



Ohio Teen Connections

Welcome to the first edition of Ohio Teen Connections

Greg Yost, Extension Educator, Cuyahoga County Youth Outdoors
Nadine Fogt, Extension Educator, Fayette County, editors

Throughout Ohio 4-H, youth are involved in significant leadership experiences. Teens are leading 4-H clubs, organizing service projects, creating camping programs, mentoring younger members and speaking out for what they value. Their engagement in these actions not only positively impacts their communities, it also shapes their lives as they transition into adulthood. These experiences may be touted locally but rarely are they shared in a way that others may learn from and help celebrate the successes.

The Ohio 4-H Teen Connections newsletter intends to be a tool that supports 4-H professionals, volunteer leaders and teens in their efforts to expand, improve and recognize how youth leadership is done in Ohio. Each issue will include practical research on youth leadership, reflections from teens involved in a variety of county, state, and national 4-H activities, activities to strengthen

leadership skills, and upcoming events of interest to 4-H teens. This issue reflects on how engaging youth in programs is vital to a successful leadership experience. You'll read how two teens' active participation in the National 4-H Conference in Chevy Chase, Maryland helped strengthen their own leadership skills and another young person's organization of an event raised money for the American Cancer Society. A research article focusing on why teens left a county's 4-H program provides insight on how to modify our programming to retain more teens. Another hot topic highlighted in this newsletter is how to utilize online social networking to reach out and work with youth.

The Ohio 4-H Youth Leadership Research Group hopes that you will find this newsletter both useful and inspiring. Please join us in recognizing the significant involvement 4-H youth have in making decisions that affect themselves, their communities and their world. Please join us in unleashing the power and creativity of youth!



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Upcoming Events & Opportunities for Ohio 4-H Teens

- December 9-11, 2011, **CNI (Carving New Ideas)**, 4-H Camp Ohio, Utica, OH, teens in grades 9-12, \$75 Registration Due by Nov. 1st, Contact Beth James, james.588@osu.edu, 567-429-9645
- December 27-28, 2011, **HOLR (Holiday Overnight Leadership Retreat) in the Holler**, 4-H Camp Ohio, Utica, OH, teens ages 13-18, \$45, Contact Amy Seward, amy.campohio@gmail.com, 740-745-2194
- January 2012, **State 4-H Achievement Record and Scholarship Applications Due**, Contact your County Extension Office
- January 2012, **State 4-H Ambassador Applications Due**, Contact your County Extension Office
- February 4-5, 2012, **Teen Winter Retreat**, Canter's Cave 4-H Camp, Jackson, OH, teens ages 13-18, \$35, Contact Erin Dailey, dailey.108@osu.edu, 740-286-5044, ext. 25
- February 18-19, 2012, **MXC (Making Extreme Counselors) Statewide Camp Counselor Workshop**, Ohio 4-H Center, Columbus, OH, Contact your County Extension Office
- March 10, 2012, **Ohio Teen Conference**, Columbus Convention Center, Columbus, OH, teens ages 13-18, \$35, Contact your County Extension Office
- March 28-April 1st, 2012, **Buckeye Leadership Workshop**, Recreation Unlimited, Ashley, OH, minimum of 15 yrs. old (or H.S. freshman), \$340 before Feb. 28th/\$365 after Feb. 28th, Scholarship deadline is Jan. 13, 2012; www.buckeyeleadership.com
- June 22-25, 2012, **Southern Ohio Teen Camp**, Canter's Cave 4-H Camp, Jackson, OH, teens in grades 9-12, Cost TBD, Contact Erin Dailey, dailey.108@osu.edu, 740-286-5044, ext. 25
- June 29 - July 1, 2012, **Ohio 4-H Junior Shooting Education Camp**, Ages 9 - 12, Canter's Cave 4-H Camp Inc., \$200
- July 13-17, 2012, **Ohio 4-H Sea Camp**, Ages 13 - 18, Kelleys Island 4-H Camp Inc.
- July 15 - 20, 2012, **Ohio 4-H Senior Shooting Education Camp**, Ages 12 - 18, Canter's Cave 4-H Camp Inc., \$290.00
- August 8-12, 2012, **State 4-H Leadership Camp**, Camp Ohio

Reflection ... On 2011 National 4-H Conference

By Connor Morrow, Carroll County

A few months ago, I had the privilege of being a member of the Ohio delegation to the 2011 National 4-H Conference in Washington D.C.

