



EXTENSION IN ACTION

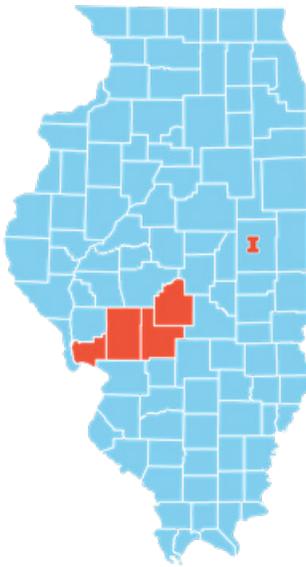
Serving Christian, Jersey, Macoupin,
and Montgomery Counties





Sara Marten
County Director

People make the difference in Illinois Extension



I was once asked to sum up what we do as University of Illinois Extension employees in one word. Given the scope of our programs and audiences, it felt like an impossible task. But as I reflected on the question, one word truly did continue to resonate in my mind.

People.

We serve, educate, and impact people. We develop and deliver relevant educational programs and experiences that make a difference for people — in their families, communities, jobs, and lives. As we continue into the second year of our three-year needs assessment, we are focused on providing experiences within our local priority areas of thriving youth, workforce preparedness and advancement, chronic disease prevention and management, and social and emotional health. You will see many of these programs and more highlighted in the following pages.

People are also one of our greatest resources within Extension. I am grateful to lead and work

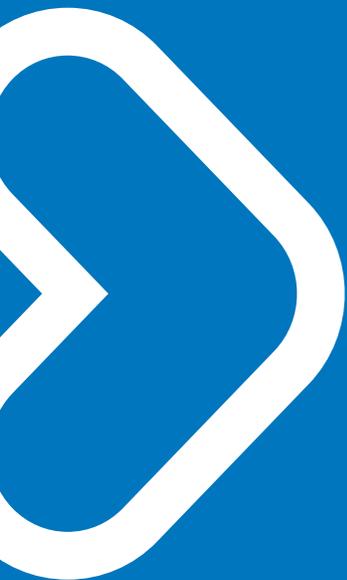
with a team of dedicated staff and volunteers who work tremendously hard and care deeply about the programming they provide. Their creativity and collaborative work create one-of-a-kind educational experiences for a variety of audiences.

Above all, we continue to thrive through the support of many key people, businesses, and organizations. On behalf of our staff, I express our deepest appreciation to our many volunteers, financial supporters, and community partners for supporting our mission and daily work. You are vital to our success, and we cannot thank you enough!

I hope the following stories showcase our commitment to you, the people of Christian, Jersey, Macoupin, and Montgomery counties, as we continue to serve and support you through the programming we provide.

With gratitude,
Sara Marten
County Extension Director

Cover photo: (left to right) Ben Wamsley, Chloe Grant, Emma Pistorius, and Jay Bliler of the Christian County 4-H Livestock Judging Team that traveled to Scotland to compete in the Royal Highland International Livestock Judging Contest.



Illinois Extension Makes an Impact

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's land-grant mission thrives each day through Extension's programs, resources, knowledge, and dedicated staff that are responsive to five grand challenge themes:



Community:
Support Strong and Resilient Residents



Economy:
Grow a Prosperous Economy



Environment:
Sustain Natural Resources at Home and in Public Spaces



Food:
Maintain a Safe and Accessible Food Supply



Health:
Maximize Physical, Mental, and Emotional Health

2023 Engagement

Extension leaders, staff, and stakeholders define priorities that create meaningful, mission-centered outcomes throughout the state:

657 Communities Served	745K+ Program Attendees	12.7M+ Webpage Views	58.5M+ Social Media Impressions	1.8M+ YouTube Views
555 Educational Sessions/Week (28K+ Annually)	90 Online Courses Accessed by 12K+ People	10,158 Local Government Education Webinar Reach	1,799 4-H Clubs	199,400 4-H Experiences

Partnerships

5,682
Program Volunteers

274
Community Gardens

2,634
School and Community Partners

Resource Generation

\$15,259,785
Value of Volunteer Contributions

\$463,368
Value of Donated Produce Grown or Facilitated

\$4M+
External Funds Secured for SNAP-Ed Partners



Jersey County family wins big!

4-H Family Spirit Award

The Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Moore Jr. Family was selected as the 2023 Illinois 4-H Family Spirit Award winner.

