Serving DuPage, Kane, and Kendall Counties

ILLINOIS EXTENSION 2022
We entered 2022 knowing our continued challenges with the pandemic would not go away but would look different than the previous years. Our staff continued to be innovative, resilient, and flexible in the look and function of programs. Our volunteers continued to move forward doing the good work they do in local communities across DuPage, Kane, and Kendall counties.

How we work, shop, and interact with others has all changed; yet, some things remain the same. We want safe, healthy, and encouraging environments where our children can thrive. We want to make healthier nutrition and lifestyle choices, grow gardens, and protect our natural resources. We are constantly searching for ways to improve our lives and lifestyles. The world has changed, but University of Illinois Extension continues to be your trusted source for reliable, unbiased information.

As part of the land-grant system, University of Illinois Extension was established not only to provide world-class education and pioneer research and discovery, but to put learning and discovery into practice to benefit the health and well-being of residents and communities in every part of Illinois.

We believe in and are committed to our mission linking local communities to the university, to develop programs, tools, and knowledge that will support needed change. Our mission is to align research to needs and translate research into action plans that allow all Illinois families, businesses, and community leaders to solve problems, make informed decisions, and adapt to changes and opportunities.

Don’t be afraid to reach out to us. We love to find new supporters, collaborators, partners, and clients. Thank you for taking the time to read our stories in this report. I hope you can see the impact Extension, our staff, and volunteers make on our local communities.
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

2022 Engagement

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>643 Communities Served</th>
<th>720K+ Program Attendees</th>
<th>14.5M+ Webpage Views</th>
<th>22.9M+ Social Media Impressions</th>
<th>900K+ YouTube Views</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>488 Educational Sessions/Week (25K+ Annually)</td>
<td>95 Online Courses Accessed by 12K+ People</td>
<td>7,062 Local Government Education Webinar Reach</td>
<td>1,807 4-H Clubs</td>
<td>178,341 4-H Affiliations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Partnerships

| 5,941 Program Volunteers | 269 Community Gardens | 1,030 School Partners |

Resource Generation

| $15,732,391 Value of Volunteer Contributions | $223,639 Value of Donated Garden Produce |
After moving to the U.S. as a child, Matias Habib felt like an outsider. He struggled with language barriers and social anxiety and was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder. However, with time and new experiences, Habib realized those differences were vital tools to empower him.

“After struggling with cognitive, social, and language barriers, 4-H gave me a place to connect and develop my passion for science and research,” said Habib, who is now a high school senior. “Through 4-H, I met kids who shared my interests, especially in natural sciences. I learned how to develop a product that could help farmers and gardeners facing the challenges my family faced in a safe and sustainable way.”

A member of the local 4-H Teen Science Ambassador program and the Millbrook Mighty Ones 4-H Club, Habib found both community and confidence. With the support and guidance of 4-H leaders, he went on to develop his own patent-pending bio-pesticide and startup business, and it all started with a 4-H entomology project.

When his family’s orchard was attacked by the invasive Japanese Beetle, Habib began researching, testing, and developing a natural solution. His bio-pesticide spray, TerraBuster, has shown exceptional results with eco-conscious production practices and ingredients. He funded and staffed his growing business and is expanding his product line to repel other pests that threaten healthy crops.

In fall 2022, National 4-H Council named Habib one of four winners of the prestigious National 4-H Youth in Action Award, sponsored by Bayer. As a national winner, Habib will receive a $5,000 higher education scholarship and spend 2023 sharing his 4-H story with youth and 4-H alumni around the nation, as well as serve as the official 4-H youth spokesperson for agriculture.

Soon to be a graduate of Illinois Math and Science Academy, Habib plans to pursue a career in which he can develop innovative solutions to protect the environment.

“We are proud to honor our 2023 Youth in Action winners, a group of exceptional young people who have overcome obstacles and made an incredible impact on their communities,” says Jennifer Sirangelo, president and CEO, National 4-H Council. “By empowering these youth and fostering their skills to make change, they, in turn, can inspire thousands of other young people wanting to make a difference. When given the tools they need to lead, 4-H’ers are becoming the next generation of changemakers in their communities and for our country.”

