

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."



4-H

NEW JERSEY

WARREN COUNTY

WARREN COUNTY, NEW JERSEY 4-H

Award-winning Program: Family Camp

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

2005 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

EXPLORING NEW HORIZONS

Since 1999, the Lindley G. Cook 4-H Camp in Sussex County, New Jersey has been doing double duty. In addition to hosting hundreds of 4-H campers and counselors each year, the camp welcomes entire families from the Phillipsburg Housing Authority.

These parents and children leave their public housing development, located on the Delaware River, to participate in Family Camp, a structured weekend of experiential learning and outdoor living in a rustic setting. The program's goal is for a small number of low-income families—five or six at a time—to share a weekend of activities building the communications skills that support successful families.

Alayne Torretta, the Warren County 4-H agent in charge of Family Camp, is enthusiastic about the program's approach. "The curriculum for Family Camp focuses on helping these families strengthen bonds, develop trust and communicate more effectively," says Torretta. "This growth happens both within families and among families."



A FAMILY FACING CHALLENGES IS LIKE A PUZZLE. YOU NEED TO ALLOW PARENTS AND CHILDREN TO FIND THE RIGHT COMBINATION TO MAKE THEIR PIECES FIT TOGETHER.

Ginny Powell, Chair, Department of 4-H Youth Development

RICH RESULTS

Family Camp's concept emerged in response to a 1997 federal grant seeking to build stakeholder coalitions that would serve low-income families in target communities. Working with a cross-section of agencies, including the state Department of Welfare and a local Head Start, the Rutgers Cooperative Research and Extension identified the Phillipsburg families as a community that would benefit.

Over the first few summers, the curriculum took shape, gaining effectiveness through exercises designed to hone family members' listening skills, self-esteem and respect for each other. "The exercises are wonderful," says Torretta. "You see kids understanding—sometimes for the first time—that their parents want them to succeed. Parents also listen to the child as someone who contributes to their family."

Surveys of families and counselors gather feedback from everyone during the camping experience and again three months afterwards. The results have exceeded expectations, with strengthened families bonding and supporting one another. "The community building was unexpected, especially its capacity to cross racial divides," comments Torretta.

Now available to other organizations at no cost, the Family Camp curriculum has reached nearly 1,000 additional families. Torretta sees more growth ahead—both for the program and for the families it reaches.

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.