

EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

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Mason County 4-H Federation “Joy Project 2021” Promotes Mental, Emotional, and Social Health

After months of being sheltered in place in 2020, Mason 4-H Federation teens were feeling the emotional effects and decided to do something to help others who may be feeling the same. Combining their leadership and program planning skills with their creative skills and empathy, they launched The Joy Project 2021 in April.

“The Joy Project 2021 is a service-learning initiative meant to promote social, emotional, and mental health awareness, with special attention to those of the teenage community,” shares Joli Pierson, Mason County 4-H program coordinator. By offering details of their personal social-emotional struggles, along with their coping mechanisms, the Federation members hoped to help others find their joy.

The project originally started as a social media campaign and then grew to include cards that were mailed and handed out.

“It is hard to truly measure the impact of this project,” stated Anita Wilkinson, Extension communications coordinator. “Our current social media hits are at 6,000, plus 156 blog post reads, but more important than the numbers are the people who were encouraged and maybe even led to professional help thanks to this project.”

The mental health effects of the pandemic are more likely to have a significant impact on teenagers, as documented in poll results from [C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital](#). “In this particular group of 4-H teens, most expressed common feelings of isolation, loneliness, anxiety, as well as inactive and somewhat depressed lifestyles. Members also shared their insights about peers who were also dealing with similar feelings,” mentioned Joli.

Recognizing their own need for confidential and easily accessible mental health resources, the teen group opted to turn their emotional struggles into a positive approach to help others. Included in Joy Project messages are resource links in which someone could reference if in a social, emotional, or mental health crisis.

The teens provided written submissions with their personal thoughts, as well as photos, videos, and original artworks. Pieces of those submissions were put into professional designs to be used as public service announcements on social media, [University of Illinois Extension](#) website, and printed cards.

“The Federation members gained a lot from the whole process,” Joli explained. “Once all of the planning, designing, and editing processes were done, the group was very excited to finally get together to sign and mail cards. So far we have delivered 210 cards. Another beautiful piece of this project is that the posts online will be easy to continue sharing for a long time to come.”

To view the unedited writings, drawings, and other creations submitted by the 4-H youth, visit go.illinois.edu/JoyProject on the [Connection Corner](#) blog.



Alexandria R. writes, “Through times of stress, my horse Storm brought me a lot of happiness. He became my rock and my reason to keep fighting. I encourage you to find your own “rock” whether it is a hobby, an animal friend, anything where you find joy.”

Alexandria’s photo and quote are an example of The Joy Project 2021 submissions by Mason County 4-H Federation members.

See more Joy Projects and access resources at go.illinois.edu/joyProject

Joli Pierson

4-H Program Coordinator
Mason County
jkpierso@illinois.edu