New research shows 4-H makes a difference

What do Faith Hill, Julia Roberts, David Letterman, Temple Grandin, Reba McIntire and Hershel Walker have in common?

Each is an American icon. Each is known to be a consummate professional. And each was active in 4-H when they were growing up.

Over the years, 4-H has provided millions of youth with opportunities to develop their leadership, citizenship and life skills that have helped them become community leaders, successful professionals, astronauts, entertainers, professional athletes—whatever they dreamed.

Now, findings from a recent study led by Richard M. Lerner, Ph.D., professor at Tufts University, confirm that young people in 4-H Youth Development programs do better in preparing to be productive and contributing adults than their non-4-H peers. Youth involved in 4-H experience high levels of positive youth development and are more likely to contribute to their families and their communities.

The study, sponsored by National 4-H Council in Washington, D.C., is the first-ever longitudinal study to measure the characteristics of positive youth development over an eight-year period of time. It involved more than 7,000 participants in 44 states, including Colorado, and measured the impact that personal and social factors have on a young person's development. The study also compared 4-H to other out-of-school-time opportunities for youth, including Boys and Girls Clubs, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, YMCA and Boy/Girl Scouts.

Overall, researchers are finding that involvement in 4-H makes a more significant difference in many areas of positive youth development than other youth development programs. Colorado 4-H Director Jeff Goodwin notes that the 4-H program makes a positive difference in the lives of more than 100,000 Colorado youth each year. "We have always known that 4-H is good for kids, families and communities," Goodwin said. "Here is strong evidence to support that fact."

Participating in high-quality youth development programs like 4-H plays a critical role in helping young people achieve success. “The 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development confirms what we have always believed to be true; 4-H in the community contributes to a stronger community,” said Donald Floyd, Jr., president and CEO, National 4-H Council.

“New information about positive youth development provided by this study will ensure that 4-H continues to support young people’s growth into successful, contributing members of their communities,” he said.

Study findings show that compared to their non-4-H peers, young people in 4-H are:

—more likely to report better grades, higher levels of academic competence and an elevated level of engagement at school.

—less likely to engage in risk behaviors, such as drinking, smoking and drug use.

—two times more likely to plan to go to college.

—more likely to pursue careers in science, engineering and technology. Girls in 4-H are more than twice as likely to participate in science, engineering and technology programs as their peers.

—3.4 times more likely to delay sexual activity by Grade 12.

—2.3 more times likely to exercise and be physically active.

—3.4 times more likely to contribute to their communities.

“This research adds to the body of evidence of the positive impact 4-H can have on the life of a young person,” Goodwin said. Information regarding Colorado 4-H Impact Studies can be found on the Colorado 4-H website, along with more details of the Tufts Study, at www.colorado4h.org/research_impact .

4-H is a community of more than 6.5 million young people across America learning leadership, citizenship and life skills. National 4-H Council is the national, private sector, non-profit partner of the 4-H Youth Development Program and its parent, the Cooperative Extension System of the United States Department of Agriculture. Learn more about 4-H and this study at www.fourhcouncil.edu/newsroom.aspx
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