
Title: 4-H Volunteers Enable More Youth to Engage in Positive Youth Development Opportunities

Author: Keri Gandy Hobbs

Summary: Volunteers are mission-centric as they chaperoned 4-H events and camps, led 4-H clubs, judged projects, and coached judging and project teams. These supporters increased the organizational capacity to reach and serve more youth, ultimately developing more contributing citizens for Georgia who, according to the Tufts Study (2012) are more likely to make healthier choices and participate in science.

Situation: Across Georgia communities, the poverty rate for children is higher than the national average (18%), with communities in Georgia ranging from 5-45% and a state average of 21%. Georgia 4-H youth programming is designed to extend research and education from the University of Georgia to support positive youth development in areas such as leadership and citizenship and can fight against the factors contributing to persistent poverty in Georgia. A ten-year longitudinal study completed on 4-H in 42 states by Tufts University in 2012 indicated that 4-H youth are more likely to make community contributions and civically engage in their communities. They're also more likely to make healthier choices and participate in science. The study noted that this positive youth development trajectory may also extend into adulthood – thus potentially into community 4-H volunteer programs. Key inputs for 4-H'ers to achieve success, as noted by the study, are leadership experiences, education outside of school, and adult mentoring (Tufts University, 2012). While Georgia population grows, the Extension state and local budgets have not allowed for hiring more 4-H youth development professionals to further extend the beneficial programs of 4-H to the growing population. Thus, one of the biggest needs in Georgia 4-H includes more human capacity to engage more young people with the positive benefits of youth development that Georgia 4-H can offer.

Response: More than 200 Extension faculty have received training through the two-hour course, Volunteer Development 101, and more than 50 faculty with 4-H responsibilities have completed Volunteer Management – Level 2 during onboarding. These courses included an introduction to volunteer service planning and engagement, with the second focusing on extending program capacity through the development of volunteer-led clubs. Faculty are instructed to design new volunteer initiatives, engage volunteers, and start new volunteer-led

programs. In addition, state 4-H faculty lead volunteer onboarding procedures to support proper background clearance and training for new volunteers working with youth. Specialized trainings have been developed in various areas and are offered throughout the year to support volunteer coaches and project leaders for further preparedness and increased impact. An updated Project Achievement Portfolio asynchronous training was launched to prepare State 4-H Congress judges for their role, and the UGA Extension Well Connected Communities Master Volunteer Academy was developed to support adult and youth volunteers with increasing community wellness.

Results/Impacts: Volunteers are mission-centric as they chaperoned 4-H events and camps, led 4-H clubs, judged projects, and coached judging and project teams. Last year, more than 4,020 adult volunteers and nearly 1,320 teen volunteers were active. More than 2,000 of these adult volunteers engaged in roles that included working with youth, with 2,004 completing the annual youth protection training, which has been shown to prepare volunteers for their service role (Hobbs & Dorn, in review). In the 4-H program year 2021, nearly 1,140 adult volunteers supported 228 statewide events (as recorded in 4-H Enrollment) and filled 2,334 volunteer shifts. This volunteer service enhanced Extension's capacity to serve more than 23,000 additional youth, when considering leader to youth ratios. Specifically, 125 of these adult leaders dedicated a full week to support summer camps, with 11 leaders devoting duplicate weeks. Also, volunteers enabled 312 more 4-H clubs last year. This collective service included approximately 60,000 volunteer service hours, the organizational financial equivalency of more than \$1.7M. Over the past five years, trained coaches and judges for youth programs continued to increase. Active volunteer credentials from the past year included: • 177 active volunteers have completed the Getting Started volunteer orientation, • 682 active volunteers have completed a Project Achievement judge training, • 50 active volunteers have completed foods lab leader training, • 142 active volunteers have completed a coaches' certification (such as Cotton Boll and Consumer Judging, Forestry Judging, Land Judging, Poultry Judging, and Wildlife Judging), • 940 active volunteers have completed SAFE Target Sports Certification, and • Six active adult and teen volunteers completed the 40-hour pilot Well Connected Communities Master Volunteer Academy. The increase in the number of supporters enhanced the organizational capacity to reach and serve more youth, ultimately developing more contributing citizens for Georgia who, according to the Tufts Study (2012) are more likely to make healthier choices and participate in science. Furthermore, these newly recruited leaders also have the opportunity to further enhance their leadership and service skills as they contribute to 4-H programs.