Hugh and June Moore have set an example for their family in Jersey County to build a foundation beginning with 4-H. With over four generations, 24 Moore family members have contributed a combined 160 years of 4-H club membership. Their legacy is honored with the 2023 Illinois 4-H Foundation Family Spirit Award.

In the Moore Family, the motto of “Head, Heart, Hands, and Health” is something that is engrained into their value system at a young age. Their application stated the following, “We use our HEADS in order to put knowledge to work when it comes to leadership roles, participating in competition, and bettering ourselves at enrichment events. Our HEART belongs to the land, to the livestock, and to the generations that are coming next to take care of it. Our HANDS are used for hard work, service to the farm and our community, and to help teach those around us. Our HEALTH is provided by the Lord to help be the light and share our talents with the community.”

Many 4-H members from the Moore family went on to volunteer with the organization, serving a combined 300 years as 4-H volunteers, including a combined 68 years of club leadership.



More about the Moore Family
go.illinois.edu/4hfamilyspiritmoore

Financial Report

Extension is funded through a combination of locally raised, county board, state, and federal dollars, which are returned to the community through educational programming. University of Illinois Extension is a three-way funding partnership that includes the state of Illinois, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Christian, Jersey, Macoupin, and Montgomery county boards. Our SNAP-Ed programs are funded by a federal grant from the USDA. These partnerships bring thousands of programming dollars into the four counties, in addition to local contributions, state, national, and federal support.



Community Partner Award

Illinois Extension’s impact is enhanced when creating partnerships with like-minded organizations, foundations, and corporations committed to supporting Extension programs. Illinois Extension provides research-based programs where youth and adults learn new skills and gain knowledge in an area that interests them.

The Extension Council is a volunteer board that serves in an advisory role, cooperating with Extension staff in planning, promoting, developing, implementing, evaluating, and financing Extension outreach that meets the needs, interests, and recourses of the local communities served.

The local Extension Council sponsors the Community Partner Award, which recognizes a community partner each year. Illinois Extension is incredibly proud to award four businesses or organizations within the unit:

- Randy Miller of WTIM Radio in Taylorville
- Jersey Community Hospital Wellness Center in Jerseyville
- Brittany Shooting Park in Bunker Hill
- Lincoln Land Community College of Litchfield



RANDY MILLER OF WTIM RADIO IN TAYLORVILLE

WTIM Radio was selected for its continued support of all Illinois Extension programs. Each week, they allow Extension staff to join their live radio show, run local Illinois Extension media releases in a timely manner, and even attend local Illinois Extension events to live stream. Local 4-H members also enjoy being interviewed on the radio by WTIM staff at the 4-H General Show and Livestock Shows during the fair. “Randy and his staff are always helpful and inform Christian County residents of Extension’s programs. Having continued support from a local radio program keeps Illinois Extension relative in today’s news,” said Cassie O’Connell, marketing and communications program coordinator.



JERSEY COMMUNITY HOSPITAL WELLNESS CENTER IN JERSEYVILLE

The wellness center was selected for continuously partnering with Extension and using its facility to teach research-based health information. Their staff also help with local 4-H programs by teaching youth development to participants. “JCH Wellness Center has been a phenomenal partner over the last ten years in helping to provide a space for the public to learn health and nutrition. We are incredibly grateful and love that they share a common goal of making the Jersey County community healthier,” said Lisa Peterson, nutrition and wellness educator.



BRITTANY SHOOTING PARK IN BUNKER HILL

The shooting park was selected for its support of unit-wide 4-H programs. Not only do local 4-H clubs use the grounds for their practices and shoots, but Brittany Park staff are instrumental in helping teams during local unit-wide shooting sports contests and state-wide shotgun contests for Illinois 4-H. “Carol Mohr, the owner of Brittany Trap, has supported 4-H Shooting Sports since the program began in 2011. They have provided a safe environment for 4-H members to build confidence, enhance marksmanship, and develop friendships and skills to last a lifetime, all while keeping the cost to participate at a minimum to help local families,” said Kate Harding, 4-H youth development program coordinator.



LINCOLN LAND COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF LITCHFIELD

LLCC of Litchfield was selected for its continued support of Illinois Extension programs and for letting Illinois Extension use its facilities for large unit-wide and Montgomery County events. Their facilities are accessible to participants and help reach new audiences within the surrounding communities. “Partnering with LLCC exposes participants to the college and allows their students to be exposed to Extension programs in return. A bonus of working with them is how friendly and helpful their staff is when accommodating us for events,” said Sara Marten, county director.





