

forum

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4-H Enrollment—Teens to the Rescue. The 4-H program is accustomed to the enrollment being largely composed of preadolescent youth. Over the years, the trend in adolescent dropouts has been apparent nationally, not only in 4-H, but in other youth organizations as well. With some exceptions, it has been regarded as "the way it is." It caused some concern, but not alarm, since total enrollment continued to increase. Currently, there's evidence that total enrollment is slipping. Indeed, some states have experienced declining enrollments in several age groups.

Studies indicate that while teens have different programming needs from those of preadolescents, they're a viable audience. Now could be the time to give teen programming a more prominent place in 4-H programs. This thrust may not reverse the trend in percentage of teen participation, but it could increase total 4-H participation.

Teen or junior leadership has been an effective way of involving teens in 4-H. Involving teens in leadership positions can have a double-barrelled impact on 4-H enrollment. Involving more teens as leaders will increase the numbers of younger

youth served by the 4-H program. 4-H groups and clubs require leaders in the form of adults and/or teens to function. Involving more teens as leaders means more clubs can be formed, creating more opportunities for youth to be 4-Hers. It looks like this: teen & adult leaders + more teen leaders → an increase in the number of teens in 4-H + an increase in the number of pre-adolescents in 4-H = an *increase in total 4-H enrollment*.

Before we blame declining 4-H enrollments on the birth rate, working mothers, inflation, etc., we can accept the challenge, involve more teens, and bring the 4-H experience to more youth.

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