



Julia Deshler, a 4-H member and high school junior from Cottage Grove, teaches fourth-graders about negative peer pressure, internet safety and the dangers of alcohol and tobacco use.

Photos: Craig Lassig for Pioneer Press



YOUTH TEACHING YOUTH

4-H teens teach and mentor their younger peers

4-H brings together kids of different ages, letting children learn from teens they look up to, and teens grow through mentoring others.

Park High School senior Alex Pendar knew she wanted to be a teacher. When she heard about a way she could see what teaching was really like, she and her friend Julia Deshler signed up for 4-H Youth Teaching Youth. In Extension 4-H, having older youth mentor the younger ones is an integral part of the program.

The 4-H Youth Teaching Youth program takes this practice up a notch by training high-school age 4-H'ers to teach elementary and middle school youth in Anoka, Dakota, Scott and Washington county classrooms. 4-H teen teachers learn a curriculum that helps younger kids learn to make better choices and provides hands-on leadership experiences for teens that can lead to future study and careers.

"When I was in elementary school, adults would just tell us 'stay away from this or that, because it's bad,'" said Julia. "In 4-H Youth Teaching Youth, we interact with the kids, and they relate to us because of our age. We ask them what they think, and create lessons and activities that make sense to them."

"Lots of mentoring happens among 4-H'ers, from age 5 to one year past high school," says Amber Shanahan, an Extension educator who provides leadership for the program. "But Youth Teaching Youth is a formal leadership experience in which the 4-H teen teachers take charge. They have to learn the curriculum, learn how to teach, practice and show up. They face high expectations with a lot of responsibility."

"When I started, I let my teaching partner take the lead," says Alex. "Now I've grown as a co-leader and can command the classroom instead of just being on the side."

The 4-H Youth Teaching Youth program fills an important need in school districts, earning

support from teachers, administrators and county partners.

"Our school districts told us they really needed programs that could help support young kids in learning how to be safe and make good decisions," said Fran Miron, Washington County Commissioner. "4-H's Youth Teaching Youth program has been an invaluable resource in helping us make sure kids in our communities are healthy and supported in these important and sometimes challenging areas."

Research shows that having youth teach other youth builds feelings of social usefulness and a sense of control. It helps prevent problems like substance abuse, pregnancy and delinquency. "Younger kids are inspired by older kids showing them how to be responsible citizens and good role models," says Shanahan. "Our teen teachers are excited and proud that they are making a difference."

For more information, visit www.extension.umn.edu/youth/mn4-H/youth-teaching-youth



4-H youth teachers encourage peers to make healthy choices

Reaching nearly 10,000 students annually with these topics:

- Building good character
- Talking about feelings
- Resolving conflicts
- Making decisions about alcohol and tobacco
- Staying safe online and dealing with cyberbullying
- Dealing with stress, peer pressure, hurt and prejudice
- Building relationships and appreciating diversity and differences

The results?

- 94% of participants surveyed said the teaching experience helped them make healthy living choices
- Classroom teachers unanimously agreed that they observed positive social and emotional learning, such as relationship-building, increased empathy and increased self-awareness through discussions and journaling.

4-H AMBASSADORS TEACH AND LEAD

Minnesota 4-H State Ambassador Julianna Langlois was a little scared about teaching younger 4-H'ers, but her initial fear was short-lived.

"The experience opened up a window of, 'Oh, I can do this,'" says Julianna, now in her second year as an ambassador. "It boosted my confidence to try new things."

Minnesota 4-H State Ambassadors serve as spokespeople for 4-H to educate youth and adults about the importance of youth development, leadership, citizenship, service, teamwork and other invaluable life skills. One responsibility is to teach nearly 800 youth at 4-H youth leadership conferences, like Building Leadership and Understanding (BLU) and Youth Exploring Leadership and Learning Out Loud! (YELLO!).

Using a youth-teaching-youth model, the ambassadors are trained to teach younger peers. They develop and lead activities that help youth think creatively, collaborate, and learn skills they'll take home and use in their lives and communities.

"Research shows that peer-to-peer teaching has benefits for both the teacher and the recipient," says Jacquie Lonning, 4-H Citizenship & Leadership program director. "Teachers learn how they can have an impact in their community and gain self-confidence. Youth respond well to other youth when they see them as a positive role model."



4-H State Ambassadors are role models in their communities and for younger 4-H members. As a team, they develop and teach leadership and other life skills to youth from across the state. Pictured: A group of the 2015 4-H State Ambassadors, including Julianna Langlois, second from left.