

Bringing Knowledge to Life in

Oakland County

Oakland County

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4-H Leadership Program alumni are local and global citizens

In 2003, Lake Orion resident Holly Jalkanen graduated from the 4-H Youth Leadership Institute. She and her fellow participants built skills in teamwork, problem-solving, and cultural competence, which they were encouraged to put to use in their community. One of the Institute's goals is to help young people recognize their ability to make a positive difference through civic actions. Seventy-two percent of those graduates go on to serve on local boards and committees.

A few gain enough confidence to apply their skills on the other side of the globe.

Eighteen months after she graduated from the Institute, Holly Jalkanen was in India, demonstrating her leadership skills by facilitating educational programs and tsunami relief efforts. She secured a job with Hope for Tomorrow International, where she organized team trips to Guatemala. From urban orphanages to rural villages, Jalkanen has successfully built bridges across cultures. The work she has done has made a significant difference in developing countries, and improved the lives of hundreds of people.

Her accomplishments are impressive, especially for someone who hasn't yet celebrated her 20th birthday.



Institute participants demonstrate their skills by leading teamwork activities with Oakland County families.

Jalkanen is in good company. Other Institute graduates serve on foundation boards, community task forces and non-profit committees. Several have testified before legislators at the capitol. Erin Biebuyck, now a college sophomore, spent last summer working in Washington DC and teaching younger students about the legislative process.

"I now find myself applying the leadership skills I was taught in different situations with school, work and my family life. It all began to come through in my life ... you recognize the difference and see it in yourself."

*Karen Wentz
4-H Youth Leadership Institute class of 2004-05*

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Michigan State University Extension helps people improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs and opportunities. Offices in counties across the state link the research of the land-grant university, MSU, to challenges facing communities. Citizens serving on county Extension councils regularly help select focus areas for programming. MSU Extension is funded jointly by county boards of commissioners, the state through Michigan State University and federally through the US Department of Agriculture.



The success of the year-long, intensive 4-H Youth Leadership Institute is due, in large measure, to its activity-based focus. Participants explore leadership topics through problem-solving challenges, communication games, and issue-based discussions. Because the Institute is hosted by organizations and businesses throughout the county, young people gain a deeper understanding of their community, and are exposed to a variety of future career possibilities.

The Oakland County Board of Commissioners has been an important partner since the Institute was founded in 2002. Commissioners recruit young people to participate in the program, sponsor their involvement, host workshops, and serve as mentors to the high school students.

Every year, Institute participants design and carry out a community project in which they can apply their leadership skills. These have included:

- Conducting a landscaping project with low-income homeowners in the city of Pontiac;
- Hosting a family weekend camp in partnership with Crossroads for Youth;
- Refurbishing part of a historic theatre in Royal Oak;
- Providing educational activities for young people housed at Children's Village.



Activity-based learning is a key strategy to engage Institute participants in building leadership skills.

"The 4-H Youth Leadership Institute helped launch me into an explosion of activity and opportunity! The Institute was preparation for me to become a youth mentor with young girls, a co-chair on a conference organization committee, a starring role and student director position in a drama production, and a senior year president."

*Danielle Center
4-H Youth Leadership Institute class of 2003-04*

The community isn't the only beneficiary of these efforts, however. Participants gain new knowledge about government processes, human-service organizations, and their role as engaged citizens. Among Institute graduates:

- 91 percent demonstrate a positive shift in their perception that they "have the ability to make a positive impact on the community."
- 72 percent serve on community-based boards, committees or task forces.
- 88 percent can correctly identify their elected representatives at the county, state and national levels.
- 96 percent understand the roles of government well enough to explain at least five public services that are provided, and which governmental unit provides each service.

Like all educational programs provided by MSU Extension, the Institute is designed to make the university's research available to citizens in ways that are relevant and practical. MSU Extension staff provide educational programs on topics that are needed by Oakland County residents, such as emerald ash borer control, food safety, parenting, lake management, preparing young people for future careers and water quality..

For more information about any of MSU Extension's innovative programs, visit our Web site at www.msue.msu.edu/oakland or call (248) 858-0880