Contributed by Carissa Nelson, Illinois 4-H Media Communications Manager
**SPECIAL INTEREST CLUBS PROVIDE UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES**

By volunteering through 4-H, adults can share their passion with the next generation. DuPage 4-H parent Kyla Muhammad did just that with Eco-Investigators, a 4-H special interest (SPIN) club in Bolingbrook. “I wanted to provide fun, unique nature-based education aimed at igniting a spark to understand and explore natural systems and to deepen their appreciation of the gifts of nature.” Youth learned about taxonomy, botany, natural materials, edible plants and herbs, entomology, ways to support wildlife, plant adaptations, and various ecological concepts. Working with 4-H staff, Muhammad wanted the club accessible for youth in a corner of the county without many SPIN Club options. The group met monthly, with each session centered around a different theme using hands-on projects members could take home. The experience allowed members to practice being environmental stewards, gardeners, and nature observers.

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**4-H MEMBER LEADS FOOD-PACKING EVENT FOR KIDS**

4-H teen leader Justin Gergen of Lombard earned a $1,000 grant for the “Snacks Kids Love” project. He organized more than 100 others, raising awareness that youth also experience homelessness or food insecurity. In one of the most well-resourced areas of the state, the project literally provided a “taste of normalcy” as hungry youth were able to enjoy many of the same treats as their peers. With help from his sister, Julia, Justin evaluated grocery options and budgeted properly. Together, DuPage County 4-H members created 440 donation bags filled with fruit snacks, trail mix, granola bars, apple sauce, and breakfast biscuits. 4-H’ers also created cards to help brighten the recipient’s day. They made bags for youth with allergies or other food sensitivities. “I believe that inviting others and turning the service into a learning experience is a great way to spread awareness and start remedying these issues. It is by coming together and working as a team that we can make a real difference in the community,” says Gergen.

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**4-H TEEN LEADER TO LAUNCH PROJECT INTO SPACE**

A dream come true! 4-H Teen Science Ambassador Krish Nangia of Naperville helped lead a multi-state 4-H team to victory at the Go For Launch! contest hosted by Higher Orbits, a non-profit STEM organization, in summer 2022. The team’s winning experiment will launch to the International Space Station in 2023, with the goal to better feed astronauts in the future. The group is studying spirulina growth under different lighting conditions in space. Spirulina is an edible biomass found in bodies of water, like lakes, that helps maintain a healthy immune system, is high in protein, and assists in the process of producing oxygen. “This is one of the biggest accomplishments of my life,” says Nangia. “I have loved the concept of space since I was young, but never expected to participate in something like this. Thanks to 4-H, I have just converted a fantasy into a reality.”

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**4-H PROGRAMS BOUNCE BACK FROM PANDEMIC EFFECTS**

The 2021-22 4-H year wrapped up, marking a 44% growth for Kane County program enrollment, which included both new members and members who returned after time off during the pandemic. In 2022, the tri-county 4-H program interest form also received 283 requests from local families, many coming after large events, like the new 4-H year “kick off” events in each county. The team also expanded offerings available to budding 4-H members ages 5 to 7, and added more options to engage middle-school and high-school students. Overall, tri-county 4-H’ers exhibited a total of 1,690 4-H show projects in 2022. “Each year, 4-H fair projects lead me to try new skills and discover new passions,” says Evelyn Scheel, longtime member. “4-H enhanced my curiosity, experiences, and learning. It provided a supportive community that encouraged me through my successes and mistakes.”
OUTREACH HELPS NEIGHBORS BE MORE COMFORTABLE WITH UNFAMILIAR FOODS

Amidst the pandemic, DuPage County food access sites reported dramatic increases in emergency food support needs, sometimes up to 200% or 300%, according to the community outreach workers. Both job loss and higher cost of living contributed to the rise, yet pantries faced overages of some foods because the foods were unfamiliar to the population served by the pantry. For example, West Chicago Food Pantry secured 250 pounds of frozen venison, but the bulk of their clients resisted choosing it. To avoid waste and help hungry neighbors, the SNAP-Education team provided familiar recipes, like chili and tacos, that featured venison instead of other meats. Extension staff prepared and provided samples of venison dishes for clients to taste, as well as helpful cards that explained how to prepare venison. Other examples of surplus foods included garbanzo beans, canned beef, dried cranberries, and a variety of fresh fruit.

