

Title

Empowering Youth as Leaders Through 4-H Trainings

Author

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Geographic Scope

Multi-County

County

Bulloch, Candler, Evans

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 Bulloch, Candler and Evans counties, 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. The Georgia 4-H Certified Teen Leader Training curriculum was developed by numerous UGA Extension faculty through vetted exercises and research-based content. 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.

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. 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 Bulloch, Candler and Evans counties.

Response

Candler and Evans County 4-H Extension Faculty delivered a Georgia 4-H Certified Teen Leader Training which equipped rising 7th – 12th graders from three counties to serve as teen leaders through 4-H programming. Teens had a day 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. After the training, local 4-H agents and program assistants contacted participants to begin serving in leadership roles in their local communities.

Impact

On June 9, 2021, nineteen youth from Bulloch, Candler and Evans counties successfully completed this training to become Georgia 4-H Certified Teen Leaders and are equipped to support local 4-H programs. Of these nineteen youth, eight were rising 7th graders, eight rising 8th graders, one a rising 9th grade and two rising 11th graders.

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

Before the training:

- 21% of participants reported some prior knowledge about the role of 4-H teen leaders
- 63% of participants reported having some knowledge about the ages and stages of 9-11 year olds
- 84% of participants reported some confidence in serving as a 4-H teen leader
- 63% 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
- 94% of participants reported confidence in serving as a 4-H teen leader
- 79% of participants reported feeling comfortable in handling difficult situations

Further analysis of qualitative data collected revealed that 89% of youth participants gained knowledge in handling different situations with peers and younger youth through the development of stronger communication and teambuilding skills. Participants enjoyed the interactive and situational components of the training as 63% noted that was the most beneficial and impactful portion of the training. Additionally, one participant said "one thing I will remember from this training is that when I am a teen leader, other 4-H'ers come first" while another said "I can now help younger 4-H'ers at any 4-H event." These two responses show that these youth gained some true leadership skills through participation in this training.

Following this training, four of these youth served as teen leaders at local summer programs in Candler and Evans 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.