

Summary Statement of Work

The National 4-H Council grant allowed us to invest in technology to provide education to our seniors through our 4-H “Tech Wizards” program. The focus of our program is to provide understandable training in using personal technology, both at home and in the workplace; and methods for staying connected with family and friends. Specially trained high school youth will teach training classes in senior centers, retirement homes and community centers. In just over a year, Douglas and Gwinnett 4-H Programs have trained 34 youth as “Tech Wizards” and served over 150 seniors in the community, with that number continuing to climb in the second year of the program. Staff and the youth volunteers have created new partnerships with senior centers in the community, senior retirement homes, and advanced community knowledge of the Extension and the program by setting up booths at local events. At least half the seniors reached would be classified as “at-risk”: facing isolation, low-income, food insecurity, and employment challenges. The Tech Wizard program has helped senior reconnect with family and friends, helped them save money as well as helped a few seniors apply for jobs.

Situation

It’s a different world today. Between health concerns, the Great Recession and seemingly daily advances in technology, this is not the world people over age 50 thought they’d be in at this point in their lives. Many are struggling to keep their jobs, hang on to their homes and maintain control. At the same time, we have a younger generation increasingly looking for new ways to volunteer and serve their communities. When AARP Foundation looked across the country in 2012, it found inspiring examples of young people giving back to older generations. They’re giving back as part of digital and technology literacy programs like 4-H Tech Wizards. When young people understand what older Americans are up against they are willing to help – they just don’t always know where to turn. That was the main finding from our formative research in 2012 among young people, and the spark for Mentor Up. With a range of intergenerational service programs already operating in communities across the nation, Mentor Up highlights and grows these examples, and helps young people fulfill their community service requirement in a meaningful way, particularly those in high school and college.

A recent study conducted by the University of California, San Francisco showed results on the effects of loneliness in seniors. Researchers found that within a 6-year period, 22.8 percent of seniors (average age: 71) who reported loneliness or feelings of isolation had passed away, and 24.8% experienced significant functional declines. In comparison with the numbers of those who were “socially satisfied,” the numbers are striking: only 14.2% of seniors passed away in the 6-year period, and 12.5% experienced a decline in function.

Social and family connections are extremely important in preventing these adverse outcomes. It’s vital that seniors in assisted living maintain these connections too; just because they are living in a community setting does not mean that loneliness is not a possibility. Visitors of all ages — children, young adults, peers, and even furry ones (a family pet, perhaps) — are of great encouragement and

support to seniors receiving home care services or living in a residential care setting like assisted living. Family members and friends should call often and keep in touch consistently to ensure that loved ones are not suffering from loneliness or depression.

Response

Senior citizens in Douglas and Gwinnett County are facing complications in terms of Financial Instability, Seclusion and Lack of Technological Education. Students in Douglas and Gwinnett County are eager to mentor older adults, however there is a breakdown in communication between the generations. The Mentor Up Tech Wizards Program was created to help youth develop a bond with senior citizens all while serving as reverse mentors. Mentor Up is a new take on community service. It's young people helping older adults stay connected and adjust to the many challenges they face in today's changing world. There are all kinds of ways you can help, and it doesn't have to take very long at all. Mentor Up was created to make it easier for young people to use what they know to help older people with what they need. The skills the younger generation has – in particular technology skills – are skills the older generation wants to learn to avoid being left behind.

Douglas and Gwinnett County 4-H partnered with various national and community groups to host a series of classes to senior citizens. These classes were based around using modern day technology to enhance the lives of the seniors who attended. Classes included tablet basics, internet security, video conferencing, online couponing, online banking, social media training and online bill payment options. The program consisted of a total of 65 classes since its start in 2013 and reached a total of 545 seniors and 50 youth. As the facilitator the 4-H Agent worked to develop lessons, recruit volunteers, secure partnerships, scout locations and develop evaluation methods.

Methods Used to accomplish Program Goals and Objectives

Tech Wizards used a wide variety of methods to successfully accomplish the program goals and objectives including

1. To improve participants public behavior in etiquette knowledge. Evaluation is a post-pre test.
2. To teach appropriate dress for the appropriate environment; good grooming and hygiene habits. Evaluation will be participant's observations by the instructor.
3. To attend class dressed for the assigned environment.
4. To instill good communication skills. The evaluation will involve working with a senior on a series of technology based issues while being observed.
5. The objective of the Mentor Up Program is to broaden a student's base knowledge of a variety of activities and what each has to offer. A post- pre test evaluation will be conducted.
6. The objective is to enlighten participant's career opportunities. Evaluative measures will be conducted on tours; post-pre test as stated in #5.

7. The objective will be to foster a sense of pride in youth participants as they work to show senior participants how to operate various programs.
8. The objective will be to increase the knowledge base of the senior participants on various aspects of technology.

Program Uniqueness

The partnership developed between the youth in Douglas and Gwinnett counties provided one of the most unique learning activities. By combining youth with very diverse backgrounds and charging them with a similar goal, the applicants saw an increase in overall participation and friendships quickly developing cross county. Applicants also saw a common trend between the seniors who were receiving instruction and were able to quickly restructure programming based off of the advice from the other counties. This is the only program of this kind within Georgia 4-H and Georgia is one of five states nationwide that are completing the program and the only state that has developed the program from scratch into a youth-lead activity.

Methods used to promote retention of diverse audiences

By creating a graduation guide for senior participants, the program is able to retain individuals as they strive to receive the certificate and tech wizards graduation gift. A member is considered ready to graduate after they have received 10 instructional hours with the program. Another way the program has been able to retain seniors is by offering classes as part of a series with a Beginner and Advanced class.

Youth are encouraged to remain active with the possibility of a rewards trip for those who complete the required 10 hours of instruction. To also encourage return participation youth who serve a set number of hours are rewarded with an official mentor nametag and polo.

Impact

Through this program, Douglas and Gwinnett County 4-H secured \$28,000 in grant money as well as strengthened networks and increased collaborations. The program has also increased communication among 4-H agents state wide with classes being taught at Professional Organizations and curricula being shared cross county. The program has assisted with increased in-kind support from community members who are eager to further the program and build connections with the youth instructors.

The Mentor Up program has grown so rapidly that the county received a second year of grant funding totaling an additional \$14,000. The program has also built a very strong relationship in between the 4-H club and the Douglas and Gwinnett County Senior Centers. These partnerships have developed into many small project clubs ranging from crafts to reading groups. The members of the community are becoming more active in the Senior Center classes and are assisting with creating curriculum for the next series in Douglas County.

Seniors Citizens who utilize the program have responded overwhelmingly positive, they enjoy having someone to share stories with and learning techniques for shopping on a budget. Through a group evaluation, 100% of attendees enjoyed the mentor up experience with their 4-H Tech Wizards from all classes. 84% gained a new level of confidence in using new technology. 90% showed a likeliness to try new technologies after participating in class. 97% of seniors felt more connected to the outside world than before they started the classes. 80% felt like they were able to use technology to save money and 100% have created and maintain a social media account and use it to connect with loved ones. One senior, during a class on “Facetime” burst into tears at the fact that she could communicate with her grandchildren in another state. “This is the best invention ever, it’s like they are right here” she exclaimed. One senior in regard to a class on resume building, came back to the Extension Office to thank his mentor for helping him develop a resume. At the age of 74 he was able to successfully apply and get a job with a local company.