Colorado State University Cooperative Extension programs are helping Colorado youth

- build a solid foundation of knowledge through hands-on projects, educational activities and community service experiences;
- increase their problem-solving abilities, resiliency and asset factors;
- resist participation in negative behaviors;
- develop life skills that help them become capable and competent adults.

The Costs...

- Many young people practice behaviors that place them at risk for serious injury, sexually transmitted diseases, other health problems and even premature death, according to data from the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, a comprehensive nationwide survey of high school student health behaviors. Findings include:
  - 73% of all deaths among school-age youth and young adults result from four causes—motor vehicle crashes, other unintentional injuries, homicide, and suicide;
  - 50.8% had at least one drink of alcohol the past month;
  - 48.4% had sexual intercourse during their lifetime;
  - 36.6% were in a physical fight during the past year;
  - 36.4% smoked cigarettes the past month;
  - 32.9% of students had property (car, clothing, or books) stolen or deliberately damaged on school property;
  - 18.3% carried a weapon the past month.
- Key findings from a recent survey by the Colorado Trust revealed that Colorado youth are concerned about emotional violence—teasing that is beyond playful, cruel gossip, bullying, and rejection by peers that can lead to physical violence.

Strengthening Youth Through 100 Years of 4-H Youth Development

Assisting young people as they prepare for the future continues to be the central mission of Colorado State University Cooperative Extension’s 4-H Youth Development Program. Involvement in 4-H helps youth build a solid foundation of knowledge and life skills. The 4-H Program offers a wealth of opportunities for young people to learn decision making, leadership and communication skills, interpersonal relations, mental and physical health, wholesome attitudes, career interests, and the ability to understand and relate to others. 4-Hers also learn responsibility, resiliency, self confidence, citizenship, community service and good work habits.

The 4-H Youth Development Program is based on the foundation that youth are a vital resource that they comprise our most important building block for the future. The American workforce, economy, social structure, education, justice, and democratic government all depend on the next generation of educated, concerned and involved youth. Cooperative Extension agents, specialists and volunteers encourage the growth and achievement of young people through a hands-on, learn-by-doing philosophy. The Colorado 4-H Youth Development Program reaches more than 100,000 youth each year and involves parents, caregivers and more than 10,000 adult and youth volunteers who dedicate their time and knowledge to 4-H kids through organized clubs, individual projects, camps, school enrichment activities, after-school and special-interest programs, and international experiences.

In 4-H, youth are valued for their knowledge, ideas and as a resource for the future. 4-H helps kids learn how to do something as well as how to be something.
Two recent studies confirm that kids who participate in 4-H and similar out-of-school programs tend to be better off than those who don’t. 4-H appears to outpace most other youth programs in the effect it has on helping children develop assets considered essential for lifetime success. Both studies revealed that youth who stay involved in 4-H or similar programs have the highest educational aspirations and school grades, a stronger obligation to serve their community, higher levels of interaction with adults, greater self-esteem and decision-making skills, and a greater ability to make friends. They also are at a lower risk for delinquent behaviors such as drinking or smoking cigarettes, stealing or shop lifting, damaging property, carrying a gun, and using drugs.

(Cornell University, 1999; Montana State University, 2001)

A U.S. government report showed a return of $6 to $8 for every $1 spent on prevention programs to keep youth on track. Last year, the Colorado 4-H Youth Development Program reached 114,806 youth from age 5 through 18 with research-based, developmentally appropriate prevention programs, and support from 10,189 caring adult volunteers.

(U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee on Children Youth and Families, 1997; CSU Cooperative Extension Blue Ribbon Enrollment Program, 2003)

The Payoff...

The mission of the Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development Program is to build lifelong skills that develop young people’s potential through safe, supportive environments that focus on critical elements that researchers identify as essential to positive youth development. Data from both a National 4-H Impact Assessment Project that surveyed youth and adults in 4-H, and Colorado youth program evaluations reveal information on positive youth outcomes.

- A positive relationship with a caring adult: Nationally, there was strong agreement by both youth (90%) and adults (98%) that 4-H adult volunteers made young people feel good about themselves. Colorado data show 80% of participating youth had positive interaction with interested adults to implement a project.
- Safe physical and emotional environment: 98% of adults and 94% of youth surveyed agreed that in 4-H, youth feel safe to try new things and do 4-H activities.
- Opportunities to master skills & content, and be an active, engaged learner: 88% of youth surveyed nationally felt encouraged to try new and different things; 84% felt that 4-H helped them solve problems on their own. Colorado data show 86% of 4-H youth surveyed were able to carry out a plan to solve a problem, and 92% used learned information to complete a project.
- Opportunities to practice service for others: 98% of adults and 91% of youth agreed that they helped each other work as a team to do community work. State data showed that 12,103 Colorado 4-Hers worked on community service and volunteer efforts last year.
- Opportunities for self-determination, decision making and goal setting: 90% of kids surveyed nationally agreed that “4-H teaches me to help other people” and “be responsible for my actions.” In Colorado, 96% of surveyed youth learned how to set goals; 90% actually demonstrated goal setting and critical thinking skills.
- A positive connection with the future: 90% of Colorado youth surveyed reported they experienced success and new life experiences, and 80% reported taking care to avoid dangerous, risky or harmful situations.
- An inclusive atmosphere: 90% of kids nationally agreed that 4-H helps them accept differences in others. 82% of Colorado 4-Hers surveyed reported they accepted differences, and managed conflict positively.