Justice served as young minds take the court

Over 30 youth from Macoupin County took part in a mock trial at the Macoupin County Courthouse in Carlinville. Participants were 4-H members from across the county and students from Gillespie High School's MPACT'D group. The youth involved spent their time learning the different roles of the court. Circuit Judge Kenneth Deihl guided youth on this journey and helped them gain a better understanding of the judicial system and the difficult decisions that are made on a daily basis regarding the law. Deihl used his own experiences and knowledge to teach youth important factors in a court case.

The mock trial was a simulation of a teenage distracted driving case in which the incident resulted in a criminal offense due to the severity of the traffic accident. This mock trial included the students in roles as a judge, attorneys, witnesses, a clerk, a bailiff, a court reporter, and a police officer. Families and 4-H members were allowed to sit in the courtroom and watch the trial.

4-H members participating in this trial were: Carter Joiner, Saralynn Joiner, Payton Harding, Halle Kaburick, Zep Reiher, Alex Behme, Katelyn Wisner, Makenna Harding, from Carlinville; Reese Heyen and Paige Heyen of Gillespie; Johnathan Royer, Natalie Royer, Shepard Gilbreth and Isabella Gilbreth of Virden; Josiah Schuette, Ben Schuette, Ethan Schuette, Luke Wolff of Shipman; Anna Cloninger, Caleb Cloninger, and Ethan Cloninger of Plainview; Braden Bowker, Malia Bowker of Medora; Heidi Kahl, Carter Phillips, Hunter Haworth, Abigail Jarden, and Peter Jarden of Bunker Hill.

Gillespie High School Miners Preparing And Caring for Teen Driving members participating were as follows: Traegen Madeline, Kennedy Helmkamp, Bailee Borrer, Kaitlyn Spencer, Emily Bergen, and Madilyn Martin. Jennifer Brown is the sponsor for the MPACT'D group at Gillespie High School. Brown partnered with Macoupin County 4-H Youth Development Coordinator Kate Harding to facilitate this event.

Prior to the mock trial, Andrea Duncan provided a tour of the historic Macoupin County Courthouse.



Andrea Duncan (far right) gave a tour to 4-H members and families of the "Million Dollar Courthouse" and discussed all the work that went into building the courthouse, its rich history, and unique features.

A skill lasting a lifetime

Local 4-H sewing volunteer Marti Benning offers sewing classes at Montgomery County Extension each year, teaching youth the basics of sewing and teaching them how to make clothing for themselves through a series of classes. This year, students at Cornerstone Academy located in Nokomis were able to participate in a sewing program.

Montgomery County 4-H Youth Development Program Coordinator Alexis Friesland and volunteer Marti offered a two-part sewing class at Cornerstone. The first session involved learning how to use the sewing machine and practicing sewing. In the second session, participants made their own patch pillows. Alexis stated, "Sewing is a valuable skill that all youth can benefit from learning." Below, you can see the pillows the youth made at Cornerstone.





Science camp participants taking a closer look at different sands through a microscope.

Sun, sand, and science

When you think of summer, you sometimes might think of going to the beach. Illinois Extension brought the beach to nearly 70 youth who discovered the science behind sun, sand, and water at the Summer Science on the Beach 4-H Science Camps.

During this year's camp, youth in Christian, Jersey, Macoupin, and Montgomery counties were challenged to think like a scientist and explore common scientific principles related to a trip to the beach – including learning about coral reefs and types of sand, making their own solar ovens, understanding water pressure by making a Cartesian diver, exploring UV rays, and the importance of sun protection.

Youth who participated also received take-home experiments to continue their learning at home.

Livestock team heads to Scotland

While many 4-H members have experienced the excitement and competition of a livestock judging experience, few have traveled nearly 4,000 miles to a different country to do it. On the front cover of the report, you will see four Christian County 4-H members had the opportunity of a lifetime when they traveled to Scotland to participate in the Royal Highland International Livestock Judging Contest. 4-H members Ben Wamsley, Chloe Grant, Emma Pistorius, and Jay Bliler represented both Christian County and Illinois 4-H and competed in the contest and livestock shows.