During this six day program, delegates attend workshops and training sessions, learn more about government, and have the ability to meet with their Congressmen. This year's conference hosted delegates from all fifty states, Puerto Rico, and Canada.

After the conference began, all of the delegates were divided into thirteen roundtable groups, each with its own topic which ranged from distracted driving to underage drinking to collegiate 4-H programs.

My roundtable's topic dealt with older 4-H member retention. Our job was to research ways to keep 4-H members involved in high school. We also had to prepare a PowerPoint presentation and a fifteen to thirty minute speech which was to be recorded and eventually published on the U.S. Department of Agriculture website. There was one catch: It had to be completed in less than four days.

We also attended various workshops informed us about preparing presentations, public speaking, issue advocacy, and more. All of the knowledge that we gained from the workshop sessions was then integrated into our presentation.

During the conference, I learned a lot about other state 4-H programs. With this information, I hope to be able to utilize it to promote ways to support and improve the Ohio 4-H program, whether that is at the county or state level. Because of this conference, I was able to increase my awareness of national issues that will affect 4-H at the state and county level.

Overall, the best experience was the ability to discuss the impact of 4-H with my Congressman's office staff and have the ability to share my 4-H story.

The 2011 National 4-H Conference will forever be one of my greatest experiences in 4-H.

Teen makes a difference as chair of Bark for Life

By Emma Newell, Fairfield County 4-H Member

As a young 4-H member in my first major leadership role, I found it equally challenging and rewarding to be a Chairperson and Team Captain of Pickerington Ohio's first Bark For Life event benefiting the American Cancer Society, May 2010. To my surprise, my 4-H club, Dynamic Dogs, won the Ohio Volunteer Conference Community Service Award for our work on this event!

Even in the rain and threat of storms, dog-loving people came with their canine companions to enjoy Bark For Life and support the cause. Music from the DJ kept spirits high. There were many educational booths to learn pet care, health tips, and canine massage. There were booths selling jewelry, art, pet supplies, and treats for both humans and dogs.

Guests were able to participate in a one-mile hike, with their dogs, along a beautiful paved trail. When they returned to the pavilion, they had opportunities to win prizes by playing games with their pups. The Mayor was involved, the K9 unit gave tours of their modified cruiser, and the Fairfield Humane Society was invited to bring dogs for adoption. Bark For Life was a wonderful community event that raised more than \$1,400 for the American Cancer Society!

As a Chairperson of Bark For Life, I



had the opportunity to communicate with many people in my community regarding the organization of such a large event. It was intimidating at first, but I learned to work with individuals and committees to complete tasks on schedule. It was important to respect other points of view and creative ideas. I was fortunate to have my 4-H advisors and mentors to help me learn how to be comfortable and confident in a leadership role.

Heather Wilson, a senior 4-H member, has been my mentor and friend since I joined our 4-H Club four years ago. She helped me with Bark For Life, 4-H projects, and any questions that I have had about leadership and 4-H. Someday, I will have the skills to mentor another young member, like Heather has generously mentored me.

Taking on a leadership role is challenging, but extremely rewarding. I look forward to being a leader during the rest of my 4-H career and beyond.

Another National 4-H Conference Perspective ...

By Heather Wilson, Fairfield County

By attending the 2011 National 4-H Conference in Washington D.C. as a delegate for Ohio, I gained many unique ideas. I was able to meet and interact with 4-H delegates from many states and countries.

While at conference, delegates were placed into discussion committees. I was placed into a committee for the topic of "Collegiate 4-H", where we discussed what we foresee the future of the program becoming. Within three days, we spent 12 hours discussing the topic. We brainstormed ideas, refined our ideas, and put together an 18 minute audio and visual presentation to be delivered at the National Department of Agriculture via web-conference to 4-H educators throughout the country.

We visited Capitol Hill where we met with our representatives in Congress to share our stories about the amazing impact 4-H has had on our lives and the lives of many other youth.

We also attended skill building workshops and listened to keynote speakers, such as the United States secretary of the department of agriculture and the secretary for the department of education.

I feel that the National 4-H Conference is an excellent opportunity for Ohio 4-H'ers to interact with 4-H'ers from other states, and even other countries to obtain new ideas for the Ohio 4-H program. A critical skill that is needed in school, careers, and day to day life is social competence. The 4-H program teaches youth interviewing, public speaking, and organizational skills. While at the conference, delegates were able to build upon these skills.

