staff demonstration of the lesson with a youth audience supported the CYP staff for future use in addition to receiving event supplies. The 4-H Military Liaison created a plan based on the audience's needs at Moody AFB, Robins AFB, and Dobbins ARB. Programming ranged from a one-hour virtual workshop for high schoolers, a two-hour cohort workshop for middle school students, and a two-hour four-day communication camp for school-age youth. In total, fifty-three youth participated in DPA programming on installations or virtually. At the 4-H Project Achievement workshop at Moody AFB, a child shared, "the most important thing I learned today [was] you can share your story when you do [a] presentation." 100% of Moody AFB youth attendees shared that they do not regularly attend 4-H meetings on-base; therefore, this workshop provided an opportunity to introduce 4-H to these young people.

Strong communication resulted from quarterly partnership check-ins and the bi-weekly 4-H Military Outreach Programs blog (80 posts shared). Consistent communication supported the implementation of a new 4-H Club and a one-hour chartering session for six youth and two staff. The blog provided a way to share curriculum, UGA Extension training opportunities, and local and state 4-H events. 4-H staff and CYP team members engaged in collaboration and training during the Quarterly meetings (4). The 4-H Essential Elements Training was conducted for CYP Center Directors in 2021, during Quarter two. Three Air Force Child and Youth Program staff and two 4-H staff completed a Quarter three communication survey. Survey participants were extremely satisfied with the partnership and highlighted the partnership is mutually beneficial. Resource sharing, teaching, or assisting with partnership events are a few examples of the mutual benefits referenced by staff. One staff shared that "the relationship with 4-H staff is inspiring and motivating!" Further, 80% reported that the various communication methods supported their program. Lastly, a 4-H Agent expressed that communication is "keeping everyone connected."