



# 4-H

## COLORADO

DARE TO BE YOU BRIDGES

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

2006 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

## BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS

In economically disadvantaged communities in rural southwestern Colorado and the Navajo Nation, DARE to be You Bridges (DTBY) closes the gap between home and school so that parents can more effectively support their children's education. A 4-H program of the Colorado State University Cooperative Extension Service, DTBY brings these parents and children together with their teachers in an 11-week curriculum that raises awareness of the strong link between education experiences and future achievement. The program focuses on increasing parent engagement in schools and building their skills in creating positive home environments that support academic success.

Because research shows that early school experiences are the most influential, DTBY serves kindergartners through second graders, their families and teachers. "Every activity ensures a family works better together. We also invite in older siblings, because this is truly a family project," says Jan Miller-Heyl, DTBY's program director. "A stable home allows a child to flourish and succeed in school and beyond."



WHEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS BECOME  
A TEAM, CHILDREN ENTER SCHOOL  
SUCCESSFULLY AND GET THE MOST OUT OF  
THEIR EDUCATION EXPERIENCES.

—Jan Miller-Heyl, Youth Development Specialist, Colorado State University Cooperative Extension

## SOLVING PROBLEMS TOGETHER

Each week, parents, children and teachers learn new skills in DTBY's staff-facilitated sessions on better ways to communicate, solve problems and make decisions that support the entire family. All activities respond to needs identified by parents themselves or by staff. Shared meals give families and teachers a time to celebrate their accomplishments.

Parents who may have had anxieties about school witness the teacher's commitment to their child and learn to effectively communicate their expectations for the parent-teacher relationship. Teachers appreciate the parents' strengths and understand more clearly the challenges some families face, which may relate to parents not having completed their own education. They also find new inspiration in the parents' commitment to their child's progress in school. "Both parents and teachers feel more supported and more comfortable talking to one another," Miller-Heyl says. "This is such an important breakthrough for the children to see."

Through interviews at 6-, 12-, and 18-month follow up intervals, DTBY participants report dramatic improvements in children's behavior, decreased incidents of depression among parents and less stress for teachers.

"Making schools work takes an ongoing commitment on the part of parents, teachers and children," Miller-Heyl says. "We give them the opportunity to get in a room together, to get to know one another and to find the motivation to work towards a common goal: ensuring the best education possible for their children."

## 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.”

## 4-H COLORADO

Award-winning program: DARE to be You Bridges

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