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Situation: Since before the pandemic, Hillsborough has not had a county council, so youth have not had the opportunity to learn and practice communication skills at the county level in a supportive environment. The life skill of communication can have a positive long-term impact on preparing youth for the work force. Mary Arnold, PH.D. states that youth can “thrive” if there is a plan and implantation of a high-quality youth development context.

Methods: One of the ways 4-H develops skill of communication is through county councils. Through the council, youth who have a propensity for leadership can develop communication skills and learn leadership roles and responsibilities of holding a 4-H office. With the revitalization of the council, the agent can educate the county officers, encourage shared leadership, and peer education. The objectives of this positive youth development was to educate officer roles, provide the opportunity for youth to practice their communication skills, to inspire other youth, and to foster shared leadership. Dr. Arnold stated that challenging growth, holding youth accountable, shared power through collaboration, and exposing youth to new opportunities lead to youth who thrive and are ready for life beyond high school.

Preparing 4-H Youth to be Tomorrow's Leaders

OFFICER ONBOARDING



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Using a supportive train-the-trainer model, a series of learning experiences were designed and presented to educate the council officers regarding the best practices of an effective club officer. The officers then became the presenters at the countywide officer onboarding as an opportunity to practice their communication skills. Participants were given officer books and gained knowledge of expectations, best practices in conducting a 4-H meeting, and completing the officer record book.

Results: The results of the onboarding training survey showed 100% of participants gained knowledge of officer roles. The onboarding provided the council officers the opportunity to practice effective communication skills and allowed 36 club officers to gain knowledge of their officer roles and where given the materials needed to effectively carry out the responsibilities of their office. The leaders that were present were informed of the information and reinforce the need to foster shared leadership within all clubs.

Conclusions: Officers learned the key elements of being a successful officer and then how to share that knowledge with their peers. Evidence was found in the survey results that all officers effectively imparted knowledge to all 36 participants during the onboarding training for club level officers throughout the county. As a result, three of the six county officers became district officers, and one officer joined the state executive board.