Ohio 4-H should place the importance of this conference near the top of its agenda. It is a conference that communicates good relations with other states and countries on behalf of Ohio and allows delegates to take their 4-H experience to the next level.

Staying connected to 4-H Teens through ever-changing technology

Mark Light, Extension Educator, Hardin County

For my club, my community, my country and **MY WORLD**. The Internet has really opened up the last phrase of the 4-H pledge to youth in 4-H. Previously only select youth would get the opportunity to leave their county or state and travel to other places. Now, older youth are connecting with each other on a "self-guided" tour of the Internet. They are surfing the sites, joining social networks, and helping to chart the course of the power of the ever-evolving Internet.

Ohio 4-H counties have set out to develop an online presence that has a positive impact on the online global community just as youth organizations do offline. There is a desire to not just ride the wave, but to be the leader in positive youth development (PYD) online. Facebook just passed the half a billion mark in membership. It is where youth and adults are flocking to and 4-H need to have a presence there as well.

Being in an online community allows youth to be valued outside their local peer groups. Most teens are involved in online social networks because it levels the playing field. Here being judged only by what they reveal to others can increase self-esteem. A perceived popularity can be achieved as youth find peers who have similar interests.

Youth also find a voice to speak out and come together around an important issue whether locally or globally. While Facebook offers these types of social tools, they also have the ability to crush confidence in your friends because they have not been done in a positive environment with appropriate mentorship. As a teen leader youth can be a positive online mentors to their peers.



Groups in Facebook help connect youth and adults around a common goal. County 4-H professionals have set up groups around camp counselors, junior fair board, and teen leaders.

There is also a group set up for every Ohio 4-H project, where teens can be mentored by an educator or an adult with that expertise. These groups allow online discussions and collaboration in solving problems. They also allow interaction between face to face meetings and to be more productive. With the busyness of teens, this is essential in communication methods.

Fan Pages in Facebook are being created to promote 4-H to an external audience. 4-H counties and clubs in Ohio are creating Fan Pages for their 4-H programs and for their county fairs. Using this tool, educators and youth promote 4-H and update clientele about current opportunities, deadlines, and other resources. The hope is that as 4-H teens interact with Fan Pages that other peers decide to join 4-H after reading about what their friends are doing.

National 4-H is currently developing the next step in social networking. This new platform called "My 4-H" will be a secure network where youth and volunteers will be vetted at a county level. The difference between this and Facebook is that we can create a secure environment where there is no anonymity on profiles as users are verified locally. This will allow all youth in 4-H, even those who were under 13. This platform will be rolled out in 2011 and 2012.

This platform will be unlike anything out there due to the security features that will allow youth of any age to be safer online. As we move forward in this digital world, 4-H youth can show adults how social networking can be a powerful tool if used to make the best better.

Youth Advisory Committee of Cuyahoga County tackles jobs usually reserved for adults

Robin Stone, Program Coordinator, Cuyahoga County

The Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) is a diverse group of youth within Cuyahoga County that helps transform existing forums of decision making traditionally reserved for adults. Youth do this by voicing their opinions, concerns, and ideas on issues that directly affect them. The YAC is committed to creating excellent opportunities for youth to have a strong impact in their county where their voices are encouraged, welcomed, celebrated.

The YAC, which began in December 2008, is open to all youth between the ages of 13 and 19 who reside in Cuyahoga County. When youth join the YAC they also become members of 4-H. This unique program, which is funded by the Family and Children First Council and the Cuyahoga County Government, has provided an opportunity to offer 4-H to a whole new audience of youth. YAC members have embraced 4-H by attending and presenting at the Ohio 4-H Teen Conference, having members serve on the State 4-H Teen Advisory Council, and completing group 4-H projects.

YAC members have also started a YAC Sewing Club completing projects to be judged

and shown at the fair.

YAC members attend monthly meetings where they choose one of six leadership teams; Education, Advocacy, Service Learning, Health/Fitness, Multimedia, or Events Planning. Each leadership team is coordinated by a Youth Facilitator. The teams develop events, activities, and information to be shared with the entire YAC membership. Following the Leadership Team meetings, all members come together and share information.

