

Introduction

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The line “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times” by Charles Dickens (1859) fits the role of youth development in today’s world. In the last five years, the number of youth committing violent crimes and youth being neglected or abused has increased dramatically. From 1988 to 1992 the number of youth arrested for violent crimes increased 46 percent, while the number in older age groups decreased. (Guerra & Williams, 1996). Youth in the United States face issues like an increased rate of suicide, depression, younger age of intercourse, and wide abuse of legal and illegal drugs. At the same time youth have an increase

in discretionary, unsupervised time (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995).

Professionals in the field of youth development have armed themselves with a wide range of tools and resources to address the issues youth face today. Through research and best practice methodologies, youth development has created models and programs that reach young people. Programs like the “Assets Model” from Search Institute; service learning, cooperative learning, and decision cases are aimed at engaging youth through meaningful contributions. Discovering what tool works in any given situation may always be a challenge when working with youth audiences. This is why a professional’s toolbox needs to be larger and include a number of options. This Center publication addresses the many ways 4-H Youth Development can connect youth to their world through the various outreach programs offered throughout the Extension Network.



The publication begins with the expressive arts program in which Carol Shields explores how brain research supports the arts. One state and two county programs highlight how youth are “transformed” through the arts. The second article by Scott Peters takes us back to our 4-H roots and civic responsibilities. This historical look into 4-H Youth Development helps deepen our public work and public mission. Melissa Bass and Lucia Orcutt’s article on civic responsibility identifies nine vital practices for Youth Development professionals. The Moorhead Healthy Communities Initiative, an article by Brenda Shafer-Crume and Lucia Orcutt, addresses the “Asset” model and goes through the collaboration steps in developing a successful community-wide youth development program. The shooting sports/wildlife study by Angie Hauer and Stephan Carlson looks at changes in young people as a result of participating in this national 4-H project. In this study, strengths as well as weaknesses in the SS/W program are noted and appropriate recommendations are made in order to develop life skills in youth. Service learning can be a valuable part of community youth development. James Kielsmeier argues for the role of service learning in educational reform and demonstrates the momentum of this movement throughout the nation in his article titled “Harnessing

the Trojan Horse”. Tammy Dunrud and colleagues’ piece on decision cases, “Real-Life Dilemmas Make Learning Fun,” shows how unresolved dilemmas are powerful tools for engaging youth into abstract thinking, problem solving, and decision making. Kids discover there are no “right” answers yet decisions still need to be made. The last article by Richard Byrne et al. focuses on the pitfalls, misconceptions, challenges, and key issues found in evaluations of community-based programs.

As we look into the next century and the future of the youth development profession, it behooves us to be reminded of the task at hand and the challenges found in both the “worst” and “best” of times. This publication’s goal is to help refine the tools and resources needed for reaching the needs of our ever-changing youth audience.

Bibliography

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