4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Heard County continues to struggle with health issues that plague the rest of our nation, like sexually transmitted infections. Seeing that relationship issues are on the rise, the Heard County 4-H Club stepped in and offered Relationship Smarts in the middle grades where these problems tend to start forming. Relationship Smarts is a curriculum that is meant to affirm the importance of teen-relationship experiences while reducing teen-dating violence.

In Heard County, the teen pregnancy rate is 24.5 percent, which is slightly higher than the state average. The STD rate for teens aged 15 to 19 is 19.1 percent, the highest rate in 11 years. Single-parent families are also at an all-time high at 30.1 percent, the highest in 10 years, according to Kids Count Data.

During adolescence, teens let their friends influence their decisions regarding sexual activity, even when they do not fully understand the consequences associated with the act. Teenagers have sex as a way to appear cool and sophisticated, but in some cases the end result is an unplanned teen pregnancy. The Kaiser Family Foundation states that more than 29 percent of pregnant teens reported that they felt pressured to have sex, and 33 percent of pregnant teens stated that they felt that they were not ready for a sexual relationship, but proceeded anyway because they feared ridicule or rejection.

Many times teens do not have the knowledge needed to make informed and responsible decisions about whether or not to engage in sexual activity that can alter their life.

Heard County 4-H implemented the Relationship Smarts curriculum for sixth- through eighth-graders at Heard County Middle School. The program is designed to help teens learn how to make wise choices about relationships, dating, sexual activity, partners and more.

Six content lessons were delivered in the classroom on a monthly basis dealing with topics such as having healthy relationships with family and friends, being a good and sensitive listener, handling conflict in a positive way, having a healthy dating relationship, and expressing your feelings with your dating partner.

Classroom activities reinforced classroom lessons through role playing or games where participants lined up with the viewpoints they agreed with and by sharing personal testimonies.

A total of 236 youth participated in the Relationship Smarts curriculum. At the conclusion, each participant was given a survey. The following are the results:

- 85.1 percent of respondents reported that they were very likely or likely to use the skills learned from the program.
- 83.8 percent of participants felt that this program was either helpful or very helpful to them.
- 72 percent of respondents reported that they would refer this program to a friend.
- 80 percent of the respondents felt better about themselves compared to before the program, when asked “How do you feel about yourself as a person now?”

Below are a few sample comments that youth shared reflecting what they learned:

- “I feel that this program helped me how to act mature when handling a situation.”
- “What I enjoy most about the program is that I’ve learned how to handle toxic relationships with other people.”
- “I feel that I have a very good mindset about dating and dealing with a relationship.”
- “This program has helped me learn how to resolve a relationship.”
Agriculture & Natural Resources

Goods and services related to Georgia’s agriculture and natural resources affect each of the state’s communities every day. Agriculture is Georgia’s largest industry, and its direct and indirect economic impact totals $73.7 billion. More than 392,400 Georgia jobs are directly involved in commodity or food- and fiber-related industries.

UGA Extension faculty and staff play a key role in the success of this industry by sharing university-based research for Georgians to use on the farm and at home. Recommendations in areas including soil fertility, pest management, plant and crop varieties, water quality, and herd health and management focus on maximizing production and profits while minimizing environmental impacts.

Agriculture and Natural Resources Extension agents also provide homeowners and communities with information on lawn care, landscaping, gardening and water conservation through a variety of workshops. Some agents also work with schools on projects like community gardens and farm-to-school programs. Georgia Master Gardener Extension Volunteers give thousands of hours of service to their communities by answering questions in county offices and creating educational opportunities.

4-H Youth Development

As the youth development program of UGA Extension, 4-H is also part of a national network. Georgia 4-H reaches more than 170,000 fourth- through 12th-grade students across the state and helps students develop the knowledge, life skills and attitudes that will enable them to become self-directing, productive and contributing members of society. This mission is fulfilled through hands-on learning experiences in agricultural and environmental awareness, leadership, communication skills, citizenship, energy conservation, health, and food and nutrition.

Georgia 4-H’ers are well-known for sharing their knowledge and volunteering throughout their communities. At the school and county levels, students participate in club meetings organized by 4-H Youth Development Extension agents. At the state level, students participate in competitions, summer camps and conferences. Some 4-H competitions and events are also offered at the regional and national levels.

Research indicates that, as a result of participating in 4-H, members are more engaged in their academic studies, less likely to be involved in risky behavior, and more likely to graduate from high school and continue their education.

Family & Consumer Sciences

Family and Consumer Sciences Extension specialists, agents and staff assist in addressing real-life issues faced by Georgians of all ages. They provide programs and the latest information on obesity, chronic disease, food and financial insecurity, family stresses, unhealthy housing, food safety and preservation, nutrition and more.

To help promote the positive development and safety of preschool, school-aged and adolescent youth, UGA Extension offers resources for parents, caregivers and others. Extension professionals in this program area lead consumer economics trainings and programs such as ServSafe®, Relationship Smarts, and PRIDE, a parent and teen driving education course.

Extension also promotes healthy lifestyles through statewide programs. Walk Georgia is a virtual, fitness-tracking resource that encourages physical fitness and healthy lifestyles to better the lives of Georgians. Other health programs managed by UGA include the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed). These classes teach families how to stretch their food dollars, eat healthier meals and snacks, and reduce the risk of foodborne illnesses.

Learn more at: extension.uga.edu