

EXTENSION  
SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL, CONSUMER  
& ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

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*4-H Tech Changemakers, is a new program in which teens teach adults about technology and how to use it safely. A recent training held at an assisted living facility focused on the importance of strong passwords and responsible behavior on the Internet.*

## 4-H Tech Changemakers Teach Digital Literacy Skills to Adult Community Members

A new program called 4-H Tech Changemakers was launched in University of Illinois Extension, Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit to empower youth to help close the broadband internet gap. This nationally led program is a partnership between Microsoft and National 4-H Council in which trained teens assist adults to learn new technology and how to use it safely.

Currently in the U.S., there are 23.4 million people who lack broadband internet access. Access is only half of the problem with feeling secure and knowledgeable enough to adopt and use the technology being the other half. This partnership elevates teens to be teachers of adults to help increase their comfort level in utilizing new technology. (National 4-H Council, 2018)

4-H teen leaders in the Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit have engaged a broad range of community organizations to learn about community issues. They created community action plans that incorporated technology into solving a community issue, and have implemented technology training with several diverse groups such as Common Place adult learners, U of I Extension staff, and senior residents at Courtyard Estates. Since its launch in July 2019, 4-H Tech Changemaker teens have trained over 40 adult learners.

The Tech Changemakers work collaboratively with an adult volunteer to teach digital literacy and internet safety and security to adult learners. Digital literacy refers to the ability to effectively use technology to interact and communicate. The most often requested lessons in this unit include online safety and security, using social media, and learning about different types of devices (smartphones, tablets, etc.)

After a session on internet safety and security, participants stated they learned how to create more secure passwords and that they were planning to implement some of the strategies they learned.

After a recent training at a supportive living center, the activity coordinator, Bri Bohanan shared her appreciation. "I just wanted to say a heartfelt thank you to the group that came and helped my seniors the other day! What a kind thing to do for our senior community. I know that my seniors really appreciated it and really loved the idea of having young people help them with technological questions. I can't thank you enough from the bottom of my heart - what a kind and generous thing you guys did!"



Photo by Judy Schmidt | Illinois Extension

The teens will continue their digital literacy programs as they expand to libraries and other senior groups throughout the year. "The benefits of this program go beyond the digital literacy gained by the participants," stated Judy Schmidt, 4-H Youth Development Educator. "The teens have gained so much as well. They have enhanced their communication skills and truly enjoy interacting with the participants."