The Positive Development of Youth: Comprehensive Findings from the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development

Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development

Tufts University

The first-of-its-kind research defined and measured positive youth development. The result is a model that is driving new thinking and approaches to youth development around the world.

For more than a decade, preeminent youth development scholars, Drs. Richard M. Lerner and Jacqueline V. Lerner, and the team at the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development at Tufts University, Medford, MA, partnered with faculty at America's land-grant universities to conduct this groundbreaking research.

The final report, *The Positive Development of Youth: Comprehensive Findings from the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development*, reviews the multi-year research findings.

RESEARCH SHOWS 4-H YOUTH EXCEL BEYOND THEIR PEERS

The longitudinal study discovered that the structured out-of-school time learning, leadership experiences, and adult mentoring that young people receive through their participation in 4-H plays a vital role in helping them achieve success.

Compared to their peers, the findings show that youth involved in 4-H programs excel in several areas:

Contribution/Civic Engagement

- 4-H'ers are nearly 4 times more likely to make contributions to their communities (Grades 7-12)
- 4-H'ers are about 2 times more likely to be civically active (Grades 8-12)

Academic Achievement

- 4-H young people are nearly 2 times more likely to participate in Science, Engineering and Computer Technology programs during out-of-school time (Grades 10 – 12)
- 4-H girls are 2 times more likely (Grade 10) and nearly 3 times more likely (Grade 12) to take part in science programs compared to girls in other out-of-school time activities. (Data found in Science, Engineering and Computer Technology (SECT) section of report)

Healthy Living

- 4-H'ers are nearly 2 times more likely to make healthier choices (Grade 7)

4-H'ers Excel

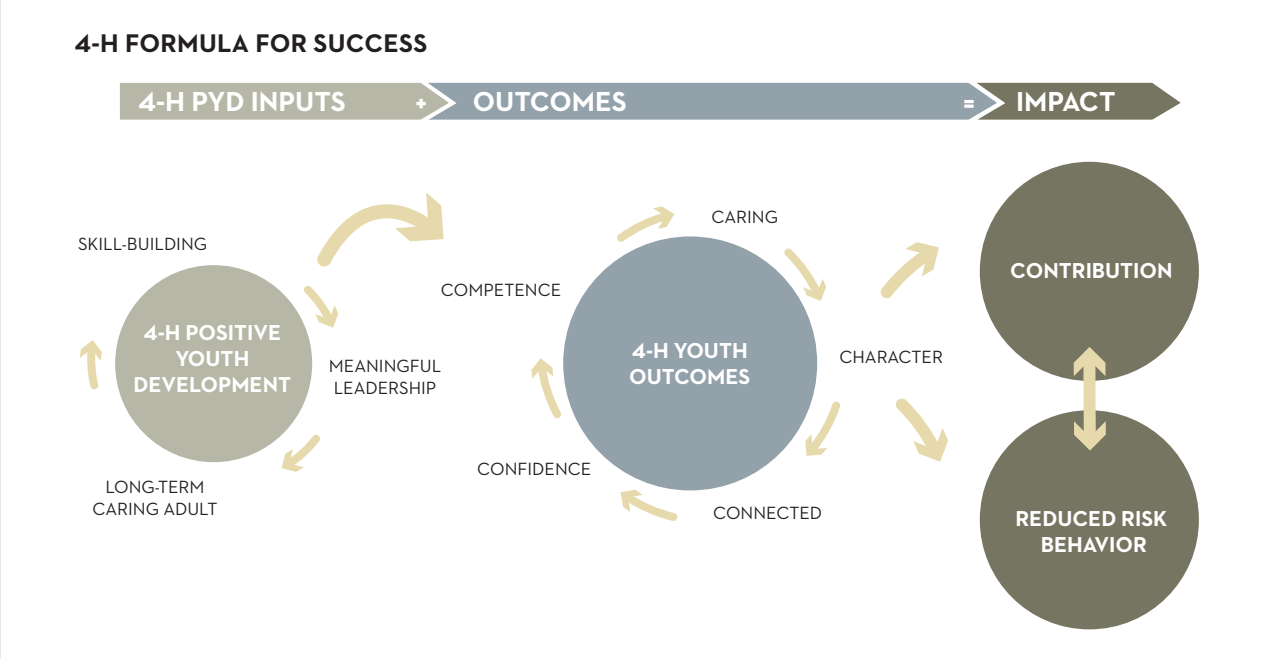
- **Nearly *4x more* likely to make contributions to their communities**
- **About *2x more* likely to be civically active**
- **Nearly *2x more* likely to participate in science programs during out-of-school time**
- ***2x more* likely (Grade 10) and nearly *3x more* likely (Grade 12) to take part in science programs compared to girls in other out-of-school time activities**
- **Nearly *2x more* likely to make healthier choices**

THE POWER OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

The research is helping families, schools, communities and youth programs develop strategies to support children and adolescents. Effective youth development programs like 4-H are putting the research to work by focusing on three important areas:

- Positive and sustained relationships between youth and adults
- Activities that build important life skills
- Opportunities for youth to use these skills as participants and leaders in valued community activities

The study assessed the key characteristics of PYD – competence, confidence, character, connection and caring – followed by the impact of valued community programs, including 4-H.



BACKGROUND

The *4-H Study of Positive Youth Development* is a longitudinal study that began in 2002 and was repeated annually for eight years, surveying more than 7,000 adolescents from diverse backgrounds across 42 U.S. states.

The first wave of research began with fifth graders during the 2002-2003 school year and ended with twelfth graders (Wave eight) in 2010. More recently, the Tufts research team examined all eight waves of data and conducted new and more rigorous analyses in order to produce the latest comprehensive report of findings. The new report, while sometimes diverging from earlier results, provides powerful evidence of the impact of 4-H participation throughout Grades 5-12.

"The potential for change is a core strength of all youth – a strength that can be built upon. This strength is cause for optimism for it means we can positively influence the life paths of all children." Lerner et al., 2013

About 4-H

4-H is a community of seven million young people around the world learning leadership, citizenship, and life skills. National 4-H Council is the private sector, non-profit partner of the Cooperative Extension System and 4-H National Headquarters located at the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). In the United States, 4-H programs are implemented by the 109 land-grant universities and Cooperative Extension through more than 3,000 local offices serving every county and parish in the country. Outside the United States, 4-H programs operate through independent, country-led organizations in more than 50 countries.

Learn more about 4-H at www.4-H.org, find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/4-H and Twitter at https://twitter.com/4H.

National 4-H Council
7100 Connecticut Ave
Chevy Chase, MD 20815
Telephone 301-961-2800

December 2013