Cultivating Youth and Communities for Positive Futures

The New Communities Project, Cultivating Youth and Communities for Positive Futures, focuses on developing life skills in at-risk youth populations in two community projects and one special mini-grant. This program received funding of $135,000 in its second year through Children, Youth and Families at Risk (CYFAR) Grant Program of CSREES-USDA.

Roots of Knowledge

Roots of Knowledge in Atlantic City and Pleasantville blends plant science, human nutrition, and career opportunities through an afterschool gardening program for children pre-K to grade 8, and entrepreneurship programs for youth in grades 4 through age 21. Projects include a summer youth-farmstand, winter poinsettia sales operation, a childcare babysitting program, Mini-Society® program, and a Horticultural Job Fair.

Seeds to Success

The Seeds to Success project is a year-round entrepreneurship and life skills training program that culminates each summer with youth operating farmstands in their communities. This project teaches a variety of business, finance, nutrition and food safety lessons throughout the year where students apply this knowledge at the farmstands. The four goals of the project are to:

- Provide workforce preparation
- Create retail outlets that bring affordable, nutritious foods to consumers
- Teach life skills
- Offer service learning and economic development opportunities to youth and communities.

Outdoor Adventure Education

The 4-H Afterschool Adventure program was implemented this year from the NCP mini-grant program. 4-H staff led teams of youth through several group initiatives that promoted effective leadership, team building, goal setting, communication, planning, and decision-making.

Outcomes for Children, Youth, Parents/Families, Communities

The primary outcomes for the overall project are focused on children and youth. Youth participants in both programs received training in entrepreneurship, leadership, writing a business plan, retail business operations and marketing, preparing a farmstand and pricing produce, handling produce, customer relations and conflict resolution prior to and during farmstand operation. Youth practiced their skills in fulfilling the responsibilities of managing the farmstands.
2004 Roots of Knowledge Outcomes
Entrepreneurship and Life Skill Development

• 23 youth participated in the Uptown Classic Produce Market selling produce and poinsettias throughout the year. Youth became proficient in the positions of salesperson, cashier and manager, and received training in Microsoft Excel to produce weekly reports tracking inventory, income, and expenses. Entrepreneur efforts resulted in a profit of $538.60.

• 21 youth participating in the Kaufman Mini-Society® program learned to work together cooperatively and were successful in starting a business. Evaluations identified increases in participants’ knowledge related to scarcity, the definition of a society, types of civil servant jobs, the concept of supply and demand, and basic math skills.

• 12 youth graduated from the first babysitting program with 30% of the graduates having found steady employment – including babysitting for the children of adults attending evening classes at the Parent Resource Centers.

• 19 youth participating in the Resume Writing/Interview Skills workshop learned how to identify personal skills and talents, the basics of resume writing, and interview preparation techniques in a training workshop as indicated by teaching evaluations. Results of pre/post Life Skills Records indicated:
  - 98% learned more about their own personalities and skills.
  - 95% understood the key concepts that should be included in a resume.
  - 89.5% were able to properly identify all effective interviewing skills on the Job Interview Quiz.
  - 83% understood the concept of “marketing” self by selecting action words and/or job titles to skills.
  - 80% of the participants applied those skills as indicated by submitted resumes and job interviews during the Horticultural Job Fair.

Nutrition Education & Healthy Lifestyles

• 151 youth participating in the Healthy Lifestyles Grant learned about food groups, calories and vitamins, healthy snacks, and serving sizes. Evaluations indicated that 91% of the participants increased knowledge about healthy choices when eating and the importance of exercise.

• 32 5th and 6th grade students participated in five basic food and nutrition classes using the Food Guide Pyramid and related 4-H curricula. Evaluations indicated an increase in knowledge in identifying foods from the food groups, healthy snacks, and sources of vitamins and energy and that:
  - 100% can correctly identify foods from grain, meat, and milk groups, understand that energy comes from carbohydrates, and can correctly identify healthy snacks.
  - 94% know the highest sources of Vitamin C.
  - 84% can identify foods naturally low in calories.
  - 72% gained a working knowledge of the food groups and daily servings.
Community Impact

- 367 customers purchased produce from the Uptown Classic Produce Market; a 25% increase over 2003. 48 customers took advantage of free blood pressure testing provided by the county Health Department. $45 in WIC vouchers were redeemed.
- A hands-on Horticultural Job Fair for local "green" industries seeking workers was held this year. As a result:
  - 76 people attended, including 11 high school students, 15 college students and adults seeking jobs, 46 business staff, teachers, and/or service representatives.
  - 100% of job seekers would attend again and found the experience valuable.
  - 100% of teachers would bring students to the event again.
  - 83% of businesses/services found the experience valuable and would attend again.
  - 73% of students were interviewed.
  - 50% of businesses are planning to hire employees from the event.

Afterschool/School Enrichment Plant Science Education

- 110 at-risk youth, grades K-8, involved in afterschool programs gained skills and knowledge in gardening, plant science, and character education through a 10-week program.
- 24 4th grade students were involved in a school enrichment hydroponics project. Evaluations indicate that:
  - 100% are able to identify the processes of photosynthesis and correctly name oxygen and carbon dioxide.
  - 100% know the definition of hypothesis and can correctly identify the five stages of scientific method.
  - 92% know the definition of hydroponics.
  - 87.5% increased knowledge of plant parts and what they do.

2004 Seeds to Success Outcomes:

Entrepreneurship and Life Skill Development
- Evaluations of the Finance FUNdamentals program indicated that 71% of the 34 youth participants in the financial basics lessons showed improvements in their ability to write a check, balance a checkbook, fill out a deposit slip, and understand how to use a check registry.
- Youth who worked at the youth farmstand demonstrated a statistically significant improvement in three skills: ability to make change and process FMNP vouchers, produce identification, and use of a produce scale/knowledge of equivalent weights.

Nutrition Education

Through the Jersey Fit series of eight food and nutrition education lessons, 148 youth learned how to select, handle and prepare healthful meals and snacks that include more fresh fruits and vegetables - with emphasis on identifying and selecting locally grown produce.

Evaluations showed that youth improved their knowledge of how to select and prepare fruits and vegetables, identify produce grown in New Jersey, and clean/store produce.
Community Impact
• 16% of farmstand sales were sold to senior citizens and young families via the FMNP produce voucher program.
• 11 local farmers provided 93% of the produce sold at the farmstands.
• The majority of community customers felt they received a good value, ate more fruits and vegetables, and agreed that they were supporting local farmers, the local economy, and local youth by shopping at the farmstand.

2004 Outdoor Adventure Education Outcomes:
4-H Afterschool Adventure provided challenge and adventure programming to 40 urban youth, ages 9-13, enrolled in the City of Trenton’s afterschool initiative. 20 youth participated in the CYFAR funded pilot program (Holland Weed and Seed Safe Haven), and 20 youth in the Munoz-Rivera Neighborhood Community Service Center.

The average changes for the Holland participants was a gain of 2.97% in self-esteem, 4.11% in trust, and 14.28% for personal responsibility. The control group (students attending a similar Trenton Weed and Seed Safe Haven afterschool program that didn’t participate in the 4-H adventure program) experienced losses (trust, -13.40%; personal responsibility, -10.20%; life skills, -5.17%) except self-esteem (+1.90%).

Improving Statewide Capacity for Children, Youth, and Families at Risk Programs
Successful programs at both community sites demonstrated the improvement of statewide capacity to support programming for at-risk children, youth, and families. This demonstrates the institutional commitment to and capacity for building and successfully utilizing collaborative relationships with government agencies, schools, community organizations and businesses.