During the past two years, the YAC has emerged as a local and national leader in youth civic engagement. Members have participated in the Forum for Youth Investment's convening in Washington, D.C., where youth from around the country met to discuss the formation of a National Youth Council. The YAC also led a nationwide conference call with America's Youth Councils on the same topic, and participated in a National Education Policy Panel and the Citizen Washington Focus program.

The YAC also took an active role in educating local voters on topics important to youth by developing and hosting two Candidate Forums for the Cuyahoga County Council and Execu-

tive elections. The forums brought youth and families face-to-face with candidates to promote dialog about education, jobs, public safety, and other youth concerns.

On April 27, 2011 YAC members traveled to Columbus to attend "Lobby for Ohio Kids Day" where they met with legislators to discuss issues that affect youth around Ohio.

Members of the YAC have also provided service within the county. This past year, they partnered with the Hospice of the Western Reserve and planted a vegetable garden that they maintained throughout the summer. Patients, family members and Hospice staff were able to enjoy fresh foods all summer as a result.

The YAC has also volunteered at Medwish, the Ronald McDonald House, and at a food give away at a local church during Global Youth Service Day.

This summer YAC members traveled to the Eastern 4-H Education Center in Columbia, NC to attend a week long leadership camp.

For more information on the 4-H Youth Advisory Committee, please contact Robin Stone at; stone.363@osu.edu or visit us on the web at: www.empower-youth.org

Here Today, Gone Tomorrow

Mary Beth Albright, PhD, Extension Educator,
Erie County and

Theresa Ferrari, PhD, Associate Professor and
Extension Specialist, State 4-H Office

For years, 4-H has struggled with the complex problems of membership retention, especially among older youth. However, relatively little research has been done concerning why 4-H members choose to leave the program. Therefore, the present study sought to investigate the reasons older youth choose not to re-enroll in the Erie County 4-H program.

A qualitative study was designed to explore factors related to youth discontinuing their involvement with the Erie County 4-H program. Erie County's 4-H member database was used to obtain a listing of the names and contact information of youth ages 12 to 18 in 2008 who were members of Erie County 4-H in 2007, but who did not re-enroll for 2008. From an initial list of 65 youth who met these criteria, 16 participated in one of three focus groups.

Significant findings from the study concerning the retention of older 4-H youth related to: (a) experiences with advisors, (b) experiences with competition, and (c) conflicts with other activities. While some youth discussed positive relationships with their club advisors, many youth discussed inappropriate behavior exhibited by adults and parents, uninvolved and unsupportive advisors, as well as advisors who were overly involved.

Negative judging experiences was also established as a theme across research questions. While some participants described positive experiences with competition, many youth described perceived favoritism during judging, unclear expectations for judging, problems with organization during judging, and poor sportsmanship exhibited during competition.

Participation in other activities was also a theme found across research questions. Several participants said that 4-H was time consuming and interfered with other activities in which they were involved.

4-H programs cannot achieve the desired impact if youth do not remain involved in 4-H programming. Who best to ask why older youth leave the 4-H program than the youth themselves? Listening to their voices will help us develop and improve our programs so that these youth are not "here today, gone tomorrow."

Keeping Youth Engaged: Strategies for addressing 4-H Member Retention

Theresa Ferrari, PhD, Associate Professor and Extension Specialist, State 4-H Office and
Mary Beth Albright, PhD, Extension Educator, Erie County

Youth benefit from programs only if they remain engaged in them. The study of retention of older 4-H youth has many implications for those who work with young people, either as professionals or as volunteers, and for young people themselves.

Club advisors are important to a young person's satisfaction with the 4-H program and their decision to re-enroll or to discontinue their involvement. Moreover, their support is also what helps youth achieve desired outcomes. We must ensure our training prepares volunteers to provide a positive club experience for members.

Older youth desire challenging, meaningful roles and responsibilities. They lose interest if adults take over all of the leadership roles. On the other hand, youth need support to carry out leadership roles. Knowing when and how much support to provide is a balancing act for those working directly with youth.

Create intermediary leadership opportunities for youth who are 11 to 14 years to keep members engaged. Youth in this age group may need more support to assume these roles, and they won't develop the skills if they have no chance to practice them in a safe, supportive environment.

Prior preparation for both participants

and judges can ensure that good sportsmanship and the highest ethical standards of behavior are practiced. Furthermore, be sure that expectations and any "unwritten rules" for competitions are clearly stated.

