



## Targeting One Million Hard to Reach Youth and Families with Health Programming

FINDINGS FROM EVIDENCE-INFORMED BEST PRACTICES AMONG WALMART FOUNDATION-FUNDED 4-H HEALTHY HABITS PROGRAMS STUDY CONDUCTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Every year, 4-H through the Cooperative Extension System engages six million youth with relevant educational programs and experiences intended to help kids grow and thrive. Health is not only one of our four H's, but it is also a key programmatic pillar for our organization. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Healthy People 2020, "bolstering the positive development of young people facilitates their adoption of healthy behaviors and helps ensure a healthy and productive adult population", with the Positive Youth Development model like 4-H's as a primary driver of that success.<sup>1</sup>

Health in youth is proven to lead to better long-term outcomes in the future and further amplifies the power of youth as change-makers. Their ability to spread what they have learned to their peers and their communities drives wide-scale impact. Youth can change themselves, serve as mentors and role models for others and drive community outcomes toward better health for all.

4-H is committed to growing to 10 million strong by 2025. To do so, we must actively and intentionally identify and scale programs and practices to reach more diverse youth and build greater equity within our system. In a rapidly changing social and demographic landscape, 4-H has a responsibility to continually improve its programs to involve even more young people with a life-changing 4-H experience. Already serving 2.1 million minority youth, as a system, we are implementing strategies to serve even more underserved youth.

Since 2012 through a partnership with the Walmart Foundation, we will reach one million youth and their families with nutrition education programs (25 percent of the Foundation's total educational goal) and an intentional focus on reaching those who face challenges in achieving positive health outcomes—SNAP-ED families, African-American communities, especially in the southern states, Latino communities and Native and Tribal communities. Each year, we have dedicated our program to focus on an additional one of these audiences so along the way, we would not only increase

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/Adolescent-Health#\\_edn7](https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/Adolescent-Health#_edn7)

reach, but also build best practices to inform future successful program delivery. Just as we will apply these to our ongoing and future food security and health equity work in extremely rural communities and others, we hope others can do the same.

Today, as we **affirm our commitment to equity** through ongoing investments and innovations in capacity building and thoughtfully scaling health equity work, the Evidence-Informed Best Practices among Walmart Foundation-funded 4-H Healthy Habits Programs (University of Arizona) provides insights to inform best practices that we hope will benefit those within and outside our system.

Completed in 2018, the study synthesizes multiple data points and thoughtful feedback from educators, volunteers and youth to help us and our Positive Youth Development peers **most effectively reach youth of color, rural youth and hard to reach populations**. Our best practices to increase diverse audiences align in the areas of Teen Leadership, Learning Activities and Community Partnerships.

### Teen Leadership

- Know that diverse teens can be an important bridge to reaching youth of color and hard to reach populations by recruiting from their neighborhoods.
- Leverage nearby resources like upper and lower schools on adjacent campuses or camps, for example, to facilitate using teen leaders to deliver programming and reach different youth.
- Diverse teen teachers leading the program and engage homeschoolers to lead programming during the day when school is in session.
- Don't forget about teens in family and community outreach—teen leaders in 4-H Healthy Habits bring information about cooking and healthy living to others and make efforts to engage their families in healthier practices.
- Rewarding teens with national and capstone event participation allows them to see the big picture of 4-H Healthy Living programs and further develops their leadership skills.
- Eliminating or waiving participation fees for teen leaders who may also come from families experiencing extreme financial hardship.
- Remember transportation can be a limitation for youth, particularly in rural areas, so consider providing transit fare for teens who do not have vehicle access or budgeting for transport of larger groups to avoid transportation challenges (e.g., fuel money if 4-H has access to vehicles, or rental of vans).

### Learning Activities

- Host family-centered events where youth and their families learn about and participate in physical activity and healthy eating together; these events can add to cultural relativity.
- Use evidence-based curriculum that involves a high level of interactivity, like food demonstrations and cooking competitions, to engage youth the most.
- Remember to make room for fun by integrating a broad range of activities—leadership, learning AND fun—for kids and teens to keep them interested.
- Be innovative in approaches to engaging families and the larger community through hosting or appearing at community-based events where a broader audience is accessible, or during times when parents typically pickup children at school.

- Lead hands-on activities like gardening or games in areas where language barriers might make seat-learning more difficult.
- Adapt recipes to focus on ingredients and recipes that are in keeping with the culture and accessibility of local populations to ensure activities are relevant to youths' everyday lives.

### Community Partnerships

- Increase reach among youth of color by collaborating with partners in K-12 schools, other 4-H programs, afterschool programs, summer camps, other Extension programs and participants' families.
- Identify and nurture relationships with specific, enthusiastic champions within partner organizations.
- Strategically partner with organizations who specifically serve typically hard-to-reach audiences (i.e., refugees, migrant farmworker families).
- Seek ways to leverage systems-level or proximity-based conveniences to minimize burdens around scheduling and transportation, which can be particularly advantageous in rural areas, given the heightened transportation challenges.

Diverse challenges require diverse solutions, and these interventions are a first step in achieving greater health equity. 4-H remains committed to applying its strengths in youth leadership, research-backed educational resources and grassroots engagement to continue address pressing health and nutrition challenges in even the hardest to reach communities and pave the way for a healthier tomorrow.

*Funding provided by:*

