



SOLUTIONS *for* NORTH CAROLINA

The Cooperative Extension Program at North Carolina A&T State University



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SOLUTIONS for NORTH CAROLINA

The Cooperative Extension Program at North Carolina A&T State University



Cooperative Extension: We're Here for You

THE COOPERATIVE EXTENSION PROGRAM at North Carolina A&T State University is here for you.

Through hurricanes, floods, tornadoes and other natural disasters; through job layoffs and job burnout, we are here for you.

When you have problems with your crops and your livestock we'll come to your farm to help you.

We'll assist you in providing for the developmental, emotional, physical and financial well being of your family. We provide an array of educational resources and tools to fit your needs.

Extension is here for you day and night, on your farm, in your community, with your family, across the state. We develop

programs that help improve your life. We work on weekends. Sometimes we travel the country to find the best options and the most effective research to address your needs. The solutions we provide go beyond 8-to-5 boundaries because your problems don't happen on a specific timetable.

Our flexibility in serving our audience means that people such as Deborah Womack, a family and consumer sciences educator for Forsyth County Extension, is out in the community delivering financial management education long past the traditional work day. You'll read more about her work in this document.

Our commitment to resolving your problems also takes on a personal touch

for people such as Wayne Rowland, an agricultural and natural resources technician. He helps protect the communities of Vance County, not only as a volunteer fire fighter, but also through his work teaching farm safety. You'll read more about his work, as well.

It is through our committed and caring staff that The Cooperative Extension Program is here for you, the people of North Carolina. Some of you we know and you have benefited directly from Extension programs. Others of you are benefiting if you are taxpaying residents. The work that goes on in Extension sometimes saves lives, expands your resources, time and tax dollars. Please read through this document for

firsthand accounts of exactly how Extension is working for the people of North Carolina.

The best thing about Extension is that even when the Womacks and Rowlands of Extension move on, the programs that they so diligently foster still remain.

Let us help you. Come on by. The lights are on and the door is open.

Dr. M. Ray McKinnie
Associate Dean and Administrator
The Cooperative Extension Program at
N.C. A&T State University

Sheilda Sutton
Interim Associate Administrator
The Cooperative Extension Program at
N.C. A&T State University



Black Plastic Makes for a Rosy Future

The community gets fresh produce sooner in the season, saving time, travel and money.

MAXTON – Lucius Epps listened politely that February of 2003 when Extension specialists from A&T came to town with claims about black plastic and drip irrigation. Greater yields. Early harvests. More money.

Epps was skeptical of those promises.

Yet grant money was available from the Tobacco Trust Fund to install the system, and Robeson County Agricultural and Natural Resources Technician Martin Brewington encouraged Epps to try the system. Epps started his plants for tomatoes, cucumber, cantaloupes and okra in his greenhouse and transplanted them into the plastic.

“By April, stuff was growing faster than I’d ever seen it grow before on bare dirt,” Epps says. “Things were looking real good.”

Things turned out so well that Epps made \$10,000 more in 2003 income than he had in 2002, and his early season crops were a major reason for the windfall. He’s using that extra money to help send his son to college. On a broader scale, the earlier yields also benefit Epps’ community, some of whom were driving an hour from the Lumberton area to Columbia, S.C., to get fresh produce.

This past summer, Epps, his wife Vera, and their children Matt, 18, and Samantha, 15,

packed up their pickup truck and took their produce to the Robeson County Farmer’s Market in Lumberton as early as the second week of May — weeks before other area farmers had crops.

“I started bringing it here earlier and instead of people having to drive all the way to Columbia to the farmer’s market, they could come here,” Epps says of the Robeson County Farmer’s Market.

Vera Epps, who usually works the market with her son, has seen the increased business firsthand and tells her husband: “Next time, give me more of that plastic.”

Enhancing Agriculture, Forest and Food Systems

330 new or alternative crops were produced by part-time, limited-resource farmers.

26 part-time, limited-resource Wake County farmers tried different management techniques and saved \$52,000.

Two Yancey County farmers are growing vegetables in converted tobacco barns and selling the produce to local schools.

Washington County youth gardens made \$18,000 in profit by selling greens.

246 part-time, limited-resource farmers adopted new production practices with more than \$140,000 in profit.

A Sampson County grower increased his income by \$10,000 after using a cold-storage facility.

Epps readily acknowledges his conversion: “I didn’t believe you could make as much as they said you could. Sometimes you got to see it for yourself.”

The former tobacco farmer, who cashed out of the crop in 1995 after his acreage allotment plummeted, now has a renewed faith in farming that spreads across the 200 acres he works. As a Robeson County boy dreaming of his future, Epps, 45, didn’t have many career options. Farming, out of necessity, chose him.

