



Kids' Community

Kentucky 4-H Theater Puts Rural Youth in Spotlight

(NAPSA)—In an eastern Kentucky town with a population of just 1,000, a community theater company is born, the idea of former 4-H member Stephanie Richards.

After a theater career in New York and Chicago, Richards came home to Appalachia to bring show business to young people in a remote area with few cultural outlets. "People are starving for a theatre company here," she said about her Artists Collaborative Theatre (ACT) project.

Each evening, approximately 100 people are in the theater's audience, enjoying the professional-quality performances of local volunteer actors, many of them in a 4-H theater club. The program works with the University of Kentucky College of Fine Arts and 4-H to provide people in Appalachia with cultural experiences and opportunities for both actors and audience members and bring the small community together to work on or watch each show.

Richards is the first fine arts 4-H educator in America. Yet her work is not just limited to young people. "Older and younger generations are able to connect through the program, sharing skills and ideas from all ages," she said.

Artists Collaborative Theatre offers 4-H youth the option to work backstage or be in the spotlight as an actor.

One young thespian is 11-year-old Sarah Haynes. "Acting taught me not to be shy and to put myself out there," she said. Sarah first got involved in the theater when the ACT program offered auditions at her school and she tried out.



Young thespians rehearse a scene for the Artists Collaborative Theatre, the brainchild of Stephanie Richards, the first fine arts 4-H educator in America.

Another aspiring actress is Kenya Moore, 12. "A couple times people missed practice, so we had to switch roles and fill in to play other parts. It was a learning experience!" she said.

Richards' talent and the ACT program have taught these artistic youth and others in their community to stand up and have pride in themselves and their community. The theater gives them a voice that's being heard beyond the hills of Appalachia as it helps to overcome the challenges of this economically-depressed community.

"This theater is all about expression of emotions and hope," Richards said. "It's bringing this community together as never before."

You may find your own community of friends in the 4-H adventure. To find out more about 4-H programs, visit www.4husa.org.