Even with the distance, the life lessons and experiences youth members gain through the livestock industry remain the same. Youth participating in these experiences learn teamwork, communication, decision-making, responsibility, and resiliency. They make connections that will serve them well in the future and build upon their knowledge and skills in the agricultural industry.

Shaping the future of leadership

Leadership skills are like superpowers for teens. They unlock a sense of accomplishment and the ability to make a real difference, especially in their communities. At the annual 4-H Officer Training, over 50 youth got a jump-start on building these superpowers. This action-packed training isn't just about titles; it's about equipping teens to develop their skills, work closely with others, share ideas, and influence change.



Macoupin County 4-H'ers practice making a motion as they make trail mix, using parliamentary procedure.

Adventures in babysitting

Empowering teenage youth to develop critical skills such as responsibility, money/business management, organization, networking/communication, emergency skills, and career experience can only help them in future endeavors. Jersey County 4-H Youth Development Program Coordinator Jessica Jaffry held a 4-H Babysitting Workshop for 27 teenage youth in Jersey County, where they learned new skills.

Youths need more opportunities to build confidence and job experience. It is important to help teens develop soft skills to help them become successful contributing community members. This workshop gives youth confidence to make smart decisions, provide high-quality care, and stay safe in any babysitting adventure.



Teens learn to make easy and nutritious snacks they can prepare while babysitting.



A student determines what transportation options are within their budget.



Welcome to real-life experiences

Imagine leaving high school without knowing how to manage money or land a job you love. That's the reality for many young adults who miss out on learning essential life skills. By giving young people a chance to develop these skills, we can help them become successful adults who are happy in their careers and financially secure. Welcome to the Real World is a program where youth build an awareness of careers and skills needed to excel. Jersey Community High School had 221 sophomores participate in this program.

Students are educated on financial management and work through a simulation, making choices, and learning the basics of: taxes, insurance, checking and savings accounts, saving money, and paying bills such as housing, transportation, insurance, and groceries. Students reflect on the experience to measure the skills learned, knowledge gained, and attitudes changed about financial management. Youth gained an understanding of the financial processes, which helped them better manage their funds. Several participants learned that to live the lifestyle they want, they must find “good” paying jobs.

I am more confident about managing my life in the future because I am less worried about expenses. I learned a lot about how to deal with real-life situations so I can navigate them better when I get to that stage of life.

WTTRW participant

Navigating pathways to success

Strong economies depend on youth having the skills to secure meaningful, well-paid work. There are few opportunities for youth to learn and practice these skills. Youth must have the skills to create a professional document exemplifying their qualifications, skills, education, and past experiences/training. Youth need help presenting a first impression that is representative of themselves and the assets they can provide. The sophomore class at Jersey Community High School participated in Ready4Work.

Ready4Work teaches the life skills necessary to increase the number of qualified applicants for the workforce. Youth learn to present themselves professionally in a resume and cover letter, how to dress for success, develop interview skills, create career planning goals, social media etiquette, time management, and more. Nearly all of the participating youth felt more prepared to apply and interview for a job due to participating in the program.

97%
learned how to write an effective cover letter

95%
developed or improved their resume

84%
learned how to find a job that is a good fit for them

79%
built confidence in their ability to interview for jobs





Christian, Jersey, Macoupin, and Montgomery county 4-H Junior Leadership members in the company board room at Brandt.



4-H career exploration sparks interest in agriculture

4-H junior leadership members took part in the 4-H Ag Career Exploration trip to Springfield. Participants explored education and career paths in agriculture. The group visited three locations: Kreher Agriculture Center at Lincoln Land Community College, Brandt Headquarters, and the Illinois Department of Agriculture.

The day was filled with facility tours, hands-on learning stations, and career advice from current professionals in the field. Bill Harmon, Rich Teeter, and Elizabeth Conrady at LLCC provided information on ag education and guided the youth through simulations related to horticulture, precision farming, and animal science. Rod Riech from Brandt offered a tour of the headquarters, presented the history of Brandt, and gave insight into current trends in agriculture. Riech was full of excitement for the future of agriculture and encouraged youth who have a passion for ag to pursue it and take advantage of all the opportunities out there. The discussion panel at the Department of Ag included a variety of professionals who provided insights into different career paths in the field.

Through educational opportunities like this, 4-H hopes to spark interest in agriculture and help provide youth with information to help them make the best choices for their future career planning decisions.