‘HEALTHY CENTS’ PROGRAM HELPS FAMILIES MAKE SENSE OF MEAL PLANNING

At Marie Wilkinson Food Pantry in Aurora, SNAP-Ed staff taught the bilingual Healthy Cents workshops twice a week from June to October at the pantry’s urban garden and grille. The Healthy Cents program is a multi-part series focused on budgeting and nutrition and features interactive cooking lessons. According to Christina Campos, the SNAP-Education team engaged local families and made the workshops fun. “We serve the most vulnerable families in our community. University of Illinois Extension helped our families try new fruits, vegetables, and recipes and assisted them with budgeting and shopping. We enjoy working with Extension because they understand the culture and needs of the families we serve.” The sessions were so popular, the garden manager built bleachers for the demonstrations, and clients ask when they will return. Extension also hosted the program at several other local pantries.

SHARE TABLES REDUCE WASTE, INCREASE NUTRITIOUS OPTIONS FOR HUNGRY STUDENTS

The local SNAP-Education team participated in a pilot program to improve share tables in Kane County schools. Share tables are a designated location within school lunchrooms where students can drop off uneaten and unopened lunch items. Other students who may want more food can pick them up. The goal is to reduce food waste and provide students more food access. Foods allowed on the share tables have some criteria; for example, an apple sauce or whole banana is allowed, but cut fruit or hot foods are not. The pilot project allows the local Extension team to recruit schools that want to implement or enhance share tables. Staff are being trained now and will help with pilot program specific materials and assistance. Collected data will assist the state team.

EXTENSION ADVISES ORGANIZATIONS AS THEY COMBINE IN NEW SPACE

After the Lombard Villa Park Food Pantry merged with The Outreach House, all services were consolidated under one roof, allowing guests to choose their own food instead of picking up pre-packaged boxes. To assist with the transition, SNAP-Ed provided layout ideas, healthy messaging, and signage to encourage guests to choose healthy foods. “These additions brighten our space, making it even more welcoming to guests, and also provide easy-to-read suggestions for making simple changes to improve our guests’ nutrition,” says Catherine Lynott, executive director of The Outreach House. In addition, community outreach workers also promote featured monthly recipes with pantry staples and give out food samples of new recipes. “It’s a great opportunity for our guests to learn about simple nutrition tips and then make choices in our food pantry they can implement when they go home.”
Food insecurity continues to rise due to impacts from the pandemic and other complex issues. The Northern Illinois Food Bank reported a nearly 30% increase in neighborhood traffic at food pantries in Kane County. In response to this growing concern, the Kane County Hunger Relief Network, facilitated by the University of Illinois Extension SNAP-Ed program, hosted a Hunger Summit in September at Northern Illinois Food Bank.

“This is to create a platform for food pantries and other nonprofits that work with them to have access to elected officials on all levels within the county,” says Christopher Mortenson, agency relations area leader with the Northern Illinois Food Bank. “We’re all aware that there is a great need for better food security within the county.”

The event explored the extent of hunger in the county, its implications, and possible solutions. Speakers included experts from the Kane County Health Department, Kane County Sheriff’s Office, Food for Greater Elgin, and Northern Illinois Food Bank. Presenters demonstrated how hunger leads to difficult social and personal issues, such as an increase in violence, crime, and health problems. For youth, it can lead to poor attendance or participation in school and negatively impact their ability to grow and learn.