Develop ways to reward cooperation, not just competition. Negative experiences with competition can lead youth to discontinue their membership in organizations. Furthermore, today's workforce values those who can work successfully in teams.

Develop strategies that can help youth balance competing demands on their time and become successful in both 4-H and other activities, such as sports, the arts, and jobs. Work with older youth to assess their interests and the amount of flexibility and structure that will facilitate their participation.

Follow up routinely with those who do not re-enroll to determine if there are issues that can be addressed.

Create a climate where young people feel comfortable sharing any negative experiences so that any issues may be dealt with before they lead to undesirable outcomes.

Ultimately, our goal is to engage young people in ways that support their current development and help them transition to a productive adulthood. Let's be sure they stick around long enough for us to do that.



Contact us ...

Ideas for photos, stories, columns are welcome! Please contact Teen Connections Editors Greg Yost, yost.30@osu.edu, or Nadine Fogt, fogt.12@osu.edu with any story ideas or suggestions.

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Your newsletter is online ...

www.ohio4h.org/teenconnections/

Youth Leadership Activity To Go

“The Power of One”

OBJECTIVE:

Youth will understand the power of individuals – including themselves – to create change.

MATERIALS AND PREPARATION:

Paper, pens, markers, and chart paper
Copy *The Star Thrower* story
Poker chips or tokens.

I. OPENING: (10 MINUTES)

Opening Circle Statement (Around the World): A hero is someone who... (Have youth leader begin this activity by answering the above question, go around the circle and have participants add their opinions)

II. DO YOU LOOK LIKE A SUPERHERO? (Choose another youth leader to lead this activity – 15 minutes)

Break up participants into groups. Have each group draw a “community superhero” suit that a hero would wear. What objects would a superhero in your community need in his or her toolbelt? What image would a hero present? Does your hero stand out in a crowd with bright colors, or does your hero look like someone in your school, your neighborhood, your religious community? Have each team explain to the whole group the reasons behind each detail of their team drawing.

III. THE POWER OF ONE (15 MINUTES)

Step 1: Have a volunteer read *The Star Thrower* out loud.

The Star Thrower

Eisley, L. (1978). The Star Thrower (adapted by MuttCats to The Star Fish Story).

Retrieved July 6th, 2007, from <http://muttcats.com/starfish.htm>

Once upon a time, there was a wise man who liked to go to the ocean to do his writing. He had a habit of walking on the beach before he began his work. One day, as he was walking along the shore, he looked down the beach and saw a human figure moving like a dance. He smiled to himself at the thought of someone who would dance to the day, and so, he walked faster to catch up. As he got closer, he noticed that the figure was that of a youth, and that what he was doing was not dancing at all. The youth was reaching down to the shore, picking up small objects, and throwing them into the ocean. He came closer and called out, “Good morning! May I ask what it is that you are doing?” The youth paused, looked up, and replied, “Throwing starfish into the ocean.” “I must ask, then, why are you throwing starfish into the ocean?” asked the somewhat startled man. To this, the youth replied, “The sun is up and the tide is going out. If I don’t throw them in, they’ll die.” Upon hearing this, the wise man commented, “But, young man, do you not realize that there are miles and miles of beach and there are starfish all along every mile? You can’t possibly make a difference!” At this, the youth bent down, picked up yet another starfish, and threw it into the ocean. As it met the water, he said, “It made a difference for that one.”

Step 2: Discuss as a group the role of the individual in creating change. (Have a youth leader lead this discussion) Sample questions:

What do you think about this story? Did you like it or not? Why?
What are the messages in this story? What do you think about the messages?
Why do you think the author chose to call the old man wise?
Why do you think the author made the star thrower young?
What does it mean to make a difference?
How significant does your action have to be?

IV. DEBRIEF (10 MINUTES) (Have a youth and adult co-lead this discussion)

How is this sort of thing happening in our lives and in our community? Who are the starfish throwers that we know? What types of things do they do?
How do I contribute to others and their lives? What are some of the small things I do
How does the “power of one” apply to a group of people like this one?

V. CLOSING (10 MINUTES)

Give one poker chip to each participant. Write the year and the program name on the chip. Before handing out the poker chips, talk to the participants about how all of the people who make a difference take chances and risks to make change. Pass out the poker chips, and ask the youth to keep them some place where they can constantly be reminded that they can make a difference, even in small ways.