Bill Harmon, professor of agronomy at LLCC, teaches how to use an augmented reality sandbox. Classes use it to experiment with how water would flow in different situations.



Empowering a service mindset

COVID has impacted many facets of life, including businesses, and employers recognize that their employees need to be trained in customer service skills to adapt to changes. From 2020 to 2022, a record number of workers quit their jobs, citing the following reasons: age as a safety concern, need for work-life balance, limited opportunities for career advancement, lack of childcare, and physical or emotional stress. These issues created change within the American workforce culture and consumer needs.

If business owners do not invest in customer service training, profits can decrease, customer loyalty diminishes, and business enhancement and development halt. Additionally, employees must grasp strategies to effectively manage conflict, foster teamwork, and optimize overall organizational success. On the Front Line is a customer service training that Illinois Extension offers. This training investment is necessary for employees to communicate appropriately with each other and the customer.

In this training, attendees acquire essential skills that can bring about significant transformations. They learn how to effectively:

- Manage their body language and tone while engaging with others.
- Understand the importance of making a positive first impression.
- Develop personal awareness regarding generational and cultural differences.
- Gain the ability to deliver precise and impactful communication in person, online, and over the phone.
- Acquire conflict resolution techniques to enhance professional relationships with colleagues and customers through respectful behavior.
- Gain expertise in employing appropriate de-escalation tactics.
- Leverage exceptional customer service to elevate their value within their current or future organizations.

This program has been offered to Extension employees and local community businesses and organizations. Participants learn why good customer service is crucial for the company and their personal brand and marketability for future employment.



Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education

SNAP-Education works with Illinois families in need to make healthier nutrition choices easier. Making healthy choices can be challenging, especially when families are struggling financially. Illinois Extension SNAP-Ed provides practical healthy eating and physical activity solutions for families and participates in strategic local, regional, and statewide partnerships to transform the health of Illinois communities.

Through classes, workshops, and collaboration with community partners, SNAP-Education positively affects families and communities by using research-based solutions to encourage healthier nutrition and physical activity choices.

SNAP-Ed works with individuals and families who qualify for or receive benefits to help them manage their food budgets, as well as the agencies, schools, and organizations that serve them. To continue to meet the needs of families within the unit, the SNAP-Ed program has continued to have face-to-face classes.



Christian County SNAP-Ed Community Outreach Worker Taylor Pope reads a book about “hearty heart” to students at North Elementary School.

OrganWise Guys keeping kids healthy

During the school year, Taylor Pope presented an introductory class “OrganWise Guys” to students kindergarten through second grade in Christian County.

The program is a fun and interactive way to engage students in nutrition education and physical activity. The students are taught about healthy eating using plush character organs of the human body. Students learned the importance of each organ and how to keep their organs healthy. The students participate in the lesson by learning a dance and a song to remind them to make healthy choices, drink plenty of water, and exercise. Each lesson provides students with an activity sheet to take home to share with their parents.



A student at Ben-Gil Elementary School places their hands under a blacklight after using glo germ to see what germs look like on their hands and learn the importance of handwashing.

Illinois Junior Chef

Illinois Extension, in cooperation with Illinois Nutrition Education Programs SNAP-Ed, hosted Illinois Junior Chefs, a five-day summer cooking camp. Reaching out to over 116 youth and utilizing community volunteers, these camps were free and open to children between the ages of 8-13 years.

The camp offered kids the opportunity to make their own nutritious meals and get excited about healthy foods, such as whole grains and low-fat dairy. The program showed participants how to add more fruits and vegetables to their daily meals. Students learned how to prepare delicious and nutritious foods and the importance of hand washing and good sanitation practices. Food and kitchen safety are good habits that will stick with them for years to come.

SNAP-Ed staff and community volunteers were on hand to teach lessons and work with participants throughout the hands-on camps. The programs were offered in Bunker Hill, Carlinville, Edinburg, Hettick, Gillespie, Kincaid, Pana, and Taylorville.



Junior Chef participants prepare the ingredients to make pumpkin pancakes.





Nutrition and Wellness Educator Lisa Peterson taught Macoupin County participants how to safely can using the water bath canning method.

Seventy-one Christian County residents attended the program. Of the participants surveyed, 100% indicated they planned to use the resources provided in the classes and agreed that the workshops met their needs. One participant also shared that they learned to cook with different oils and found the workshop enjoyable and educational.



