



Building Youth into Leaders

Impact Statement

The Problem/Issue:

While statistics profiling young people of the 21st century are not always positive, the youth perspective on family and community issues is a valuable piece of any planned resolution. Youth-serving organizations and educators have sought ways to take youth input to the next level of active involvement. When we consider the concept of positive youth development, perhaps the most valuable skills we can pass on to our youth are those that encourage involvement as motivated and committed community leaders.

What's Been Done:

Through the Urban Youth Initiative, Extension educators seek to build skills, provide motivation and create opportunities for youth to develop their full potential as contributing citizens. The Urban Youth Initiative focuses on engaging young people to promote positive citizenship and community development.

A number of different approaches were used in 2003. The Madison County Urban Youth Initiative partnered with Huntsville city schools to provide youth development workshops and seminars. Curriculum resources such as "Tackling the Tough Skills" were used to educate youth in life skills development including, decision making, communications, career planning and responsible behavior.

Several Extension urban youth development programs in Tuscaloosa County target troubled youth in inner city schools. Fifty-two sessions were conducted during the school year to provide lessons on concepts of respect, responsibility, trustworthiness and fairness.

A program in life skills development at the Tuscaloosa Alternative Learning Center involved youth specifically recommended by their schools as having the greatest need for conflict resolution and anger management programming. A Tuscaloosa County Extension agent met with the students under the guidance of the school counselor, providing 40 lessons.

In Houston County, Extension guided a youth entrepreneurship program where participating youth were required to submit a business plan and were not allowed to request additional funds to keep their businesses in operation. Beekeeping, Web page design, lawn care services, babysitting and computer hardware repair were

some of the businesses developed.

Creative thinking led to the organization of Summer Fun-shops by Extension in Lawrence County during school vacation period to deter misuse of free time among school-aged youth. The programs ranged in length from one day to one week and were strategically located across the county. Some were conducted in collaboration with local Boys and Girls Clubs. The fun-shops provided new educational experiences and wholesome fun to what might have otherwise been unsupervised time for the youth involved. Programs were offered in environmental science, farmer safety, canoeing, cooking, sewing, and swimming based on recommendations from the 4-H County Council.

The National Tree Trust provided funding to support a growing and nurturing program partnership between the Coosa Valley Youth Services and Extension in Calhoun County. The program addresses the need for additional urban forestry resources and provided opportunities for meaningful involvement of youth in community outreach. More than 200 youth-at-risk residents of Coosa Valley Youth Services participated in the process of potting, growing and maintaining 11,000 trees that were dispersed free of charge to communities willing to plant them in and around public buildings, parks, schools and right of ways.

Why We Care:

Leadership builds self confidence and breeds productivity. In Madison County, more than 4,400 inner city students, grades 3 through 5, were involved in 107 workshops at 12 city schools. Reports from teachers reflect higher test scores, improved attendance, and teacher satisfaction. Twenty-five teachers have adopted the youth development training as a part of their lesson plan.

In Tuscaloosa County, Extension's efforts helped more than 600 youth significantly improve their in-school behavior. Measures used to monitor student's behavior before and after the program showed improvements based on teachers' assessments. Extension's program at the Tuscaloosa Alternative Learning Center changed young people's lives. Forty lessons were conducted with 110 youth with a 70 percent success rate. Success was defined as improvement of students' behavior to the point that they could be removed from the alternative system and returned back to the normal school system.

In Houston County, the majority of the youth involved kept their businesses operating and earned a profit. One participant started a beekeeping business in which he sells honey and other value-added products. He used part of his profits to increase his honeybee colonies. Another young man has created a Web page design business that has been so successful that most of his accounts are with Dothan area businesses.

The unique partnership in Calhoun County exposed youth to life skills, trade skills and a sense of civic responsibility. Forty-one communities planted over 5,000 trees, improving the state both environmentally and

aesthetically.

More than 21,500 face-to-face were made as part of Extension's Urban Youth Initiative efforts. Through Extension programs and projects, more than 7,240 youth in five Alabama metropolitan areas and one rural county received leadership and personal development experiences. While measuring the impact and results of programs related to attitudinal and behavioral change generally involves longitudinal assessments, pre and post measures and observations by Extension and school educators did show general improvements in youth participating in leadership and personal development programs in Houston, Madison, Lawrence, Morgan, Calhoun and Conecuh Counties.