

research in brief

Good News Travels Fast

As revealed by a Pennsylvania/Texas study, "personal communication between peers" was the most effective device in transmitting the 4-H message among teens. Furthermore, having friends involved in 4-H positively influenced the decision to join the program.

The importance of friendship patterns among teens as related to 4-H recruitment and programming prompted the present study. Subjects were 964 male and female adolescents, 12 to 19 years old, who lived in the city or county of Roanoke, Virginia. With the approval of public school officials, a structured questionnaire was given in a classroom.

Results

Eighty-one percent of the subjects reported having four or more good friends. Only 31 reported fewer than 3 good friends.

Sex of respondent didn't appear to be a significant factor in determining the number of good friends. Eighty-one percent of the males and 80% of the females reported 4 good friends.

Age, however, may have an affect on teen friendship patterns. Eighty-four percent of the 14 and 17 year olds had 4 good friends, while only 79% of the 15 year olds and 75% of the 16 year olds reported that number of friends. The devotion to 1 "special" friend may alter friendship patterns between the years 15 and 16.

Subjects were also asked to report the number of children in their family. Eighty-four percent of the teens having 4 siblings and 82% of those with 5 brothers and sisters reported 4 good friends. Only 78% of the youths with only 1 sibling and 60% of only children reported that many friends. Large families may serve as a school for friendship development techniques.

Implications

The potential for 4-H member recruitment via the teen friendship network is tremendous. If most teens report more than 4 friends and each of the 4 friends have 4 friends, then a 4-H Club can easily become a reality. Efforts must be made to ensure that teen members really understand the 4-H program and are challenged to help it grow. They're our best recruitment method.

Continued successful teen 4-H programming requires a strong friendship base. Peer influence is an important factor in recruitment and retention. It can't be ignored. Parental "encouragement" to remain in 4-H may not be a match for friends' discouragement. (The odds are 2:4 against the parents.) To strengthen senior 4-H member programs, begin with friends.

"Teen Friendship Patterns: Implications for 4-H Recruitment and Programming." John J. Beasley, Naomi Conner, and Reid Ostrander. Fall, 1978/Spring, 1979 (unpublished). Available from: J. J. Beasley, Extension Leader, 4-H, 130 Smyth Hall, VPI and SU, Blacksburg, Virginia 24061.

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