Simple steps to a healthy lifestyle

According to county health rankings, 37% of the Christian County population is obese. Diabetes and heart disease are just a few complications that can happen due to obesity. Eating well and physical activity are crucial to managing and preventing chronic disease. Eating well starts in the kitchen. To promote a healthy lifestyle, Nutrition and Wellness Educator Lisa Peterson and Taylorville Memorial Hospital partnered to provide four workshops to get individuals back in the kitchen and prepare more nutritious options at home. The classes covered various topics, including cooking with healthy fats through air frying, cooking for one or two people, creating healthier freezer meals, using a slow cooker safely, and using an electric pressure cooker to prepare quick and nutritious meals.

I am more aware of my food choices, dividing my meals into smaller portions and freezing.
Cooking for One or Two participant

Taylorville Memorial Hospital hosted the workshops, and each class provided nutrition and food safety education and hands-on experience creating meals with various appliances. The class encouraged social wellness, with the cooking happening in small groups, walking around the room to taste new recipes, and sharing experiences working with the different kitchen tools. Participants received Illinois Extension recipes and the skills needed to make healthy decisions at home in each session.

Unlocking the delicious flavors of salsa

What do tomatillos, bell peppers, tomatoes, corn, strawberries, blueberries, and jicama all have in common? They are all the essential ingredients to make salsa. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that only one in ten Americans eats enough fruits and vegetables. Making and using salsa is a unique way to encourage eating more vegetables and limits the amount of added sugar and salt when purchasing pre-made salsa at the grocery store.

Illinois Extension partnered with Jersey Public Library to offer a hands-on salsa-making class. This class encourages the consumption of fruits and vegetables in a variety of ways and purchasing produce in season. Participants learned about various types of salsas and prepared six different types while improving their knife skills. It also encouraged participants to work in small groups to create recipes and try new fruits and vegetables. Research finds cooking, serving, and eating with others connect people despite differences in cultures and generations (Farmer & Cotter, 2021). Twenty-two individuals participated in the hour class with a variety of ages from 5 to 75 years old.





Enhancing your well-being

Through partnerships, AAMP/AMT Sensory Garden, and education about sensory gardens, Illinois Extension is addressing social and emotional health. The goal of this project was to design an outdoor learning environment that enhances sensory integration for visitors, especially individuals with autism participating in the Autism and Movement Project (AAMP), which specializes in Autism Movement Therapy (AMT).

AAMP/AMT explored opportunities to enhance sensory stimulation in a controlled setting. They partnered with Master Gardener Karen Cherry to start a sensory garden at the Latonis Train Village in Pana. The garden engages each of the five senses with plants selected to afford a sensory experience. AAMP participants are provided an accessible environment to learn and grow in knowledge and benefits of the natural world. Successive sessions were planned to enable AAMP students to participate in the development of the sensory garden from planting to maintenance.

The Sensory Garden programming effort was supported with Illinois Extension Master Gardener 'Know More Grow More' funds of \$1,000 plus additional funds from Christian County Master Gardeners to assist with the installation of plant materials and signage for the garden. Andrew Holsinger, horticulture educator, designed the sensory garden informational sign which is now installed at the garden. The tangible outcomes represent a step forward in cultivating a more inclusive and enriching environment for individuals with autism.

The Autism and Movement Project is designed for individuals with special needs and anyone needing to build stronger speech, behavioral, social, or motor skills. The adults in the program are learning valuable skills and how to care for a garden. Clients are not only receiving sensory input from the colors and smells of the garden, but being hands-on in digging, planting, watering, and maintaining the garden allows them to reap all the benefits.

Erica Matthews, owner of AAMP



(left to right) Tony Drockton and Karen Cherry worked together to install the interpretative sign at the garden.



Discovering your path and purpose

Employers consistently express their desire for employees who show up for work promptly and can work well with others. They believe necessary job skills can be effectively taught once these foundational qualities are in place.

Illinois Extension recognizes that some individuals face challenges in finding personal fulfillment in their WHY (purpose) and their WHAT (passion, interests, and skill set). The iDREAM-iCREATE program aims to ensure that young people develop a strong sense of self-esteem, understand their unique strengths, and use these strengths to establish meaningful connections between their interests and future career aspirations. Valerie Belusko, a community and economic development educator who teaches the course, wants to empower individuals to cultivate a profound sense of self-worth and purpose as they transition into adulthood.

