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**Monroe County 4-H Youth are Exemplary Leaders in Service
4-H Youth Make Impact by Volunteering in Local Communities**

From creating dog toys to donate to local animal shelters, to sorting food packages at local food banks, to weeding flower beds in local parks, Monroe County youth care about supporting their community.

Monroe County 4-H members participate in community service through community, club, and school events. In December, youth had the opportunity to make seasonal decorations and decorate gingerbread houses with residents in the Memory Care Facility at Creekstone, an assisted living community. This event was part of the Monroe County "Mighty Mondays", a series of monthly events open to all youth in Monroe County where the community has the opportunity to sample activities and learn about what 4-H is.

Over 25 youth, parents, and residents participated in this event. "Decorating gingerbread houses at Creekstone was a great opportunity for our club members to spend time sharing, learning from, and helping others," Leslie Pude, 4-H Friends club leader, said. "Working together brought joy to the kids and the residents and made a great connection that we hope to continue with future events."

Kids had fun creating and decorating with residents as well. "It made me feel good and I made new friends," 4-H Friends club member, Jacob, said.

Some Monroe County 4-H clubs strive to participate in at least one community service activity a month. "We believe exposing kids to a variety of service options and helping them learn that contributing to their community is important... and that it also makes you feel good about yourself," Niki Whilden, Posh Ponies club leader, shared.

Posh Ponies club member, Beatrix, reflects on one of her 4-H club service experiences. "While we were [at the non-profit Pencils and Paper] there we helped to sort supplies and clean, it was a great experience," Beatrix shared. "Even though it had challenging aspects, it had very fun ones too! It was educational and taught me many things about schooling that I did not know. I cannot wait to volunteer there again."

Building Strong and Vibrant New York Communities

Cornell Cooperative Extension is an employer and educator recognized for valuing AA/EEO, Protected Veterans, and Individuals with Disabilities and provides equal program and employment opportunities.

Service projects reflect not only the needs of the community, but also their own interests and passions. The 4-H UNITY (Urban Neighborhoods Improved Through Youth) club, created fleece dog toys to donate to the Verona Street Animal Society, a local Rochester City animal shelter.

"The youth in the UNITY club are all animal lovers," Susan Coyle, 4-H Team Leader, said. "They feel badly for the dogs that are awaiting adoption at the shelter and thought that making toys to cheer the dogs up would help improve their quality of life and chances for adoption."

UNITY club members enjoyed their visit to the animal shelter. "I felt extremely happy [after visiting the animal shelter]," Marlana, 4-H UNITY club participant, shared. "The animals made me smile and I felt proud when we gave them the toys we created."

Some clubs mainly focus on community service; for example, the Busy Bees 4-H club classroom at Mary Cariola Children's Center has completed a number of projects for the community at large and the Mary Cariola Community. According to Busy Bees club leader, Kathy Lee, the Busy Bees club recently hosted a pajama party to collect pajamas, toys, and pillowcases for a local shelter. The club invited other classes at Mary Cariola to join the party and collected over 100 pairs of pajamas to be donated.

During the past year, two Monroe County 4-H clubs collaborated to host a "Baby Shower" at Cameron Community Ministries. Items such as baby wipes, diapers, toys, and clothing were collected by members of the Hilton Horsemen and Posh Ponies clubs for mothers and babies in need. The group also made over 15 fleece blankets for the shower.

"Every 4-H member picked out the fabric and learned a new skill cutting and making the blankets," Posh Ponies club parent and 4-H volunteer, Luann Lanzatella, shared. "The kids sat around the tables talking and laughing while tying the blankets. The different projects that the kids get involved with helps them develop new skills like teamwork, patience, leadership, to think of others, and above all the importance of giving back."

Club collaboration is seen all year round in Monroe County. A favorite community event for 4-H'ers is the annual Mary Cariola Center Petting Zoo. This event has 4-H'ers bring in animals of all sizes for the benefit of the students at the Mary Cariola Center. "The students at Mary Cariola have significant challenges and have often never seen farm type animals," Whilden shared. "Our members brought rabbits, a turkey, chickens, and a hedgehog for students to pet and visit with. We love participating in this event each year; our kids love to share and talk about their animals."

The fun is shared by all at the annual Mary Cariola Center Petting Zoo. "We are so lucky that our 4-H friends bring in a number of baby farm animals, Oprah Whinnie-free the mini horse and bunnies, chickens, etc.," Lee said. "All of the students just love the animals and we appreciate that our 4-H family comes together to make a wonderful experience for the children at Mary Cariola Center."

Some service projects can involve more than just 4-H youth, some projects include effort from family and friends. Hilton Horsemen club members and their families participate in the annual "5k for FA", a charity run supporting the Fanconi Anemia Research Fund. The club has raised over \$1500 in the last three years for this event.

Monroe County 4-H youth have put many hours into fundraising for local non-profit organizations. For some of these fundraisers, youth have been able to tour the facilities and see the benefits of their work firsthand. For the past two years, Hilton Horsemen club members have collected pop tabs to be donated to the Ronald McDonald House. "The Ronald McDonald House takes these metal tabs to a local metal scrap yard who pays them double for their monetary weighed value," Hilton Horsemen leader, Jen Schwab, shared. "These types of community donations may seem small, but as we learned on our tour, every donation helps to fund and maintain the house... It was an honor to be able to tour the Ronald McDonald House and we are proud to live in such a caring community."

The Monroe County 4-H Program is offered through Cornell Cooperative Extension to the youth of Monroe County. 4-H is a worldwide youth development program open to all youth ages 5 to 19, who want to have fun, learn new skills, and explore the world. In return, youth who participate in 4-H find a supportive environment and opportunities for hands-on or "experiential" learning about things that interest them.

Learn more at <http://monroe.cce.cornell.edu/4-h-youth-development>.



Monroe County 4-H youth share and meet new animals at the annual Mary Cariola Center Petting Zoo. Photo by Theresa Lippa.