Preparing Michigan’s children and youth for the future

With a goal of ensuring every Michigan child has the necessary knowledge, tools and skills to lead a healthy and productive life, Michigan State University (MSU) Extension’s children and youth programming and Michigan 4-H are preparing the state’s children and youth for the future by providing educational programs that impact Michigan families from birth through adulthood.

These programs have a vital impact on Michigan communities: developing a capacity for academic success in young children and youth, creating workforce ready young adults, creating engaged future leaders and so much more.

Michigan’s early childhood programming provides resources and support to parents and caregivers during the most formative years of a child’s life: birth to age 8. By covering an array of important topics, MSU Extension is equipping adults (parents and childcare providers) with the tools and knowledge to become their children’s best resource and advocate early in life. Programming for this audience focuses on emerging literacy and school readiness skill education. As youth become older, MSU Extension supports them through the largest youth development organization in the state: Michigan 4-H. This youth development program helps youth ages 5 to 19 learn the critical life skills they need to contribute to their communities as both children and adults. By coupling positive adult mentorship with structured and instructional out-of-school time, real-world learning experiences and leadership opportunities, Michigan 4-H allows youth to explore new interests, gain new knowledge, and discover their passion while building their confidence, civic engagement and leadership skills, and sense of responsibility.

All MSU Extension children and youth programming is focused in four core areas; academic success, leadership and civic engagement, career exploration and workforce development and capacity building for youth development programs.
ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Academic success programs and services through MSU Extension are focused in three key areas: early childhood development, science literacy and life skills development. Early childhood programs help prepare young children to enter and excel in school by providing parents and caregivers with the resources to increase early childhood science, math and preliteracy skills while enhancing children’s social and emotional development. Science literacy programs cultivate an understanding of the scientific process and increase knowledge of both general and specific science topics. Utilized in all academic success programs, as well as other MSU Extension children and youth programming, life skills programs develop a capacity for future success by equipping youth with the necessary skills to contribute to their communities now and in the future.

• In the 2014 program year, more than 21,900 youth in 77 counties participated in nearly 300 Michigan 4-H science education workshops, shows and expositions designed to improve interest and literacy in science. As a result of their 4-H experience, 93 percent of surveyed youth reported increased science knowledge and problem-solving, critical thinking and decision-making skills, and 80 percent of surveyed youth indicated that they are good at science.
• Through 2014 MSU Extension early childhood development programs, adults increased their knowledge of basic concepts that promote school readiness and academic success during early childhood. More than 1,600 people in 55 Michigan counties were engaged in one-time early childhood education workshops or presentations. As a result, 92 percent of those surveyed indicated that they learned new techniques to help young children learn and promote school readiness, and 73 percent planned to use specific course content when working with children.
• More than 12,000 youth were engaged in life skills activities through Michigan 4-H in 2014. Of those surveyed, 97.5 percent indicated that they were aware of the life skills they were learning in 4-H, and 89 percent could identify those life skills.

Nearly 61 percent of Michigan 4-H’ers who graduated high school in 2013 and 2014 are attending college, compared with just 44.6 percent of their peers, and 4-H alumni are more likely to go to college than their same-age peers in 90 percent of Michigan counties.
LEADERSHIP AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

MSU Extension leadership and civic engagement programs prepare youth to become leaders in a globally connected and multicultural world. As a result, Michigan youth understand and respect the cultures of others and are prepared to respond to local and global issues through leadership, civic engagement and volunteerism.

» In 2014, more than 76,000 Michigan 4-H’ers participated in activities specifically designed to increase civic engagement, community service, leadership and communications skills. In addition, nearly 10,000 youth and adults were engaged in trainings and events focused on leadership, civic engagement and cultural competencies. Of those surveyed:
  • 96 percent of participants agreed that they can stand up for things that are important to them, and 95 percent of participants agreed that they understand that others’ ideas are just as important as their own.

» Innovative 4-H programs such as the Michigan 4-H Youth Conservation Council (M4-HYCC) and 4-H Capitol Experience enhance youth leadership skills by helping youth to develop a deeper understanding of the legislative process, identify community challenges and create positive solutions. Of youth attendees surveyed:
  • 89 percent of M4-HYCC participants agreed that, after the program, they could think critically about public policy issues and suggest ways for improvement, compared with just 47 percent before the program.

» 4-H global citizenship programs such as the 4-H China Art Exchange, the 4-H International Exchange, the 4-H Youth Leadership and Global Citizenship Spectacular and 4-H Backpack to Adventure: Youth Leaders in Global World enhance youth’s cultural and global competency.

CAREER EXPLORATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Career exploration and workforce development programs through MSU Extension allow youth to explore future careers and entrepreneurship while enhancing their financial literacy and developing important skills for the workforce. These programs prepare Michigan youth to make important decisions about their professional future, to contribute to the workforce and to take fiscal responsibility in their personal lives.

During 2014, MSU Extension career exploration and workforce preparation programming reached more than 13,000 participants through 276 events in 72 Michigan counties. Among the 13,000 statewide participants:

• More than 7,200 were engaged in entrepreneurship workshops or events that helped them understand how to start their own businesses. Of those surveyed, 65 percent planned to start businesses, and 27 youth initiated businesses in the program year.

• Nearly 900 took part in financial literacy programming that helps youth gain a basic understanding of money management. Of those surveyed, 95 percent agreed that they are responsible for their own future, they understand the importance of starting to save early in life, and they plan to pay their bills on time.

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• More than 2,000 were engaged in events to help youth explore future careers and develop self-awareness of their interest in various fields. Among those surveyed, 99 percent agreed that they plan to take steps to reach their career goals as a result of their 4-H career exploration program, and 97 percent have identified careers in their field of interest.

• Nearly 3,000 participated in workforce preparation workshops that help youth develop a basic knowledge of employability skills and how to apply for a job. As a result of these programs, 92 percent of youth surveyed reported that they are prepared for job interviews, and 62 percent agreed that they could identify the options available for funding their postsecondary education.

CAPACITY BUILDING

MSU Extension youth development capacity-building programs provide outreach efforts and trainings to volunteers and professionals in 4-H and other youth development programs across the state. As a result, the people and organizations that support Michigan’s youth are better equipped to prepare young people for future educational, career and life success.

In 2014, MSU Extension reached more than 4,200 youth and adult participants through various capacity-building programs. As a result of this programming:

• Nearly 2,000 youth and adult volunteers received training to support their service with Michigan youth, with 95 percent of those surveyed reporting that they increased their knowledge of quality standards for positive youth development.

• More than 1,600 professionals received training and support to enhance their youth development work.

• 185 youth were matched with caring adult mentors through community-based planned youth mentoring programs. Of mentored youth surveyed: 100 percent plan to go to college; compared to 83 percent in the presurvey.

“One of the best things about volunteering with youth is seeing the kids work so hard and accomplish their goals.”

— Michigan 4-H volunteer