

Through local clubs, camps and after-school programs, 4-H strengthens family relationships and community networks for more than 6.5 million young people across the nation. 4-H supports youth and their families through research-based programs at 106 state universities and 3,100 extension offices. In 4-H programs, youth in rural, suburban and urban communities experience hands-on learning in healthy living; leadership; citizenship; and science, engineering and technology while gaining valuable life skills. "For more than a century, 4-H has worked to empower the nation's youth with a sense of independence, confidence and community service," says National 4-H Council President and CEO Donald T. Floyd, Jr. "By involving parents and families, we are ensuring that youth are supported as they reach their fullest potential."



4-H

NEW JERSEY

MIDDLESEX COUNTY 4-H PROJECT GIFT

4-H NEW JERSEY

Award-Winning Program: Middlesex County 4-H Project GIFT

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

2008 FAMILY STRENGTHENING AWARDS

PRESENTS AND HOLIDAY CHEER

Families make the most important part of the holiday season. But for families who cannot afford presents for their children, New Jersey 4-H helps create a memorable holiday experience despite difficult circumstances. In two low-income communities of Middlesex County, N.J., the median family income is nearly half that of the state, and 80 percent of children receive free or reduced-price lunches. For these parents who lack the resources to hit the malls during the winter holidays, there is an alternative place to find gifts for their children. Through Project GIFT, low-income parents can shop for free in a “store” brimming with new toys from baby dolls and footballs to board games and miniature cars. In December 2007, more than 120 families selected gifts and stocking stuffers for nearly 300 children in a three-hour shopping event organized by 4-H youth.

“Project GIFT brings the whole community together to help disadvantaged parents provide a memorable holiday for their children,” says Laura Bovitz, county 4-H agent for the Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Middlesex County.



PROJECT GIFT IS TRULY A COLLABORATION OF 4-H YOUTH, THEIR PARENTS, BUSINESS LEADERS AND AGENCIES WORKING TOGETHER TO SUPPORT STRUGGLING FAMILIES IN A TANGIBLE AND MEANINGFUL WAY. THIS KIND OF PARTNERSHIP NOT ONLY STRENGTHENS FAMILIES, BUT ALSO STRENGTHENS THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY.

—Laura Bovitz, county 4-H agent, Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Middlesex County

A COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN

Project GIFT creates a unique connection between 4-H youth and families involved with the County Cooperative Extension. Most participating families are part of the county extension office’s Expanded Food and Nutrition Education program, which teaches healthy eating to low-income families, many of whom receive food stamps or other forms of public assistance. Project GIFT was developed when 4-H teens learned of the struggles these parents face especially during the holidays.

“These parents have already faced so many challenges,” Bovitz said. “Our 4-H youth want to bring our families and community together to support them in this special time of the year.”

A culmination of months-long efforts, the Project GIFT shopping event showcases the successful collaboration of multiple partners, including 4-H parents, local businesses and social service agencies. Dozens of 4-H parents join the 50 youth organizers to help set up and run the shopping areas. Funds and toys are donated from more than 30 companies and local clubs, including Target, Toys-R-Us, local grocery stores and Kiwanis clubs. A local bus company also provides free rides for parents who lack transportation to and from the event. To further support parents, 4-H teens provide refreshments and free child care.

“We want parents to shop comfortably, just as they would in a store,” Bovitz says. “With help from our partners, we are able to eliminate barriers to participation and offer a fun holiday shopping experience.”

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.