Meeting Local Needs 2014

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ISU Extension and Outreach provides educational opportunities for economic development, food and the environment, health and well-being, and K-12 youth outreach. We meet local needs, so Hamilton County can be an even better place for the next generation.

Brett Ahrens  
Extension Council Chair  
Jerry Chizek  
Regional Director

Health & Well-Being

Hamilton County is an amazing place to live and raise a family. Imagine moving here and being unsure how some services in the community could be accessed and what were the obligations of living in the local community. Exito en el Norte or “Success in the U.S.”, is a six-session workshop where twelve Spanish-speaking families learned skills needed for day-to-day living. Each class explored services and resources specific to Iowa and Hamilton County. Visiting about the education system led to finding answers to meet specific needs regarding English as a Second Language (ESL) classes as well as getting ready for parent-teacher conferences. The local library director visited with the group about the free services families could access and which were offered for a nominal fee. Resources were shared on where to look for help with homework or for family fun. Each session was an interactive way for people new to Hamilton County to explore questions in a low-stress environment and learn skills needed for day-to-day living. Being able to ask questions of local professionals that were unique to their own family and community situations was invaluable.

Every Iowa county has an elected extension council that guides local educational programming by partnering with staff. From needs assessment through program implementation and evaluation of outcomes, the council represents the issues and people of the county.

Back Row L-R: Brett Ahrens, Richard Carlson, Kathy Getting, Bob Walker  
Front Row L-R: Cindy McCollough, Lisa Tapper, Gayle Olson. Teresa Gourlev, Kris Walker
Hamilton County’s 4-H youth learned by doing projects with skilled volunteers that were designed to fit their needs at different ages. Youth participated in a variety of projects from food to forestry, welding, rockets, robotics and rabbits. Anything a youth was interested in doing could be turned into a 4-H project. 4-H gives kids and teens all kinds of opportunities to experience life skills and to practice them. In Hamilton County, numerous hands-on project workshops were offered. Leadership, communication and citizenship skills were put into practice and became part of our young people’s lives. Hamilton County’s 196 4-H’ers participated in a variety of activities including Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM), robotics, babysitting trainings, Junior 4-H Camp, photography & leadership camps, after-school groups and day camps with Clover Kids, Fish Iowa programs, nine traditional 4-H community clubs, and other learning environments.

Food and Environment
Hamilton County Master Gardeners contributed nearly 600 hours in volunteer service to their communities. Community gardens, farmers markets, horticulture programs, public garden tours and plantings were just a few of the many activities held in the county. A highlight for Master Gardeners was assisting with 4-H and the open class horticulture exhibits at the 2014 Hamilton County Fair.

Economic Development
The opening of the new Health Insurance Marketplace created new opportunities and obligations for Iowans. To reach those most in need of high-quality non-political information about changes in health insurance, Family Finance Program Specialist, Barb Wollan, provided informational workshops to social service agency staff, health care providers, employers, clergy and other professionals in a position to share critical information. After the workshops, 96% of respondents indicated that they understood the changes moderately well or very well, up from only 25% before each workshop.

Extension also provided ten “Smart Choice: Health Insurance” workshops for the public in Region 7, reaching over 100 individuals. Research showed that this nationally-acclaimed workshop improved participants’ preparedness for choosing health insurance coverage that met their needs.

In 2014, through AmeriCorps member Rebecca Roberts, youth gardening reached approximately 300 youth in Hamilton County with new and expanded gardening programs in three elementary schools and through a 4-H/Hy-Vee horticulture group, each with their own garden. With this increase, more students were trying and liking new vegetables, both raw and through cooking demonstrations. The youth were then sharing this enjoyment and fresh produce with their families. All of the students learned about what it took to grow a garden including soil preparation, worms and insect benefits, plant selection, garden care, and composting.

Hamilton County Extension Staff at the 2014 Channel 13 RVTV event in Webster City.

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