

**Title**

Empowering Youth as Leaders Through 4-H Trainings

**Author**

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**Year**

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**Geographic Scope**

Multi-County

**County**

Candler, Evans, McIntosh

**Unit/Department/Group**

4-H & Youth

**Summary**

Youth leaders that can motivate their peers and lead by example will make the youth group stronger and more effective. However, many youth do not receive training in this area through school curriculum and school experiences. By facilitating a 4-H Certified Teen Leader Training for youth in Southeast Georgia, 4-H faculty were not only able to educate and empower youth to become peer leaders and mentors to others, but also aided in building soft skills among today's youth.

**Situation**

Youth need opportunities to practice and assume leadership roles (Connell, Gambone, & Smith, 1998). This practice contributes to the Georgia 4-H mission of providing youth with the opportunities to lead to a self-directed and contributing adulthood. As Putnam (2000) notes, active engagement in organizations is declining in younger generations. In providing youth the opportunity to become active and engaged as leaders in their program where their voices are a part of decision making, Georgia 4-H can contribute to leadership skill development and in meeting its mission. According to Arnold (2018), youth see helping others as a personal responsibility and live up to the values of respect, responsibility, honesty, kindness, and generosity. Youth care about and give back to their communities. Youth who achieve positive developmental outcomes are more likely to achieve long-term outcomes marked by vocational or academic success, civic engagement, employability and economic stability, happiness, and well-being (Arnold & Gagnon, 2020).

Of the many opportunities Georgia 4-H offers, the ability to develop leadership skills has been acknowledged as one of the most positive experiences within the organization. The opportunity for more experienced 4-H'ers to mentor younger 4-H'ers by serving as Certified Teen Leaders in their county program, as well as district and state events, through sharing their own 4-H experiences and knowledge, has proven effective in fostering increased participation and

overall enthusiasm. Acknowledging the effectiveness of Georgia 4-H Certified Teen Leaders, it became evident that not only offering the opportunity to certify new 4-H'ers but also to utilize their creativity in keeping current and new coming 4-H'ers enthusiastic and engaged, was vital to the future growth of the Georgia 4-H program in Southeast Georgia.

### **Response**

Candler, Evans and McIntosh County 4-H Extension Faculty delivered a Georgia 4-H Certified Teen Leader Training which prepared rising 7th – 12th graders from six counties to serve as teen leaders through 4-H programming. The Georgia 4-H Certified Teen Leader Training curriculum was developed by numerous UGA Extension faculty through vetted exercises and research-based content and updated to a more modern format in 2023. This curriculum is available to UGA Extension 4-H Faculty and Staff across the state as a guide to facilitating a meaningful and productive training for youth that are interested in expanding their leadership skill sets. Teens had 5 hours of training where they were equipped with materials to assist them with becoming a successful leader for their community; topics included handling conflict, dealing with various personalities, recognizing different communication styles and understanding developmental differences of younger youth as well as hands-on experiences leading activities to prepare for their audience. Youth discussed real life scenarios they could potentially face as peer leaders and developed helpful and applicable responses as a group. Youth participants also received training on written communication through thank you notes using the UGA Extension Manners Worth Millions curriculum.

### **Impact**

On June 6, 2023, twenty-three youth from Bulloch, Candler, Evans, Effingham, McIntosh and Screven counties successfully completed this training to become Georgia 4-H Certified Teen Leaders and are equipped to support local 4-H programs.

Posttest evaluations revealed a significant increase in knowledge, skill and abilities.

Before the training:

- 62% of participants reported some prior knowledge about the role of 4-H teen leaders
- 55% of participants reported having some knowledge about the ages and stages of 9-11 year olds
- 70% of participants reported some confidence in serving as a 4-H teen leader
- 62% of participants reported some comfort in handling difficult situations

After the training:

- 100% of participants reported knowledge about the role of 4-H teen leaders
- 100% of participants reported having knowledge about the ages and stages of 9-11 year olds
- 93% of participants reported confidence in serving as a 4-H teen leader
- 89% of participants reported feeling comfortable in handling difficult situations

Local 4-H agents and program assistants contacted participants to begin serving in leadership roles in their local communities after the training. Within four months of this training, 78% of these youth (eighteen) served as teen leaders at local county programs in their home counties. Because of the training they received, they were able to facilitate strong 4-H programs and

build strong relationships with younger youth. They assisted 4-H Extension Faculty in coordinating and implementing the educational components of these activities while putting into practice the leadership skills they learned. 4-H Agents with youth that participated in this training were asked to provide insight regarding the importance of Certified 4-H Teen Leaders within their programs.

- "Teen leaders are a great way to get younger students excited for leadership opportunities in the future! Younger 4-H students are always eager to be just like our older students who serve in afterschool clubs as teen leaders or those that attend camp as a teen leader! We rely on the leadership skills to successfully implement numerous activities in our county."
- "At our Cloverleaf Officer Training, one of my 6<sup>th</sup> grade students asked her mom if she could get a nametag like the Teen Leaders were wearing. It gave me the opportunity to tell a parent and a student who is really just starting their 4-H career about the opportunities offered in 4-H as you grow."
- "Teen leaders are extremely important to the Bulloch County 4-H program because they often serve as the connector between Cloverleaf youth and adult leaders. Teens are often more relevant to the cloverleaf group and can serve as a tremendous source of encouragement for younger youth."
- "Teen leaders are vital to the McIntosh County 4-H club. With only one 4-H staff member in the county program, teen leaders are a valuable extension of the staff leader. The teen leader role is a wonderful tool to keep our older students involved in 4-H and inspire our younger students to stick with it as they reach middle and high school grade levels."

Based on this feedback, it is clear that this program not only has value to the students that participate but to their home 4-H programs as well.