

June 2008

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MICHIGAN 4-H LEARN & SERVE TEEN MENTORS PROGRAM

## Build a “corps of support” for teen mentoring programs

*Julie A. Chapin, 4-H Program Leader*

Some of the key elements for a quality youth mentoring program are recruiting, screening, training and supporting mentors. In an endeavor like the Michigan 4-H Learn and Serve Teen Mentors program, the primary focus of these efforts is on teens who are interested in becoming mentors to younger youth.

Just as in a planned mentoring program that matches adults with youth, training and support for teen mentors is critical. However, teen mentoring programs bring with them another challenge. Supporting young people who are mentors so they can be the most effective mentors possible while

also building their own life and leadership skills is just as important as supporting the matches after they are made.

This additional facet of quality teen mentoring programs can create even more challenges for programs that are struggling to find time to perform the basic mentoring program management steps. These challenges also create an excellent opportunity to explore new ways to recruit adult members of your community to become involved with 4-H.

According to “Mentoring in America: A Snapshot of the Current State of Mentoring” only 29 percent of adults are involved in formal mentoring

programs. Most individuals are more interested and comfortable serving as “informal” or “natural” mentors for youth. Others are committed to helping youth be successful but don’t have the time to make the commitment needed to mentor a youth on a regular basis.

As you look for ways to improve and expand your teen mentoring program, consider expanding the adult volunteer corps involved in the program by using middle management volunteers.

Consider expanding the adult volunteer corps involved in your teen peer mentoring program by using middle management volunteers.

This allows you to improve the quality of the mentoring experience for both the teen mentors and the young people they’re matched with, and to more effectively manage the day-to-day tasks that are required in quality planned mentoring programs.

When considering a potential middle manager role for adult volunteers, it’s important that you have a clear understanding of the tasks you need help with. Just as with any other volunteer position, the first step to filling a volunteer slot is to develop a position description for it. Depending on the size of your program, you may want to



This group of Macomb County mentoring program teens might well agree that paid staff can’t do it all! Recruiting middle management volunteers to handle some administrative tasks strengthens your program’s ties to the community and gives you more time to focus on improving the teen mentors’ and their mentees’ experience of the program. *(Photo courtesy of the Macomb County 4-H teen peer mentoring program)*

*Continued on page 4*

## Sportin' Character program uses sports to build life skills

By Donald S. Matlock

Student Intern, State 4-H Office

Whether they're kicking a ball around, playing a speed cup stacking game or attending a Detroit Red Wings practice in Traverse City, the young people in the Antrim County "Sportin' Character" teen peer mentoring program are building relationships and learning leadership and other life skills.

Sportin' Character is a collaboration of the Michigan 4-H Learn and Serve Teen Mentors Program through Michigan State University Extension and the Central Lake School District in Antrim County. It serves high school and middle school students (mostly males) from the Central Lake schools.

Dee Miller, Extension educator for 4-H Youth Development in Antrim County, coordinates the Sportin' Character program. She says the teens' weekly activities have helped build their self-esteem and relationships with each other. One of their favorites is a speed cup stacking game that promotes concentration, hand-eye coordination and friendly competition. The game's objective is to stack and unstack cups in specific patterns as quickly as possible.

### What's up with the stacking cups?

Curious about speed cup stacking? Visit the World Sport Stacking Association on the web at <http://www.worldsportstackingassociation.org/> or watch a video of stackers in action at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGRCQAiZiYo&NR=1>.

"I can't get them away from it, they love it!" Miller says of the cup stacking game. "I even went out and bought the mats and timers for them to do it. The cups we have are fluorescent and glow in the dark, so the latest challenge is learning to speed stack in the dark."

The participants also enjoy playing games such as Twister, football and baseball. Each meeting starts with a discussion about character. They often discuss books that promote character development in sports.

The interaction between mentees and mentors can be life changing, according to one young man in the program. "You don't realize how much of an impact you have on your mentee's life," says Brian, an 11th-grader who is a mentor with Sportin' Character. "I've learned so much and I've grown really attached to my mentee."

"You don't realize how much of an impact you have on your mentee's life," says Brian, a Sportin' Character mentor.

"I think what I like most about the program," Brian continues, "is that we teach real-life lessons and not just sports character."

Miller says the program requires the mentees and mentors to participate in some form of community service learning. Last year, they ran a sports camp for elementary school aged kids in a local park. They set up skill stations where kids learned how to play sports such as football, soccer and baseball. "It was simple and fun," explains Brian, "plus, we got to play with them."



Kids wait their turn to make like an NFL quarterback at a football skill station during a summer 2007 sports camp organized by Sportin' Character participants. (Photo courtesy of Antrim County Sportin' Character program)

The parents of the camp's participants were excited and supportive of the program, saying they hoped the group planned to run another camp in 2008.

