



Youth, Families, Community

PHOTO: ANDREA OMER

Youth development programs transform communities, build resilience

Outreach is the foundation of the Cooperative Extension System. Through many volunteering efforts, specialists and 4-H youths across the United States initiated programs to strengthen communities and provide resources during times of need.

Successful examples include:

- In **Louisiana**, two state 4-H specialists and one 4-H agent collaborated to create the first Louisiana 4-H MLK Day of Service and enabled children of all ages and all areas of the state to participate. The program used Facebook Premier to hold a virtual MLK Day ceremony led by Louisiana 4-H National Conference Delegates, LSU Collegiate 4-H members and alumni. Youths learned about the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and ways they could volunteer safely in their local community. More than 458 youths and adults (352 females and 134 males) participated, completing 2,076 volunteer hours and benefiting more than 14,296 individuals. Also, 33 partners participated in the program, which included 22 K-12 schools. An additional 4,000 people were reached by the virtual ceremony, which was viewed more than 1,400 times, including by more than 555 youths.
- In response to the damage caused by the 2020 hurricane season, three **Louisiana** state Extension specialists created a virtual educational program designed to teach youths throughout the state how to prepare their communities and families for a disaster. A total of 403 youths and adults participated in the program, completing 2,131 volunteer hours and assisting more than 661 individuals. Post-program evaluations showed that youths and adults learned how to become better prepared for a disaster, felt confident that they could teach someone else about disaster preparedness, know which items need to be included in a disaster kit and will use this new knowledge to teach others about disasters.
- The University of **Idaho** Extension's Well Connected Communities initiative (WCC) focuses on bringing community members together to direct activities that improve the overall health in three communities. Engagement included participating in or teaching at community health education programs, health

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coalitions with an adult, the National Youth Summit on Healthy Living and community health projects. Several teens participated in the WCC national or state harvest sessions, community meetings or the Community Wellness Volunteer program.

- University of **Florida** and University of **Georgia** Extension professionals have implemented the Volunteer Income Tax Assessment program to help low-income families prepare their tax returns without using an expensive fee-for-service program. This IRS-funded program works with volunteers to offer free tax help to people who make less than \$66,000 annually. In 2021, about \$622,000 was channeled back into local communities through tax refunds and preparation savings to those who participated in the program.
- Creating positive youth development and civic engagement, 4,330 volunteers in the **Alabama** 4-H Youth program model and mentor service to their communities. As a result of their volunteerism, 125,721 4-H youths are now four times more likely to make contributions to their communities and two times more likely to be civically active. Alabama 4-H volunteers provided an economic benefit worth \$2.6 million in 2019-2020.