

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

# IOWA

## THE STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PROGRAM

### 4-H Iowa

Award-winning Program: The Strengthening Families Program  
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CHILDREN DO WELL WHEN THEIR FAMILIES  
DO WELL, AND FAMILIES DO BETTER WHEN  
THEY LIVE IN SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

2006 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

## RELEASING PEER PRESSURE “VALVE”

In the pre-teen and early teenage years, peer pressures can lead young people to make poor decisions. The Strengthening Families Program for Parents and Youth 10-14 (SFP: 10-14), a 4-H program designed by the Iowa State University Extension Service, has engaged parents in helping their children expertly navigate this turbulent time to make good life choices. Since 1993, more than 2,000 families from 33 communities have participated in the program’s interactive learning experiences, spurring family communications and teaching new skills to both parents and children.

“The program helps children and their parents develop a better appreciation of each other, and it helps parents set appropriate limits and expectations for their children,” says Extension Specialist Marilyn Bode, who directs program implementation.



BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE BEGINS WHEN  
PARENTS AND CHILDREN CAN SIT DOWN  
TOGETHER AND TALK THROUGH ISSUES.  
MUTUAL RESPECT LEADS TO SHARED SUCCESS.

—Marilyn Bode, Extension Specialist, Iowa State University Extension; Program Director,  
The Strengthening Families Program for Parents and Youth 10-14

## FAMILY SUPPORT AT JUST THE RIGHT TIME

Videos created by SFP: 10-14 form the centerpiece of the program’s seven-week curriculum. Scripted to depict challenging situations that lead to potentially damaging behaviors—including drugs and alcohol use, truancy, shoplifting and neighborhood violence—the videos also portray typical interactions in diverse families. Each week, parents and children first view a video in peer groups and then move into a whole-family session facilitated by staff. Here, parents and children tackle problems collaboratively by role-playing scenarios and brainstorming strategies and solutions.

In addition to learning about positive alternatives to risky choices, parents and young people report gaining a positive sense of family. “The parents and kids always say: ‘The best thing was working together,’” Bode says. “Parents suddenly find they can bring up topics that might have been tough to talk about. The kids love their parents interacting with them. Often, it’s the kind of hands-on support they haven’t had, or haven’t appreciated, before.”

Families that participate in SFP: 10-14 are then filmed interacting for several years following their participation. Outcomes, measured through the National Survey of Drug Use and Health, have consistently demonstrated that fewer program participants experiment with drugs and alcohol than their classmates. A “train the trainers” model has now graduated some 1,500 new facilitators in 40 states, who are able to expand the reach of this innovative approach.

Bode is pleased that many more families can benefit: “What’s more important than parents and children finding the tools and support they need—just when they need it most?”

## 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.