The Kane County Hunger Relief Network, spearheaded in part by Illinois Extension, remains committed to advancing toward solutions.

Illinois Extension furthers the mission of Northern Illinois Food Bank and the network of member agencies we have the opportunity to serve.... I have seen the impact the Illinois Extension team has on pantry directors, giving them access to time and resources they otherwise would not have been able to dedicate and implement.

Christopher Mortenson, Northern Illinois Food Bank

“Through the relationship with Illinois Extension, the Northern Illinois Food Bank has been able to help provide additional resources for pantry directors,” says Mortenson. “These resources start with the neighbor in mind, and it is evident by how accessible the material is.”

A few key examples include developing bilingual signage and recipe cards to introduce new and healthy produce items that might be unfamiliar to neighbors, as well as coaching pantries on new practices to enhance their physical space and empowering clients to make a more educated decision when feeding themselves and their families.
As a child, Kevin Patrick made many special memories with his mom at Willowbrook Wildlife Center in Glen Ellyn. “She taught me that even the smallest creatures need a helping hand once in a while,” he recalled.

Today, the reverse also rings true for Patrick who receives a helping hand from his work with animals and one animal in particular, Willow, his service dog.

“I was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from my service in the United States military,” he says. “Navigating the complexities of PTSD can be a very confusing time for veterans returning home from war. Willow isn’t just my service dog, she’s a great companion, too. She has helped me to navigate some of those complexities and continues to be my right-hand girl.”

Continuing that passion for wildlife and the outdoors fostered by his mom, Patrick became an intern at the same wildlife center. “The staff and volunteer Master Naturalists taught me how I can make a positive change in our environment,” he says. “The education that organizations like [this] provide to the public is an invaluable resource.”

Both encouraged and inspired by these experiences, he decided to apply to train as a University of Illinois Extension Master Naturalist. But he didn’t do it alone. Willow stood by his side, unphased by class distractions, including the herpetology unit where the duo met various snakes. Willow was given her own Master Naturalist name badge and, upon graduation, even her own Master Naturalist certificate.

“My goal as a Master Naturalist is to continue learning as much as I can about our environment and find ways in which I can give back to our community. Our environment needs us now more than ever. Every volunteer, citizen scientist, and Master Naturalist has the ability to make significant contributions to the overall success of our conservation efforts.”

Kevin Patrick, Master Naturalist
SEED SWAP CELEBRATES 5TH ANNIVERSARY OF HELPING OTHERS GROW
Each winter, Kendall County Master Gardeners host a free event to provide both knowledge and seeds to the community. Participants take home a variety of free vegetable, flower, herb, and native plant seeds. Seeds are collected and provided by Extension volunteers or donated by local companies. According to volunteer Laura Spang, the goal of the event is to share seeds with the community, to share the Master Gardeners’ passion for plants, and to share research-based information with those interested in gardening and natural resources. Spang, who is both a trained Master Gardener and Master Naturalist, said they also hope to increase awareness and interest in native plants. Volunteers answer questions, showcase seed-starting equipment, discuss seed-saving techniques, and guide participants to educational handouts on various aspects of gardening, from soil testing to harvesting vegetables.

MASTER GARDENERS HARVEST PRODUCE AND HOPE FOR A COMMUNITY
More than 20 years ago, Elaine Weil became a Master Gardener to grow her skills and share it with her community. As a teacher at a SNAP-eligible school in West Chicago, she worked with colleagues to start a community garden. “Our purpose was to provide an opportunity for students to learn about gardening and where their food comes from, as well as to try new healthy foods, increase physical activity, and work cooperatively with each other for a shared goal.” Because fresh vegetables are expensive, the garden provides fresh produce for the food pantry right at Anne M. Jeans School. Since students grow the food, they are interested in trying new types of vegetables and new healthy recipes using them. Weil says she loves being stopped in the hallway by excited students who want to share stories about things they are trying to grow at home. She’s often asked, “When will spring come so we can garden again?”