Research has concluded that individuals who lack a sense of purpose, engagement, and belonging within a community often experience feelings of insignificance and anxiety. Moreover, this unfortunate circumstance frequently leads to a sense of hopelessness and depression, resulting in a persistent state of confusion and aimlessness. The aftermath of this issue frequently manifests in isolation, depriving the world of a valuable and actively participating community member.

The iDream program helps students learn to explore and connect to their passions through comprehensive dreaming/ goal setting. The iCreate program builds creativity through the lens of entrepreneurship. The programs are facilitated by local community leaders, who provide visible examples of success and build community relationships that will establish a more connected workforce in the future.

Nearly 1,000 students throughout Montgomery County have been reached through this program. Students are empowered to recognize their passions, establish personal objectives towards accomplishing their aspirations, and determine their unique qualities, ultimately paving the way for them to shape their future paths.



A fourth grade student at Litchfield Elementary is actively planning for her future by writing down goals, which are called “dreams,” to the students.

It’s been an incredible journey witnessing students immerse themselves in engaging lessons. The participation of community members has added a fresh perspective and excitement, enhancing the learning experience. This program equips students with essential skills by covering topics from taxes to igniting entrepreneurial spirit and emphasizing goal-setting. These skills are continually reinforced throughout their journey at Litchfield School District, as we remain committed to ensuring every senior graduate has a clear career pathway goal in mind.

Abby Carlson, Litchfield careers services coordinator



Fourth grade students at Litchfield Elementary School are sharing their dreams with one another and with community leader Jennifer Helgen, owner of Lily Pad Learning Center.



Students have an “egg-cellent” adventure learning about chicks

In schools across multiple counties, embryology kits provide memorable moments for students as they learn about life cycles. For the classrooms with chicken eggs, those 21 days are filled with anticipation and activities. Both teachers and students love the hands-on, multidisciplinary lessons that accompany having an incubator with eggs in their classroom.

Embryology affects several aspects of learning. As a science lesson, students learn about life cycles by seeing pictures of developing chicks. As they investigate the eggs’ structure, they discover each part’s name and function. They may even dissolve the hard shell with vinegar to see the shell membrane and experiment with its porosity. Many students journal and write stories about the process as a language arts lesson. Together, they read books to learn more about raising chicks, what they eat, how many breeds there are, what they provide, and how nutritious eggs and poultry are to consume. As a math lesson, students graph their favorite ways to eat eggs or poultry and the hatching times. In social studies, they may explore how chickens were raised compared to now. They may explore poultry dishes from around the world. In many schools, pictures and stories line the hallway for other grades to see, which allows other classrooms to enjoy the experience, too.

When hatch time finally arrives, everyone watches the hard-working chicks slowly pipping their way out of the eggs. Once they dry off, the chicks stay warm under a heat light in the brooder. Sometimes, other students in the building stop by to check in on the new additions. They watch the chicks continue to grow for a short time until they head to a farm. Embryology provides a variety of lessons across multiple subjects with lasting memories.



A student at Beckemeyer Elementary School holds a chick for the first time.

Understanding yourself and others



Navigating the intricacies of human communication and identifying your preferred mode of communication can be daunting. Fortunately, Real Colors offers a transformative four-color personality assessment and workshop, expertly crafted to enhance self-awareness and foster effective interactions with others. Program participants acquire invaluable skills in deciphering different perspectives and uncovering underlying motivations, ultimately enabling them to connect with others on a deeper level.

A clash of communication styles hinders productivity, which is crucial for a cohesive workforce, but also creates unnecessary frustrations and conflicts that impede interpersonal relationships and personal growth. This program empowers attendees to enhance their communication skills, foster better teamwork, cultivate stronger relationships, explore self-discovery, and gain valuable insights into how others respond to different situations.

Real Colors training reached nearly 40 participants within Jersey County Home and Community Education Association, Macoupin County CEO, and Montgomery County CEO.



CEO students explain to their peers how their needs, values, skills, and joys bring value to those with different personalities and communication approaches.



CEO students work together to think about what brings them joy, what skills they excel at that are helpful to others, and what principles motivate their actions.

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The Illinois Nutrition Education Programs are funded by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP).

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the US Department of Agriculture by the Director, Cooperative Extension Service, and University of Illinois.