

SUCCESS STORIES

UAF Cooperative Extension Service

Pillow Patrol: Reaching out to foster families in Alaska's largest city

Issue

Alaska's Office of Children's Services (OCS) indicates that at any given time, there are more than 900 children in foster care in Alaska's largest city. Foster children often face challenges related to a sense of security, belonging and self-esteem. With its focus on youth development and outreach, 4-H is in a prime position to respond to this issue.

Response

To reach out to area foster families, the Anchorage district 4-H agent improved upon a pillowcase project idea she saw at a conference, and Anchorage Pillow Patrol was launched in 2006. To date, more than 3,200 pillowcases have been made and donated. Most pillowcases were brought to OCS, with additional donations to other organizations working with foster families and youth in transition. The recipients see an outpouring of support from the community, and get to choose a special item for themselves. In addition to benefitting Anchorage, boxes have been sent to Palmer, Fairbanks, Kenai and Dillingham.

Results

Many beneficial partnerships have been formed because of the project. Various groups including the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, Family and Community Education (FCE) homemakers, a Methodist women's group, sororities, high school service clubs and homebound seniors have all become connected to 4-H through their interest in helping youth. One senior personally donated 150 pillowcases.

Fabric is not cheap, and one pillowcase takes one yard of fabric. At a regular retail cost of \$12 per yard of fabric, the 3,200 pillowcases donated to date have a price tag of \$38,400. With ample donations of fabric, sewing machines, and time, pillowcases have been made for a very small fraction of that price.



4-H'ers in Anchorage show their enthusiasm for a Pillow Patrol sewing activity

The social value of this project has manifested itself in volunteerism, collaboration, and adoption of the project beyond its 4-H origins. A steady stream of volunteers turn up for sewing events, and participants are given the chance to improve their sewing skills.

More than 600 people have participated in the project so far, and other nonprofit groups are starting to imitate it. The goodwill, learning and sharing that occurred is a small part of the larger picture of how people can help in their own community, a valuable lesson that 4-H and Cooperative Extension can help perpetuate.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Marianne Kerr
4-H & Youth Development Agent
University of Alaska Fairbanks
Cooperative Extension Service
Anchorage District
mlkerr@alaska.edu
907-786-6305

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