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4-H UNITY Teens Join Welding Workshop Growing Empowerment While Learning Workforce Skills

In mid August, teens from the Monroe County 4-H UNITY program at Agape Haven of Abundance visited Ironwood Studios in Springwater, NY to learn about the field of welding. The teens learned about welding techniques as well as vocational opportunities in the welding field from professional metal sculptor Stacey Mrva. Mrva hopes to provide opportunities for young people from the city of Rochester, especially young women, to use welding as a means to empowerment and to forge their own lives' paths through welding.

As Mrva began the first demonstration and the first round of sparks began to fly, a sense of excitement and astonishment filled the room. The youth followed along carefully, then one by one were led to first carve their initials into metal, later moving on to create their own welded 4-H clover. Mrva shared her thoughts on the experience, "Welding with the teens from Agape Haven was such a wonderful experience. The remarkable courage displayed by these young individuals was truly inspiring. As they each took their turn, their initial apprehension and unease gradually dissipated. Witnessing their mutual encouragement and their willingness to explore a completely unfamiliar territory was undeniably rewarding."

Some of the youth instantly took to the experience, quickly turning to become teachers themselves as they guided and encouraged fellow participants in the activities. Finding their spark among sparks, these youth discovered a sense of accomplishment within themselves, and possibly opened the door to a future interest or career. Not only did the youth create a physical, tangible creation to show for their work, but they were also forming something deep within themselves.

Julia Oakley, executive director at Agape, shared that she felt a shift in energy while the group was at the studio. The teens seemed more at ease, opened up to one another, and came together as a team. 4-H Educator Jessica Reid added, "You could really sense the energy and aura around the group change - that they were finding something special within themselves. I could tell the group really benefited from being able to relax and unwind." As Mrva led the youth through the day's activities, the teens benefitted not only from learning new skills and discovering opportunities, but by experiencing a moment of mindfulness as well.

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For Mrva, the experience also left a positive mark. She said, "It was an honor to share my passion for welding with them. I look forward to showing more young people and especially girls that they can weld too!" While the group arrived at Ironwood Studios not quite knowing what to expect from the experience, these teens left with a newfound sense of empowerment and the tools to develop their confidence to enter the workforce, on whatever path they may choose.

4-H UNITY (Urban Neighborhoods Improved Through Youth) is part of the Children, Youth and Families At-Risk (CYFAR) Program. The project is supported by Smith Lever funds, National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research, New York State 4-H and Cornell University. 4-H UNITY is conducted in Endicott and Rochester by Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Broome County and CCE of Monroe County in close partnership with New York State 4-H, Cornell University.

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 aged 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 about 4-H at <http://monroe.cce.cornell.edu/4-h-youth-development>.



Youth learn welding skills.



Youth learn proper safety for welding.

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