Title: 4-H Sustainable Communities Project

Project Leader: Karen Barshefsky

Project Overview

The 4-H Sustainable Communities Project will engage young people in the city of Springfield in the out of school time hours to provide educational enrichment and promote life skills development. An area of national and local need that has been identified by the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, National 4-H Council and UMass Extension 4-H is Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math education (STEM). Education in the STEM disciplines is critical for preparing a globally and regionally competitive workforce. To achieve this goal, 4-H will partner with Student Bridges a student led organization that works to increase college access and success for underrepresented students by building partnerships with local schools and community organizations.

The Massachusetts 4-H Program is uniquely positioned in Massachusetts to assist in delivering quality educational STEM programs in out-of-school settings. The National 4-H Curriculum System provides a rich and diverse set of research, juried curricula and evaluative methodologies developed by faculty throughout the national system. We, as the 4-H Sustainable Communities Project evolves, project leaders and our student collaborators will continue to seek partners in the Springfield community and at UMass Amherst to expand the array of educational enrichment and youth development experiences to help prepare youth for success in school while creating connections and pathways between Springfield youth and the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Activity Summary - 2014

- 4-H Program Staff Meetings with Community Partners and UMass Students (40)
- After School Program Workshops (4)
- Curricula development for Springfield CYFAR Sustainable Communities Project (2)
- Learning Through Community Engagement (Teaching - Undergraduate Course) (1)

Total Educational contacts

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Narrative Summary and Impact

The Massachusetts 4-H SET Adventures SCP supported two after school programs in the City of Springfield this past year. Program sites included the South End Community Center (SECC) and the New North Citizens’ Council (NNCC). The 4-H Educator and students from the University of Massachusetts Student Bridges were the tutor/mentors and provided instruction for this project. During the school year, the SECC and the NNCC programs met twice weekly with additional field trips to Hip Hop Revolution and to the University of Massachusetts. Overall, a total of 32 middle school students participated on a consistent basis throughout the school year. Ten additional students participated on a limited basis. The 4-H Educator worked closely with the UMass Student Bridges Site Coordinators organizing specific science, engineering, and technology themes then linking the themes to hands-on activities. Youth participated in various activities that included learning about volcanoes, polymers, plant and soil science, exercise science, nutrition, veterinary science, growing bacteria, and also linking engineering and computer technology to create an end product. College positive activities consisted of youth visiting the UMass campus, Hip-Hop Revolution which is college positive arts event. Purposeful conversations and structured activities addressing going to college also took place throughout the school year. Former college students attended the after school sites and shared their experiences studying abroad.

Eleven UMass college students from the Student Bridges Organization provided weekly instruction at the South End and North End community sites. In all, the 11 college students have had a total of 1,010 contact hours for the year with the middle school students. The 4-H Educator/Site Coordinator and staff members from partnering organizations were also present. A graduate student from the University of Massachusetts facilitated a course for the eleven UMass students involved in this project. This two-semester course examined how race, class and a variety of historical forces shape students’ access to quality education.

A University of Massachusetts faculty member from the Engineering Department along with six UMass engineering students worked on a special engineering project with youth. A community member gave a music lesson on rhythm, using traditional Puerto Rican instruments. The students learned to use the instruments, their bodies, and their voices to make rhythmic beats. Four female youth participants attended the 2013 Girls Connect FIRST LEGO League Robotics Day at UMass in April. Twelve youth participants attended the 2013 4-H Summer of Science Camp at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst campus during the month of June. Youth participated in the Veterinary Science track, Solving Medical Mysteries track, and the Movie Making track. Five youth from the North End site were hired during the summer months by the New North Citizens’ Council to work as youth leaders for their summer program.

Collaborating Organizations

- (4-H) New North Citizens’ Council - After school community site
- (4-H) South End Community Center - After school community site