IDEA GARDEN PLANTS A PIECE OF HISTORY AND REAPS A RECORD NUMBER OF VISITS
Each year, the Kane County Idea Garden showcases innovative gardening methods and fun designs that are easy to replicate at home. In 2022, it also featured two historic tomato projects, including “space” seeds that spent five years orbiting Earth. In 1990, schools across the country grew the seeds as a large science experiment, and when Master Gardeners uncovered a leftover kit, they planted them in the Idea Garden. The second tomato project stemmed from a partnership with local libraries to grow a unique heirloom variety which originally came to America with Sicilian immigrants who sewed the seeds into clothes to keep them from being confiscated. The Inciardi tomato nearly went extinct, but thanks to Chicagoland gardeners, it is back and thriving. The Idea Garden also received a “Know More Grow More” grant to increase awareness, including a new, eye-catching sign. The 2022 open houses set a record for the number of visitors.

MASTER NATURALISTS BURN WITH A DESIRE TO HELP MOTHER EARTH
In spring or fall, smoke seen near grasslands and forests may signal a prescribed fire set to intentionally manage the local natural ecosystem. The use of prescribed fire is increasing throughout Illinois, and this management tool requires careful planning, proper safety measures like firebreaks, and specialized training and equipment. Prescribed burns help control some invasive species, keep woody areas from encroaching on prairies and savannas, stimulate native species, reduce leaf litter buildup in forests, and increase species diversity. They even reduce the risk of dangerous and damaging wildfires. In November, newly trained Master Naturalist Cheryl Smith volunteered with Campton Township Parks in Kane County for her first prescribed burn. “I learned so much,” says Smith. “I am doing so many cool things after taking the Master Naturalist course!”
MASTER GARDENERS RECOGNIZED FOR OUTSTANDING COMMUNITY EFFORTS

At the 2022 state conference, the Illinois Master Gardener program honored Gail Sanders of Carol Stream and Marty Yochum of Elgin for outstanding leadership, as well as the Sherman Natural Prairie and Community Garden for teamwork. Yochum helps lead that same Elgin-based team which has served 916 community gardeners, donated more than 3,000 pounds of fresh produce to local food pantries, and has helped mentor six other community gardens. Yochum not only develops materials, mentors new gardeners, organizes events, presents and teaches, but she also was instrumental in mentoring Elgin Community College students. Sanders, who volunteers at the award-winning DuPage Care Center therapeutic horticulture program, is known as a go-to person. She takes on organization, planning, and preparation for events and daily tasks. She also shares her time with the Western DuPage Special Recreation Association, the Bloomingdale Garden Club community plot, the Cantigny Park docent team, and Kline Creek Farm.

4-H VOLUNTEERS INDUCTED INTO ILLINOIS 4-H HALL OF FAME

Jim McGuire of DuPage County, Doris Braddock of Kane County, and Mary Schobert of Kendall County joined the 2022 Illinois 4-H Hall of Fame. Volunteers are the backbone of the 4-H program, and these fellow residents give selflessly to educate and inspire the next generation. McGuire has served as president, treasurer, fair board director, and now fair manager. His passion is to provide a place for 4-H youth, community members, families, and all residents to gather and celebrate. Braddock has embraced 4-H at every stage of life – as a member in Missouri, as a mother and a grandmother in Kane County, as an Extension professional with 30 years of service, and now as a volunteer and show superintendent. Schobert also shares those milestone roles and participates in many committees, including the Kendall County Livestock Auction which she’s served on for 20 years.

