

4-H Community Spirit

National Report Illustrates How Youth Can Impact Their Communities

(NAPSA)—While young people today seem to grow up faster than ever, they still yearn for mentoring and the support of parents and other role models. In addition, today's youth desire programs that allow them to serve as leaders in their communities. These are among the key findings of "The National Conversation on Youth Development in the 21st Century," a series of forums where youth and adults discussed ways to build a positive future for America's young people.

Sponsored by 4-H to mark its 100th anniversary this year, the Conversations began in communities in the fall of 2001, followed by the State Conversations in the late fall and early winter. The process culminated with the National Conversation in Washington, D.C. on February 28 to March 1, 2002. More than 1,600 Conversations engaged 50,000 youth and adults of various backgrounds that represented 600 youth and community organizations from all 50 states and Puerto Rico.

Participants focused their discussions on how to develop a positive future for youth in their communities. The final report outlines ideas at national levels where various organizations, corporations and government can collaborate to provide youth life skills programs, build adult/youth partnerships and participate in community service. The key findings include:

- Establish youth advocates within each federal department and agency;
- Design programs and educational opportunities that promote



Carla Archibeque (Texas 4-H), Don Floyd, president and CEO, National 4-H Council and Gary Davis, executive vice president of JCPenney Co. present the National Conversation report to Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman.

ethnic diversity;

- Increase compensation and opportunities for youth development professionals;
- Maximize resources by creating procedures that improve coordination and eliminate duplication across youth development organizations and agencies;
- Expand the use of mentoring, work-based and community service learning, safe and innovative after-school programs, and technology so each young person reaches his or her full potential.

The findings of the National Conversation correspond with the findings of the Local and State Conversations but focus on a broader approach. The Local and State findings include recommendations tailored to the specific needs of youth in their communities. Some local examples include building community centers, increasing after-school programs, receiving school credit for commu-

nity service, increasing scholarship opportunities or electing a youth representative to school boards or other community advisory committees.

"Two comments struck me as I listened to the Conversations," said Don Floyd, National 4-H Council president and CEO. "First, the frequent refrain of 'I didn't know 4-H did that,' and second, the observation that, 'We need to work together on that program.' For me, these voices call us to a higher standard of collaboration and communication to ensure the maximum effectiveness of our youth programs."

"If young people are provided with the personal and community assets needed for positive development, they can overcome adversity," said Floyd. "The young people who participate in youth development programs are not typically the ones who drive up negative statistics. Nevertheless, they are often impeded from having full access, equity and opportunity."

According to Floyd, the next step is for the participants to work with their communities and meet with youth, adults and community leaders to determine how they can implement these ideas at the local and state levels. This grassroots effort is what 4-H calls its "birthday gift to the nation."

4-H currently has seven million members, 50 million alumni and a program in every county nationwide. To learn more about the National Conversation and view local, state and national reports, visit www.4hcentennial.org.