Matt and Samantha now have more choices than their father had growing up. Matt is a college freshman majoring in

engineering — the first generation of his family to go to a four-year university.

The additional income his father is reaping through black plastic has helped Matt get a leg up on campus life.

But money is not the only impression farming advances have made on the earnest young man. His 12th-grade science project, which yielded him a big, fat A, was all about the black plastic, drip irrigation process.

“We tried out a lot of stuff and it worked out pretty good,” Matt Epps says.

Making Money the Harden Way

Money management classes give a young man the necessary assurance and support to leave street life in his past.



Fredrick Harden

Developing Strategies to Effectively Manage Finances

1,341 limited-resource families increased household income by making sound consumer decisions.

In Catawba County, five people each saved \$1,000, three reduced their debt by \$900, and one person removed 13 incorrect entries from her credit report.

In Guilford County, seven single mothers developed and used personal budgets; four opened savings accounts; one repaid all of her creditors and is on track to be debt-free.

WINSTON-SALEM – Fredrick Harden didn't want to spend an hour every Tuesday morning listening to a woman from Cooperative Extension talk about saving money.

Shoot, he already knew how to save money.

He'd rather be home in bed. He'd rather be anywhere else, with one exception: jail. The prospect of going back to prison was what finally made Harden regularly attend the money management class, jointly sponsored through Cooperative Extension and the Forsyth County Day Reporting Center. He was required to attend the class as a condition of probation for a drug violation.

Eventually, what Harden learned from the Cooperative Extension money management class taught by Deborah Womack, a family and consumer sciences educator for Forsyth County Cooperative Extension, helped change his life. He learned to accommodate his needs before his wants and to distinguish between the two. He learned to track his spending and he opened checking and savings accounts.

Harden has used his newfound tools to help him navigate his successful new life as

a full-time restaurant employee, devoted father of two adolescent children and citizen of the world.

"I was just macho," Harden says of his earlier attitude about money management. "I said, 'I already know how to save money.'"

Of course, his savings account was in a shoebox that he kept in his bedroom, and most of the time he withdrew more often than he deposited.

Both Harden and Womack remember the turning point that converted him into a man with a financial future. As a class assignment, Harden and a class partner researched how to open banking accounts. When Harden's partner didn't show up for that Tuesday's class, he was forced to do the entire presentation alone.

"He got up there and he did an excellent job," Womack said. "He even had literature from the bank to pass around for the rest of the class."

The experience gave Harden a sense of accomplishment, which boosted his confidence. So one day as he left the Day Reporting Center Office on Trade Street,

he walked six doors down the street and saw a "help wanted" sign in a new restaurant called Sweet Potatoes.

"We were in the pre-opening stage and flooded with applicants," co-owner Vivian Joiner says. "I wasn't even prepared to interview. But I saw a young man who came in and was patient enough to wait — he must have waited an hour and a half — and I probably only spent 30 seconds talking to him."

Harden had made enough of an impression that Joiner later gave him a more formal interview, during which Harden gave his history. Joiner believes that "everyone deserves an opportunity to succeed." She gave one to Harden and neither of them has regretted it since. He's worked his way from bus boy to waiter in one of the city's most popular restaurants.

On Jan. 16, 2005 — and he can effortlessly recall the date — Harden will have been at Sweet Potatoes for two years; the longest he's worked anywhere. His goal is to go back to school and study to be an electrician. Harden credits a lot of people for helping

him straighten out his life — his employers, his father, his children and their mother, as well as Womack and the money management class, and the Day Reporting Center.

L. Bernard Terry, director of the Day Reporting Center, says the partnership with Cooperative Extension has been so successful that the former participants he sees regularly recite information that they've learned in Extension classes. Harden is no exception.

"That class helped me to focus," Harden says.

Tyschaun Harden so reveres his father's example that when he turned 13 last October, his biggest goal was to open his own savings account — just like his daddy.

"It feels real good," Harden says of all his accomplishments. "When you're making an earnest living sometimes it's hard, but when you stick with it and stick to your goals, and use the tools you learned, things do get better."

Home Safe Home

Practicing proper farm safety makes for a safe food supply.



8 | Susan Sears



KITTRELL – It might be a tossup as to which incident was the most explosive, the night lightning struck on Susan and Joe Sears’ 110-acre farm, or the day a man spit a stream of tobacco inside the Sears’ carefully-tended greenhouse.

Both events involved the issue of farm safety and both evoked some mighty impressive fireworks. In fact it was Susan Sears’ desire to grow some fiery hot peppers that sparked her relationship with Cooperative Extension to begin with.