The community service learning component is important because both the mentors and mentees learn to have a voice and see the necessity of giving back to their community, according to Miller. "They take full responsibility for the sports camp by going before village officials to request permission to use the park facilities. They do all of the publicity, find the equipment they need and plan the camp."

The Sportin' Character program has caught the attention of local officials. Antrim County Probate and Family Division Judge Norman R. Hayes says of it, "Sportin' Character is an excellent peer-to-peer mentoring program for Antrim County youth and we support this 4-H effort."

For more information about the Sportin' Character program, contact Dee Miller by phone at 231-533-8818 or by e-mail at [mille454@msu.edu](mailto:mille454@msu.edu).

## Tips for teen peer mentoring programs

By Christopher Stickney, Associate 4-H Program Leader for Peer Mentoring

Summer can be challenging for mentoring programs, with everything from conflicts with family vacations to participants who lose motivation in shifting from school-year to summer vacation mode.

Still, the expectation of the Michigan 4-H Learn and Serve Teen Mentors Program is that mentors will participate in a 12-month program, spending 11 months in a mentoring relationship. Several measures you can take to meet this ambitious goal under summer's challenging circumstances follow.

- **Plan ahead.** This is perhaps the most important thing you can do to prepare for the summer. Plan how to address the summer challenges you anticipate before they occur.

- **Consider adapting your schedule.** Meeting on a consistent and regular basis is the key to developing strong mentoring relationships. However, meeting once a week over the summer is not an option for some participants. Longer sessions held two or three times a month may be more practical.

- **Give paper, pens and stamped envelopes** addressed to the program coordinator to mentors and mentees who will be out of town for extended periods. They can use these supplies to write each other letters. Having the mentors and mentees send their letters to the program coordinator for forwarding eliminates any concern about providing home addresses to participants.

- **Plan a variety of activities.**

Picnics, field trips, hikes, fishing trips and visits with other counties' teen peer mentoring programs generally aren't options during hour-long school year meetings, but could work well over the summer.

- **Take on a service learning project.** Because school isn't in session, you'll likely have more flexibility to schedule projects you couldn't have tackled during the school year.

- **Partner with other organizations in planning summer activities such as camps, clubs and sports leagues.** Not only can mentoring pairs participate in these activities together, they may also be able to help out with these programs.

- **Conduct program planning.** Summer is an ideal time to sit down with participants and plan for the coming year. This gives them a chance to contribute to the program's success and can significantly shorten start-up times in the fall.

- **Relaunch your program.** Consider revising your program's timeline to start in the summer. Recruiting participants at the end of the school year might seem counter-intuitive, but orienting and training new mentors over the summer can result in a cadre of mentors who are ready to go in the fall.

By keeping mentees and mentors active and involved in the dog days of summer, you can help them have a rewarding and enriching summer experience.

You can post other ideas for keeping your program going strong over the summer in the "Summer Programming Ideas" forum on the Michigan 4-H Learn and Serve Teen Mentors program's ANGEL workgroup.



### Hop off the bus and into summer!

Young people's schedules and motivation levels change when summer arrives and school lets out. Planning ahead for those changes can keep your mentoring program running smoothly. (Photo courtesy of Mackinac County 4-H teen peer mentoring program)

## Middle manager volunteers can help expand mentoring programs

Continued from page 1

recruit more than one adult to serve in this role. Potential roles for middle manager volunteers include:

- Overseeing the administrative responsibilities related to match support, including reviewing mentor reports, communicating with teen mentors about upcoming activities and more.
- Recruiting potential new teen mentors and mentees to help expand the program.
- Helping with monitoring matches during site-based activities.
- Serving as a coach or advisor to the teen mentors.
- Leading match activities on a weekly or monthly basis.
- Leading and supporting reflection activities with the teen mentors.
- Giving leadership to the planning and coordinating of mentor training.
- Serving as program promotion and public relations coordinator.

These are just a few of the roles that adult volunteers might play in your Michigan 4-H Learn and Serve Teen Mentors program. For more ideas on how to recruit volunteers to serve in middle manager roles in this program or in other parts of your 4-H program, review the *4-H TAXI* curriculum in your county MSU Extension office.

MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY  
EXTENSION



4-H Youth Development  
Children, Youth, Families and Communities  
Michigan State University Extension  
160 Agriculture Hall  
East Lansing MI 48824-1039

MSU is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer. Michigan State University Extension programs and materials are open to all without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, religion, age, height, weight, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, marital status, family status or veteran status. Issued in furtherance of MSU Extension work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Thomas G. Coon, Director, MSU Extension, East Lansing, MI 48824. This information is for educational purposes only. Reference to commercial products or trade names does not imply endorsement by MSU Extension or bias against those not mentioned. The name "4-H" and the emblem consisting of a four-leaf clover with stem and the "H" on each leaflet are protected under Title 18 U.S.C. 707. 1P-275-06:08-MI 4-H-RM