



Traveling to where the young people live and play is just one way 4-H attracts new, diverse audiences. (Left) Amelia Jackson, 4-H program coordinator, with kids at a Willmar housing site. (Right) Kathryn Sharpe, Extension youth development educator, with members of the Franklin Library 4-H Club in Minneapolis.

OPENING NEW DOORS

4-H reaches diverse communities of Minnesota's youth

Youth across Minnesota—from families who have been a part of Extension 4-H for generations to first-generation 4-H'ers—are engaging in 4-H in new and vibrant ways. Today, 4-H programs are as diverse as the interests of the youth they serve.



Krista Lautenschlager, 4-H program coordinator in Kandiyohi County, has witnessed Minnesota's changing demographics right in her own community. "I also noticed that many youth from the growing immigrant population didn't attend quality youth programs," she says.

That had to change.

"But you can't just take a program that's been working for one group of kids and expect it to work for all," she says. Lautenschlager found out that transportation was one barrier. Communication with parents was another. "Although 4-H has been a part of the fabric of our communities for more than 100 years, newer residents needed an introduction."

4-H on Wheels

That introduction took place in Kandiyohi County the way it does in many other

communities: through partnerships. Then Lautenschlager and her colleagues tore down the transportation barrier by giving 4-H wheels.

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Today, "4-H on Wheels" serves Somali and Hispanic youth in Willmar on site at their housing developments. It's delivered with United Way and Willmar Community Education, and served 300 youth at six sites during the summer of 2014. Activities included camping, geocaching, healthy

living and more. The program is a Children, Youth and Families At Risk (CYFAR) project funded by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

“Summer learning loss affects kids’ success in school and life,” says Amelia Jackson, a Kandiyohi County program coordinator who focuses on science-based learning activities. “Making 4-H mobile gives harder-to-reach youth access to quality summer programs.”

Summer also provides time to learn with a more playful mindset than during the school year. “Research confirms that play is essential in the education of young people, enhancing brain and body development,” says Jennifer Skuza, assistant dean for Extension youth development. “This is one area where 4-H can help narrow the achievement gap. Informal learning motivates kids to explore their interests, develop skills and be more persistent in solving problems.”

“4-H can help narrow the achievement gap.”

This isn’t just happening in Willmar, but in many places where new populations of youth have migrated as families have moved for jobs in agriculture, factories and other industries.

“Through this partnership with 4-H, we are able to help kids have fun and learn at the same time,” says Tammy Rudningen, Willmar



4-H on Wheels enhances brain and body development for harder-to-reach youth during the summer months, when learning loss often occurs. This is one way 4-H can help narrow the achievement gap.

Community Education staff. “The college interns who help deliver the program also provide great role models and a connection to higher education for the kids.”

Changing lives

The Franklin Library 4-H Club in Minneapolis recently took their passion for their community and turned it into a video project to help neighbors connect and create a safer neighborhood.

The club is a partnership between 4-H in Hennepin County and the Franklin Community Library. Club members—primarily Somali and other East African youth from Minneapolis’ Phillips and Seward neighborhoods—meet weekly at the library’s teen center.

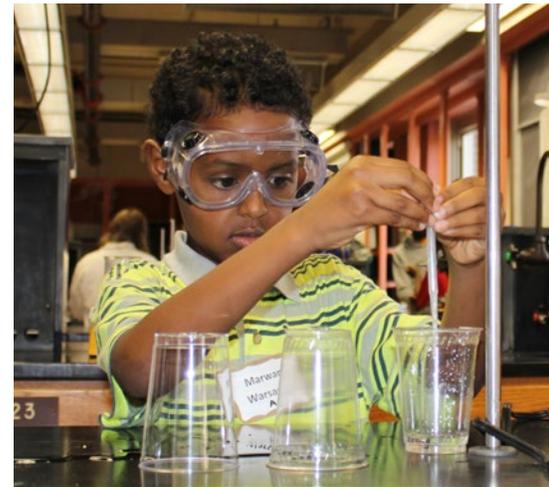
“It’s a diverse group of kids in the heart of south Minneapolis,” says Kathryn Sharpe, an Extension educator who guides the club. “They like serving their neighborhood, and they enjoy technology and science. The video project was one way they combined their interests for a great hands-on learning experience.”

Habso Khalifa, a 17-year-old born in a Kenyan refugee camp, said 4-H has taught her about her community and about herself. “I used to feel angry about certain things and get in trouble,” says Habso. “I think about my community now.”

The video project helped Habso make that transition. “I learned that people have their moments,” she told a Star Tribune reporter who covered the video screening. “That they have things that only they can do.”

Research shows that youth programs like 4-H are more flexible than schools. They can better adapt to the needs of diverse youth populations, which are growing across Minnesota. “4-H is an important part of the University’s outreach mission,” says Dorothy Freeman, Extension youth development associate dean and state 4-H director. “The goal is to provide positive learning experiences to prepare all youth in Minnesota to succeed.”

It’s working for Habso, and she will pay it forward. “It’s changed my life,” she says. “4-H taught me how to be a role model. Now, the younger kids listen to me.”



Youth in the Ka Joog 4-H program visited campus to engage in a science experiment guided by students of the University of Minnesota Center for Sustainable Polymers.

BRINGING STEM LEARNING TO SOMALI YOUTH

Education is regarded highly in the Somali-American community, and a new partnership is connecting Somali youth to Extension 4-H and the University.

Through funding provided by Youthprise! and CYFAR, 4-H Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs will be delivered at Ka Joog, a nonprofit on the West Bank in Minneapolis serving approximately 2,500 Somali youth annually.

In Somali, Ka Joog means ‘resist’ (literally, ‘stay away’) which symbolizes the goal to help Somali youth resist drugs, violence and other negative influences and help them stay on the path to higher education.

“Ka Joog began with a vision, a dream, and a lot of what-ifs,” says Mohamed Farah, Ka Joog executive director and 4-H program coordinator. “Our partnership with Extension 4-H and the University is a perfect fit.”