She and her husband moved to Vance County in 1986 from Apex, but the couple had a six-month stint in El Paso, Texas, in 1992 when Joe Sears was assigned there as part of his job with the National Guard. It was in the Southwest that Susan Sears fell in love with hot peppers and, arriving back in Vance County

later that year, was convinced that she could grow them in the loamy coarse sands of Vance County.

That’s when she called Harold Thompson, Wayne Rowland and the other agricultural experts at the Vance County Cooperative Extension Center. They consulted with Carl Niedziela, then a specialist in The Cooperative Extension Program at N.C. A&T State University, and thus began Susan Sears’ quest of making “Kittrell the chili pepper capital of North Carolina.”

That ideal faded after Sears realized the area market couldn’t support her vision, but her relationship with Extension has only intensified in the last 12 years.

“Before I even knew anything about pesticides they gave me information

about them, and told me about the certification process, and how to store them,” Sears says.

The pesticides and other chemicals on her property are kept in a special shed that is locked and clearly labeled with a warning sign. When lightning struck her property July 5, 2002, all Sears heard was a crack and a sizzle, and a few minutes later, the ringing of her telephone. A neighbor spotted a thatch of smoke between their properties.

When Rowland, who was the volunteer fire department chief in the neighboring district, also heard the call, his worried response was twofold: was the family safe and could their pesticides be contained?

He took consolation in the Sears’ responsible use and storage of pesticides

because of their Extension training. Then, just minutes after the alarm went out, Rowland found out that his clients were safe and it was an old storage house — several hundred feet away from the pesticides and the main property — that was burning.

“Had the fire been closer, it would have helped us knowing where the chemicals were,” Rowland says.

That episode also underscores the example of vigilant safety that Sears tries to maintain on her farm. A customer once came through her greenhouse to buy some vegetable plants and Sears saw him spit tobacco on the floor. Before she had time to think she confronted and lectured the man about the need to maintain a sterile environment for the health of the plants.

“Spitting tobacco in my greenhouse; that’s like spitting on my kitchen floor,” Sears says, as she rattles off a list of plants that fall prey to certain contaminants. “That’s why today, when you walk in my greenhouse, you’re walking on a (chlorine bleach) solution that I use to protect these plants.”

Her strict adherence to sanitary conditions ensures that customers at the farmers’ markets and specialty stores where she sells lemon grass, holy basil, sage and peppers get products that are not just delicious, but part of a healthy and safe food supply.

“I learned about those contaminants through Wayne,” Sears says. “I learned things from him that I could not have learned on my own, as easily.”

Promoting Safe and Healthy Environments

381 limited-resource people adopted health and safety practices in their living environments.

Parents in one North Carolina county reduced the possibility of accidental poisoning by removing potential household hazards from their homes.

20 Vance County farmers are operating farm equipment safely.



Claudie DeGraffenreid eats a bowl of nutritious "Beef Corn Dandy" prepared by Nutrition Program Assistant Gloria Russ.

Eating to Live a Longer Life

Older people are cutting medical and insurance costs by eating healthy.

GREENSBORO – George Burns. Bob Hope. Bessie and Sadie Delany.

Guilford County Cooperative Extension Nutrition Program Assistant Gloria Sides Russ uses the fame of these late centenarians to make a point during discussions with her *Project Eat Right Add to Life* audience: people are living longer.

With high rates of obesity, hypertension, diabetes and other diseases that prey in particular on minority populations, and cost millions annually to treat, it is more important than ever for people to eat properly. Russ is the gentle vigilante who helps people practice better nutrition. Using

educational literature, cooking demonstrations and discussions, Russ drives home points about healthy and unhealthy eating.

She works with such special populations as the senior citizens and disabled residents of the Gateway Plaza, a federally-subsidized housing community run by the Greensboro Housing Authority. During one of her bi-monthly visits she reads her audience an excerpt about nutrition from *Having Our Say*, the autobiography by the late Bessie and Sadie Delany, who lived to be 104 and 109, respectively.

The chapter resonates with the Gateway group of women, who are

actually giggling about growing old. The session has the atmosphere of part quilting bee, part confessional and part slumber party without the pajamas.

"I wake up at night and my mouth is so dry; I have to keep a glass of water by my bed," says resident Thelma Barton.

"I'm way overweight and crippled with osteoarthritis," says Patsy Smith, "and when I got stressed out I used to down gummy bears and gummy worms."

"I was diagnosed with diabetes two months ago," resident Helen Adams says. "I was weighing 233 pounds; I'm down to 216 pounds,

so I'm trying to lose some weight. I'm scared of diabetes — losing arms and legs. It's killing people."