4-H TEENS EARN AWARDS AND SCHOLARSHIPS FROM ILLINOIS 4-H FOUNDATION

The career achievements of Illinois 4-H members were lauded at the Illinois 4-H Celebration of Excellence where the Illinois 4-H Foundation awarded $45,000 in scholarships to 4-H youth for the 2021-22 4-H year. Five teens were honored from the tri-county area: Food systems: Madeline Schulz, DuPage County; Leadership: Krish Nangia, DuPage County; Natural Resources and Environmental Science: Emily Reppy, Kendall County; and STEM and Robotics: Justin Gergen, DuPage County, and Sydney Reppy, Kendall County. The scholarship program is supported through private donors and the Illinois 4-H Foundation and are based on merit and a demonstrated standard of 4-H excellence. In addition six local 4-H members earned diamond- and emerald-level Experience Awards: Gauri Venkatraman, DuPage County; and Emily Reppy, Sydney Reppy, Sofie Heidrich, Abi Munar, and Annie Ralston of Kendall County.

COUNTY BOARD HONORS DUPAGE CARE CENTER PROGRAM

In November, the DuPage County Board honored the dedication of DuPage County Master Gardeners and the amazing therapeutic horticulture program at DuPage Care Center (DPCC). For 30 years, DPCC residents have benefited from the garden program which helps keep them physically active, connected to others, and mentally stimulated. In addition, the flowers and vegetables produced are used at the center for all residents and leftovers are donated locally to those in need. The DuPage County Master Gardener team has earned numerous awards and attracted thousands of dollars in grants to support the continued operation and expansion of the garden and the therapeutic horticulture program. Over the past 13 years, DuPage County Master Gardener volunteers have spent an estimated 21,440 hours facilitating and serving this program, which is equivalent to a value of more than $540,000 to the community.
### Overall service and value provided

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Value</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>454 Extension Volunteers</td>
<td>38,788 Service Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>309 Master Gardener and Master Naturalist Volunteers</td>
<td>2,034 Pounds of Produce Donated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3,257 SNAP-Ed Partnerships</td>
<td>76 SNAP-Ed Partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>899 4-H Club Members</td>
<td>7,856 4-H Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 Local Government Leaders Receiving Resources</td>
<td>454 Extension Volunteers</td>
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### People and partners supported

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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>242 Extension Partnerships</td>
<td>32,113 Overall Educational Program Attendance</td>
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<td>76 SNAP-Ed Partnerships</td>
<td>3,257 SNAP-Ed Reach</td>
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<td>61 Local Government Leaders Receiving Resources</td>
<td>40% Minority Youth Engaged with 4-H</td>
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Deanna K. Roby-Vorgias, County Director

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### Horticulture and environment

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<tr>
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<td>1,690 Expert Consultations and Help Desk Services</td>
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### Nutrition and wellness

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<td>76 SNAP-Ed Partnerships</td>
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### Youth development

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### STAFF SERVING DUPAGE, KANE, AND KENDALL COUNTIES

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<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>4-H Youth Development</th>
<th>Natural Resources</th>
<th>SNAP-Education</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DuPage County</strong></td>
<td>- Donna Nuger Extension Educator</td>
<td>- Sarah Fellerer Program Coordinator</td>
<td>- Christine Birns Extension Educator</td>
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<td>- Leilah Siegel Extension Educator</td>
<td>- Danielle Stojan Program Coordinator</td>
<td>- Shelley Booth Community Worker</td>
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<td>- Kim Einsaule Program Coordinator</td>
<td>- Jamie Viebch Program Coordinator</td>
<td>- Jocelyn Briones Cid Community Worker</td>
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<td>- Andrea Farrier Program Coordinator</td>
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<td>- Yolanda Escobedo Community Worker</td>
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<td>- Katie McFarland Program Coordinator</td>
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<td>- Cindy Glavin Program Coordinator</td>
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<td>- Nancy Reppe Program Coordinator</td>
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<td>- Olivia Melgoza Program Coordinator</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Kane County</strong></td>
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<td>- Lisa Mills Community Worker</td>
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<td><strong>Kendall County</strong></td>
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#### STAFF SERVING DUPAGE, KANE, AND KENDALL COUNTIES

- **Deanna Roby-Vorgias**
  - County Director
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- **Carrie Hubbard**
  - Office Support Specialist
- **Carrie Hubbard**
  - Office Support Specialist
- **Melissa Schumaker**
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#### ONLINE

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