

Abstract

Pulaski County 4-H has a foundational program that focuses on literacy and healthy living that is directed toward a much younger audience than the typical 4-H age youth (9-19 years old). These programs are focused on youth Pre-K age (4 & 5 year olds). It is a marketing tool to reach the younger audiences and teach them about 4-H at a very early age and a positive youth development program that helps build a foundation of healthy decision making choices. Through fun, kid friendly 4-H healthy living programming, routine healthy snacks, and exercise, healthy decision making skills are instilled alongside fun reinforcement activities. Students learn to make healthy habits for a lifetime, and they pass that educational information on to family members and friends exponentially educating our community and helping the effort toward combating the overweight & obese epidemic in Georgia.

Description

Pulaski 4-H has a foundational program, Focusing on F.U.N. (Food and Understanding Nutrition) that focuses on literacy and healthy living that is directed toward a much younger audience than the typical 4-H age youth (9-19 years old). The 4-H Cloverbud age programs are focused on youth Pre-K age (4 & 5 year olds). It is a marketing tool to reach the younger audiences and teach them about 4-H at a very early age and to help build a foundation of healthy decision making choices. By instilling routine healthy snacks and exercise with the love of reading, students will learn to make healthy habits and pass that educational information on to family members and friends exponentially helping to educate our community. The program content consists of 4 main parts: 1) literacy promotion, 2) understanding food and nutrition via MyPlate, 3) kid-friendly exercise, and 4) reinforcement activities. Reinforcement activities include: 4-H reading a book about a food or healthy topic, a MyPlate food group game is played to reinforce the topic learned, a coloring sheet is given to complete later and take home or a simple craft is done, a sample healthy snack may be given if appropriate for the book and/or lesson, and an exercise is done to help solidify the concept of eating healthy and exercise as a total healthy package. All items given out contain the UGA logo & 4-H emblem, and youth learn to recognize 4-H and the services and positive youth development we offer to the community at a very early age.

Starting with the Basics to Build a Healthy Future: Pre-K 4-H Programming



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Targeted Outcomes

Georgia youth are currently facing an epidemic of huge proportions of being overweight and obese. To be obese a youth's body mass index, BMI, must be in the 95th percentile or higher. There are more than 12.5 million children and teenagers that are obese in the United States. In the state of Georgia, obesity in children and youth was a significant public health problem. The youth in Georgia, ages 2-18, exceeded the Healthy People Goal of 5% for obesity by a significant amount of 10% or more in all age groups. The prevalence of obesity was 18.5% in youth in the U.S. in 2015-2016 according to the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS Data Brief, No. 28.) Not only is the extra weight a medical problem for obese children, they have increased risk for other medical conditions such as: hypertension, sleep apnea, diabetes, low self-esteem, and asthma. Overweight adolescents have a 70% chance of becoming overweight or obese adults. Pulaski 4-H wanted to help teach healthy living programming earlier than the normal 9-19 age, so that a firm foundation could be started earlier for future healthy decision making skills. Focusing on Pre-K youth would help start the conversation of healthy living earlier and create a foundation for healthy living decision making skills that would follow the youth throughout their school career and beyond.

Hales, C., Carroll, M., Fryar, C., & Ogden, C. (2017, October). Prevalence of Obesity Among Adults and Youth: United States, 2015-2016 (Issue Brief No. 28). Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db288.pdf>

Evaluation



During a Quality Rated Child Care Evaluation for Pulaski Pre-K, the school had a lack of nutrition education and experiential learning opportunities. Pulaski 4-H was asked to help teach monthly club meetings to increase nutrition education knowledge in four Pre-K classes based on the agent's programming and expertise in healthy living. All 4-H programs met the GELDS (Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards) that support the growth of the whole child. Since its introduction, over 800 Pre-K youth (88 youth, 8 teachers, and expansion of family education via take home lessons/activities and afterschool programming yearly) have been a part of the healthy living program with 95% correctly identifying each food group and being able to place varying foods in their respective food group and identifying them as healthy choices or not during the lessons and matching games. This program is such a success that 4-H is invited back year after year and often collaborate with specialty day camps or summer activities for that age group and as resource lessons for parents too. The Focusing on F.U.N. program also opened the doors to programming with Head Start, a Federal program that promotes the school readiness of children from birth to age five from low-income families by enhancing their cognitive, social, and emotional development. This added an extra 30-60 youth (depending on the yearly enrollment) learning about food, nutrition, and exercise each month. Youth remember 4-H and the lessons for years after often commenting on them when we see them again in the community and/or at the schools. One teacher stated, "4-H helps us meet a need where we were lacking. They bring experiential learning to the kids that we do not have time to do in the classroom. The kids love the lessons and are excited each month to find out what the lesson will be about!"

Program Replication

This program is easy to replicate. Most school systems are mandated to provide nutrition education to the youth. If a Pre-K program isn't available, Kindergarten would be a great place to start too with early foundational Healthy Living decision making skills. 4-H program staff and youth can provide lessons supplied by USDA's MyPlate or from other sources to teach about the food groups and exercise, read books that relate to the topic of the month (food group or exercise), provide reinforcement activities, and a take home portion to continue education with family and friends to create a well rounded educational program. Only time, effort, printing, and inexpensive supplies are needed to replicate the program. Lessons used are available upon request. Most mandated nutrition programs also have an allotted amount of money that can be utilized to help offset cost of printing and buying any needed supplies.

