Colorado State University Cooperative Extension helps Colorado youth
• access educational, safe, caring, before- and after-school programs;
• enhance personal development, academic performance, social interaction, and life skills through participation in 4-H Youth Development school-age programs.

The Costs...
- Research from the law-enforcement community shows that 45.5% of all violent juvenile crime on school days takes place between 2-8 p.m., the time of day millions of children and youth are left unsupervised. 57% of violent crimes committed by juveniles occur on school days. Research has shown that unsupervised children are at significantly greater risk of truancy, academic problems, and risk-taking behavior including substance abuse and teen pregnancy.
- A Canadian study compared juvenile arrests in two public housing projects, one with an after-school and summer program and one without. Results showed that the number of juvenile arrests declined by 75% in the housing community that had an after-school program, and increased by 67% in the comparison project. The resulting savings to government agencies came to twice the program’s cost.
- A Wellesley College survey revealed that children who lack supervision and/or structured after-school programs spend a great deal of time watching TV. Children’s television viewing has been associated with lower reading achievement, behavioral problems and increased aggression, and when children watch more than three hours of television a day or watch violent programs, these risks increase.

Adding Value to School-Enrichment and After-School Experiences Through 4-H

Before- and after-school care, or school-age care as it is commonly called, has become a way of life for most American families. Over the course of their developmental years, millions of children will spend more time in out-of-school-care arrangements than they will in formal education. Children spend less than 20% of their waking hours in school. Schools usually provide educational experiences only until mid-afternoon, and are typically open less than half of the days of the year. What happens in the other 80% of a child’s time is critical to children’s development. High quality before- and after-school programs have been proven to help young people develop skills that enable positive development. Successful after-school programs help create safe environments for young people in the hours when juvenile crime peaks. For more than a century, Cooperative Extension’s 4-H Youth Development Program – the world’s largest youth-serving organization – has provided positive youth development programs for school-age children between the ages of 5 and 18. Each year, nationwide, about two and a half million youth are involved in 4-H school-enrichment programs. Extension staff and volunteers partner with schools, churches, public-housing communities and community centers to provide educational, safe, caring before- and after-school programs. The 4-H Youth Development Program provides critical links between formal and non-formal educational experiences and helps young people develop skills such as decision making, leadership, communication, interpersonal relations, anger management, responsibility, resiliency, citizenship and good work habits. Teachers find the learn-by-doing instruction increases student learning and critical-thinking skills.
Putting Knowledge to Work

Public officials recognize the importance of school-age care as a means of developing healthy communities and families—a survey showed that 92% of them ranked childcare and before- and after-school care as one of the most pressing needs for children and families. In a survey of voters, 8 of 10 people across party lines agreed that after-school programs are an absolute necessity and should be funded. (National League of Cities, 1996; Afterschool Alliance, 2003)

Teachers, parents and principals surveyed in 16 states reported that children had become more cooperative, learned to handle conflicts better, developed an interest in recreational reading and were getting better grades as a result of the after-school programs organized by the Cooperative Extension System. In Colorado, 98,247 school-age youth participated in 4-H Youth Development after-school and school-enrichment programs last year. (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1993; CSU Cooperative Extension Blue Ribbon Program, 2003)

Estimates of the economic impact of after-school programs on high-risk youth range from a return on investment of approximately $3-$4, to a high of $10-$13 for every dollar spent. The conservative estimate excludes crime reduction benefits but includes reduced welfare costs, improved school performance and the savings realized by producing more productive members of society. (Costs & Benefits of After-School Programs, Brown, et. al, 2002)

The Payoff...

• A Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development after-school program in Colorado Springs, funded through the Colorado Trust, reaches low-income, high-risk youth in grades 4-9 at various community sites. In addition to providing a safe haven for youth after school, the program combines culturally appropriate strategies, developmental assets and character building to promote reading improvement, academic enrichment, leadership development and community service. Of 200 participating youth, 87% had an improvement of at least one grade point in all academic classes; 90% reported they accomplished goals related to leadership, teamwork and decision-making.

• In Moffat County, Cooperative Extension served as the catalyst among community youth-serving agencies for a Colorado Trust grant that funded “RAD – Recreational After-School Doorway” an after-school program for 5th and 6th graders at Craig Intermediate School. The grant supported a full-time coordinator and instructors for 17 programs offered four days a week throughout the school year. 62% of the students participated in the program designed to increase contact with positive adult role models and enhance academic achievement.

• Gardening provides a hands-on classroom that teaches children earth stewardship, science and the process of discovery. Cooperative Extension in Adams and Boulder counties developed two programs that are in high demand by area elementary-school educators. Each year almost 900 children in the two counties participate in “Earth Gardens” to design and plant a school landscape while they learn math and science concepts. Extension’s “MiniGreenhouse” program reached more than 4,000 1st-3rd graders in the metro area who were introduced to earth science by sprouting a seed and watching it grow. In Larimer County, the Master Gardener Youth Program helps dozens of 14- to 18-year-olds develop an appreciation for nature while increasing their interpersonal skills through teamwork and community service.

• Cooperative Extension is a strong participant in the Eagle River Youth Coalition, a partnership of youth-serving agencies organized to provide Eagle County youth aged 10 to 18 constructive, skill-building experiences. A wellness fair held at the high school attracted 600-plus students to workshops with such titles as Clues to the Blues, Alcohol 101, and Tests You Don’t Want to Fail. Coalition follow-up included an Extension-facilitated county-wide youth assessment and asset-building education in the community.

• In Logan County, Cooperative Extension conducts school-enrichment education for elementary, middle and high school classes using the Character Counts program. Third graders did hands-on lessons on team building, respect, trust, cooperation and citizenship – 77% of them could relate the “Pillars of Character” and illustrate examples of character in action. Middle school students experienced in-depth character-building activities with teacher follow-up; 72% of them increased their knowledge of character traits.

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