



## NC 4-H Congress Hands-to-Service Activities

Harriett Edwards and Ben Silliman, NC 4-H Youth Development Specialists

North Carolina 4-H Congress, an annual, weeklong residential teen conference focused on citizenship, leadership, and service. A 2003 review committee reaffirmed the conference mission and a 2006 evaluation of youth participants reported high levels of program quality and outcomes for the overall event. Subsequently, conference planners sought to better understand youth experiences and benefits of specific activities during the event. Youth identified the “Hands-to-Service” community service event among the most beneficial conference activity in 2006. However, the brevity (3 hours) and intensity (programmed, rather than youth planned and implemented) nature of the activity led planners to seek to better understand youth perceptions. The 2007 Hands-to-Service activity engaged 561 youth and adult delegates in 32 service sites or activities with 17 partner agencies, organizations, or non-profits. Each site team provided feedback, reviewed below.

**Impact.** Feedback forms were returned from 56 groups, representing 65 NC counties. Ninety-seven percent of participants recommended that Hands-to-Service be included in the 2008 NC 4-H Congress, with 2 youth indicating “No” and 13 “Not sure.” When asked what they gained or learned from the service experience, teens emphasized teamwork, responsibility, communication skills, work skills and experience, leadership, sense of accomplishment and pride, value of giving back to the community, meeting new people and working with friends, appreciation and respect for others, and just plain fun. This combination of practical skill-building, fellowship, and cultivation of civic values is quite consistent with the intended purpose for this event. Additional skills such as goal setting, project management, and public relations that might be needed by youth to lead their own community service event, can be learned through other 4-H experiences. Responses to a question about favorite parts of the experience included satisfaction of giving, working with friends, meeting new people, and knowing that you helped someone. These comments corroborate the 2006 program evaluation that found strong links between social and service experiences at 4-H Congress. In that context, Hands-to-Service serves as a bonding experience that reinforces self-efficacy, teamwork, and service to others. This convergence of 4-H values, skills, and social experiences produces a powerful incentive to continue service activities at 4-H Congress as well as in local communities.

Participants also offered suggestions for improvement of next year’s event. These included allowing counties to choose their service activity, providing more and better snacks, supplying directions for returning to campus, reducing assembly time to increase service time, naming county groups when announcing sites, and allowing for more clean up time after the activity. Delegates also offered suggestions for service projects, including working with continuing to work with organizations now collaborating (UNC-TV, etc.), NC Museum of Natural Sciences, and partnering with new organizations. Other more general suggestions included helping nursing homes and services for the elderly, working with animal shelters or projects, serving food banks-shuttles-pantries, working in soup kitchens, helping libraries, rescue missions medical clinics, military support projects, and picking up litter. Others suggested working directly with other youth.

## 2007 NC 4-H Congress Hands to Service – Feedback Summaries

- 561 youth and adult delegates
- 32 service sites/activities
- 17 agencies, organizations or non-profits participating
  
- 56 feedback forms returned
- 65 counties participating in response process

Should Hands to Service be included in 2008 NC 4-H Congress?

Yes	546 (97%)
No	2
Not sure	13

Top 10 things teens gain or learn from Hands to Service (unranked)

1. Teamwork
2. Responsibility
3. Communication Skills
4. Work skills and experience
5. Leadership
6. Sense of accomplishment/sense of pride
7. Value of giving back to the community
8. Meeting new people and working with friends
9. Appreciation/respect for others
10. It's fun!

Suggestions for Improvement: 1) Allow counties to choose service activity; 2) Offer better/more snacks; 3) Give directions back to campus; 4) Allow more time for service activity; 5) Allow more time to get cleaned up after activity; 6) Cut assembly time shorter; 7) Call out county names with sites when announcing during assembly

Favorite Parts of Hands-to-Service: 1) Satisfaction of giving back; 2) Working with friends; 3) Meeting new people; 4) Knowing that you helped someone

Service location Ideas: 1) UNC-TV again!; 2) Museum of Science; 3) Rest homes, nursing homes, services for the elderly; 4) Working directly with kids; 5) Animal shelters, humane society, animal-related projects; 6) Rescue missions; 7) Habitat for Humanity; 8) Ronald McDonald House; 9) Stop Hunger now; 10) Food Bank, Food Shuttle, Food Pantries; 11) Soup Kitchens; 12) Libraries; 13) Medical Clinics; 14) Military support projects; 15) Picking up trash/litter; 16) Big Sweep