



4-H

NEBRASKA

UNL FOR FAMILIES

CHILDREN DO WELL WHEN THEIR FAMILIES
DO WELL, AND FAMILIES DO BETTER WHEN
THEY LIVE IN SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

2005 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

REACHING OUT

When the staff of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL) Extension set out to strengthen families across their largely rural state, they faced special challenges in reaching the many Nebraska families isolated in rural homes. An innovative, accessible marketing campaign was especially important to reach low-income families.

As a first step, in 1999, staff initiated 48 “listening sessions” with parents and children to gather their perspectives, using a question-and-answer framework based on the work of Nebraska professor John DeFrain, Ph.D.

One early challenge emerged. The planning program, UNL for Families, would need to begin by promoting family strengthening as a desirable goal among the state’s 230,000 families. “Acceptance was key,” says 4-H Youth Development Specialist Kathleen Lodi. “The message had to be: ‘Working at having a strong family is OK.’”



UNL FOR FAMILIES HAS BROUGHT
RESOURCES TO THOUSANDS OF FAMILIES
AND RAISED THE STATUS OF FAMILY PROGRAMS
ACROSS OUR STATE.

Elizabeth Birnstihl, Associate Dean, University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Staff chose a kickoff activity with an attainable goal: Eat With Your Family Night. In doing so, they built on the brainchild of a youth group that had worked with schools, civic associations and churches to free up common family time. With UNL for Families' leadership, the Night grew statewide. With the governor's endorsement, UNL promoted the Night through a Nebraska Family Month, a mass mailing of calendar stickers, TV and radio spots and local newspaper coverage.

From family unity came community unity, in the form of Family Fun Nights. Employing activities from the 4-H curriculum, communities began focusing on the specific needs and interests of their families. Family Fun Nights happen as often as three times a week, supported by professionals from the program's referral network. Based on measurable outcomes, UNL for Families developed a toolkit of curricula, audio-visual materials and at-home exercises.

Last year, UNL for Families—through programs, materials and a Web page with 200,000 hits to date—reached more than one in three residents in more than one-third of Nebraska's 93 counties. The program also released a compendium of best practices, Family Treasures, at another first: an April 2006 satellite training for professionals serving families and children. "So many families have changed how they relate and communicate," reflects Lodl. "But one thing hasn't. We never forget we're a grassroots effort."

FAMILIES COUNT FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

Through a joint venture of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the National 4-H Council, the FAMILIES COUNT Family Strengthening Awards recognize outstanding 4-H programs that work to give children in rural communities what they need most—strong, capable and economically successful families. Responding to the varied needs of the families they serve, these organizations improve the economic prospects of working men and women and create the services and networks of support that all families need to realize their aspirations for themselves and their children.

4-H is a community of more than 7 million diverse young people across America learning leadership, citizenship and life skills. Through clubs, camps, school-based and after-school programs, 4-H makes a positive impact on the lives of urban, suburban and rural youth and their families. Youth learn and grow through participation in fun, hands-on learning experiences in areas including science, engineering, technology, healthy lifestyles and citizenship. “4-H connects families to programs and resources to help them succeed and grow stronger,” says National 4-H Council President and CEO Donald T. Floyd, Jr. “With the FAMILIES COUNT Family Strengthening Awards 4-H is able to reach rural families who often find themselves isolated from opportunities and supports to help secure their children's futures.”

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA—LINCOLN 4-H EXTENSION

Award-winning Program: UNL for Families

Elizabeth Birnstihl, Associate Dean

Kathleen Lodi, Extension Specialist, 4-H Youth Development

University of Nebraska—Lincoln Extension

114 Agriculture Hall

Post Office Box 830700

Lincoln, NE 68583-0700

402-472-9012

<http://unlforfamilies.unl.edu/>