

Building a Bridge to the Future

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This issue of The Center looks at youth at the turn of the millennium. What are their needs, issues, and challenges? Where do youth development programs position themselves within the larger picture of society or culture? Are our collective efforts providing young people a bridge into their future?

Today's youth live in a world where technology and innovation shift the ground beneath their feet, where television causes us to lose track of reality, where the glory of the U.S. women winning the World Cup in soccer is juxtaposed to the Columbine High School shootings in Littleton, Colorado. Youth face a future of global uncertainty where the only certainty is change.

For this issue, we asked young people to tell us what it's like to be a youth in the new millennium. Close to 200 young people throughout Minnesota wrote to me to describe their insights and views of what the new millennium would be like. Most were concerned about technologies overcoming everyday life. Some wrote about flying cars, living in space, cloning humans, and picture phones. Many felt that Y2K was a lot of hoopla about nothing other than marketers getting rich. Y2K also brought about an increased awareness of how dependent we have become on technology. Young people feel there are still great challenges such as cures for AIDS and cancer, world peace, starving and homeless children, and "techy" toys taking away imagination. Throughout this publication ten



youth will share their insights and ideas about their future. Their powerful words bring even the staunchest researcher back to reality.

The articles in the publication look at the role of youth development at the beginning of the new millennium. Dale Blyth's article, "Extension's Roles Community Youth Development for the 21st Century," challenges us to envision a new role in the 21st century. He addresses four trends (Change, Diversity, Information, and Inequality) and sets a course of action for the next two decades.

Lynne Borden et al.'s article, "Advancing the Understanding of Youth Development and Its Effective Application: Reflections on the North Central Region's Recent Efforts," builds on the principles in Blyth's article and encourages states to work together and share research within the Extension system.

Jerome Stein's article, "Community Youth Development: New Challenges for a New Century," looks at how communities can intentionally encourage positive youth development and challenges Extension professionals to go beyond traditional models.

The issues and tensions that arise from a single dominant European American cultural view are identified in Leon Rodrigues' article, "Multicultural Challenges in 4-H Youth Development: Bridging the Divide." Bridging the cultural divide helps youth increase their understanding of home and community, and frees them from their cultural boundaries. The goal is to reduce the prejudice and biases that cripple our communities.

Two articles in this issue help us understand youth development as it relates to the fourth H: Health. Colleen Schacht's article, "Minnesota Counties and America's Promise," describes the

role of a healthy community and shows how "America's Promise," movement is alive and well in Minnesota. Nikki Sigler Andrews and Stephen Russell look at the role health has played in our society and in Extension pro-

Mission

The evolving mission of the Center for 4-H Youth Development is:

To act as a catalyst, advocate & resource for...

- Quality youth development programs
- Communities becoming more intentional about youth development
- Professionals and volunteers seeking to understand and do youth development
- The generation of new knowledge that enriches the practice of youth development

grams in their article, "Broadening the Perspective on Health and Youth Development." They challenge us to take the lead in creating a safe environment for youth to discuss conflicting values and sensitive issues.

Youth involvement on public boards builds the competencies of decision making, problem solving, negotiation, cooperation, and citizenship. Jennifer Bloom's article, "Youth Summits: Capturing Youth Voices in Public Policy Debates," looks at why this program has been so successful over the last five years.

Finally, Mary Marczak's article, "Using Numbers to Tell 4-H Success Stories," takes us full circle back to why we do youth development work. She reminds us of the importance of research and of documenting both successes and failures. Numbers can help paint pictures that are powerful ways to tell stories. Without this effort, our collective knowledge is lost.