

Bringing Knowledge to Life in

St. Clair County

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Seniors learn nutrition on the frontline

Share Our Strength's Operation Frontline is a nutrition education program developed to address the root causes of hunger in the U.S. and sponsored by Tyson Foods.

Chef Rachelle Bonelli of "Rachelle's on the Go", Greg Kozlowski of Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeast Michigan, Mary Taylor of St Clair County Council on Aging, and Lori Stephens-Brown, St Clair County MSU Extension educator, recently presented this program to 12 local foster grandparents. Sound nutrition, food budgeting, healthy food selection, food safety, and food preparation skills were taught in six lessons.

The foster grandparents enjoyed interactive cooking lessons, nutrition lessons and a grocery store tour. Each week, Tyson Foods supplied each senior with ingredients to make the dishes that were demonstrated at home.

Operation Frontline offered each participant the tools to make healthy, safe, and economical food choices.



Seniors make healthy snacks at the Council on Aging kitchen.

Teens guide 4-H through new advisory council

The 4-H Teen Advisory Council was formed to give young people a voice in their 4-H program. The members will have the opportunity to provide input on 4-H activities and offerings.

In addition to giving input to the 4-H program staff, the young people will have the chance to develop skills that they'll use throughout their lives, regardless of the life paths they choose.

Fourteen youths from ten 4-H clubs are serving on the teen advisory. The group took part in a lock-in during January to conduct team building exercises and get to know each other.

One exercise involved moving a number of different sized balls from one location to another. The ball sat on a metal ring which had strings attached and the group was required to work together to move the balls without letting them fall off the metal ring.

In work sessions the youths talked about the current 4-H program, areas or topics they want to address, decided on the meeting schedule and came up with a mission statement for the council. "The purpose of the 4-H Teen Advisory Council is to give youth a voice in the 4-H Program".

Future plans involve communication skills training (verbal and written), conflict resolution and leadership skill building. These activities will be part of the regular bi-monthly meetings.

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Michigan State University Extension helps people improve their lives through an educational process that applies knowledge to critical issues, needs and opportunities. Offices in counties across the state link the research of the land-grant university, MSU, to challenges facing communities. Citizens serving on county Extension councils regularly help select focus areas for programming. MSU Extension is funded jointly by county boards of commissioners, the state through Michigan State University and federally through the US Department of Agriculture.



SMILE newsletter helps families cope with divorce

In cooperation with St. Clair County Friend of Court, families with children who are going through a divorce must attend an educational session to learn how to help their children cope, improve communication with their ex-spouses and manage custody issues.

MSU Extension provides a follow up newsletter series that presents more information about these sensitive topics.

More than 300 residents received “Divorce – Start Making It Livable for Everyone” (SMILE) last year.

A survey was conducted in August to determine whether the newsletter was effectively providing information. Some of the responses showed:

- 72 percent of respondents rated the newsletter as being very helpful in their family transition,
- 81 percent felt the newsletter helped them assist their children in adjusting to the divorce transition,
- After reading the newsletter, 81 percent felt they are more effective at practicing single parenting,
- 78 percent feel they are developing a closer relationship with their children,
- 65 percent felt they had more constructive communication with their ex-spouses.

Inmates receive help accessing community services

St. Clair County MSU Extension’s Family and Consumer Science staff began working with inmates at the new St. Clair County Intervention Center in December.

Each week the educators offer classes on re-entry and release planning services. Inmates learn about community resources and services and how to access them. Effective communication and goal setting are also part of the classes.

From December to mid-March, 85 male and 66 female inmates have attended classes.

One recent participant shared with the other inmates that they were all very lucky to be in the class, and that these classes have been the most thought provoking and helpful of all the programs he has participated in.

Explore, experience, achieve through 4-H mentoring

A three-year project focused on expanding St. Clair County mentoring programs is moving into its second year. 4-H staff members are recruiting caring adults who can serve as positive role models for youths for a minimum commitment of one hour per week for one year.

Studies have shown that mentoring programs that pair young people with supportive adults have a significant contribution to the youngsters’ well-being and development.

The Community Mentoring Coalition which includes Diversion Unit of Juvenile Court, Girl Scouts Michigan Waterways Council, Department of Human Services, Community Counseling & Mentoring Services, NorServ Group Ltd., and Bridge Builders was established by MSU Extension Mentoring Americorps volunteer Gwen Brockdorff, to identify the established mentoring programs, avoid duplication of efforts, support mentoring program staff members and provide mentor training, mentor/mentee activities and identify resources available for adult/youth matches.

Following a review of existing programs in St. Clair County, MSU Extension staff members established a mentoring program for at-risk youths between ages 8 and 17 from the Diversion program of Family Court. Youth in this program are not yet in the juvenile court system.

As a result of providing services to these youths, educators expect to reduce the frequency and/or severity of youths entering the juvenile court system.

The young people involved will also develop positive relationships, learn skills and develop competencies through support and socialization events and activities.

Adults interested in becoming mentors must go through an application process, submit to a criminal history check, be interviewed, and attend an eight-hour training program. Please consider being a mentor.

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