Adams, 63, used to wolf down a bag of peppermints and a pitcher of sugar-sweetened Kool-Aid daily. Since working with *Project Eat Right* and her doctors, Adams is learning to change her eating habits and lose weight. She exercises regularly, drinks mostly water or iced tea sweetened with a sugar substitute; eats baked turkey wings instead of fried chicken; and can even restrain herself and make healthy choices when her son takes her out for dinner at the all-you-can-eat bar at the local steak house. Adams

Building Healthy Families through Healthy Living

1,191 Food Stamp Program participants say they are preparing grocery lists, practicing comparative shopping, buying less prepared food and buying fresh fruit and vegetables. Fifteen participants said they planted gardens.

282 Food Stamp Program participants reported a reduction in salt intake, fat intake, sugar and caloric intake.

22 public schools and 45 other local agencies worked with Extension to promote nutrition education.

also practices the recipes and information that Russ shares on her regular visits.

The gummy-worm addicted Smith gave up the treats when Russ told her how much sugar was in them. Instead, Smith substitutes them with Smoothies and yogurt balls — recipes that Russ helped her find. Barton, who regularly stays abreast of nutrition and health issues, still attends the nutrition classes to get guidance from *Project Eat Right* about changes in the food pyramid, and to get cooking tips.

Those tips come with actual taste tests and recipes, evident during a recent visit when Russ whipped out a hot plate, frying pan and the ingredients for a low-fat recipe of lean ground beef, stewed tomatoes, frozen vegetables and fat-free cheese. Adams watches her every move.

"I just apply all of it," Adams says of what she's learned. "I'm learning about the different kinds of vegetables and how — when I go home — I should blend all that information in to how I cook. I don't need that extra salt."

Building Strong Families

2,261 limited-resource parents attended parent education classes and say they spend more quality time with their children.

1,109 limited-resource parents adopted positive parenting practices.



Sandy Harris oversees a fun game of checkers being played by her youngest two boys Matthew, 6, left, and Bobby, 9.

Mama's Got a Brand New Bag

A mother learns parenting skills that benefit her own children and others in the community.

GREENSBORO – Sandy Harris didn't just learn how to become a better mother when she began attending parenting classes offered through a partnership with Head Start and Cooperative Extension. She also learned to be a better advocate for other children in the community.

When her youngest two boys, Bobby Jr., 9, and Matthew, 6, began Head Start at Poplar Grove, Harris began attending the "Building Self Esteem in Young Children" parenting classes offered through Guilford County Cooperative Extension.

"I learned how to spend more of my time for the children," Harris says. "I used to have time for everyone else but them."

Something as simple as playing the Candy Land and checkers board games with them, and reading library books with them over the summer, helps give the boys the attention they crave, builds stronger bonds between them and has also made her boys better prepared for school. Harris says her oldest son, R.J., 14, didn't attend Head Start and didn't get the level of attention she has given to the youngest two boys, and one of the results is that he was not as academically prepared for school as his younger siblings.

"R.J. had a lot of difficulty when he first started going to school and these two, they were just ready," Harris says of her youngest sons. "I've learned that

by sitting down and reading with them, and doing things with them, the more you get out of them."

The Harris' home, an old family place in a northeast corner of Greensboro that has become a mix of white, Hispanic and African American families, is a neighborhood gathering spot. Harris and her husband Bobby have a reputation for harboring stray cats, and their place brims with refuge-seeking animals in the yard; a houseful of boys and their various playmates. Theirs is a home of ready-made camaraderie and extra supper and Harris regularly sets a place for a son's playmate.

Harris' home would have been a gathering spot even had she not taken

the parenting classes. Yet the training that prompted her to become a school volunteer has also inspired her to become a more involved parent and a more self-confident children's advocate.

On the last day of the 2003–04 school year, when a second-grade Hispanic boy ran away from her sons' school, school officials and the boy's family began a frantic search for him. Harris, who was volunteering at school that day, knew the child as one of her sons' playmates. On instinct, she drove to the boy's house, and knocked several times on the door. She got no answer, but her instinct told her he was there. Harris began to talk through the closed door, promising him that he was safe

and she had come to help.

The boy, who acted as a family translator for his parents, opened the door, and explained to Harris he had run away because he was having a bad day at school; and also said he was afraid of the punishment he would get by going back. Harris promised that people would be more relieved at his safety than angry at his actions, and promised to stay by his side as they explained what had happened.

The story was happily resolved. Yet without the parent training she got through Cooperative Extension, Harris says she would have been too intimidated by protocol to have acted.



Welcome to the 21st Century

A community reshapes its fate through computer classes, which help make residents more savvy consumers.



14 | Camellia Norris, left, and Mae Wilson, right, follow the directions of their computer instructor Derrick Haynes.



KINGSTOWN – Don't mess with Mae Wilson. She's got a computer and she knows how to use it.

Wilson, 71, isn't the fastest keyboarder in this southwestern North Carolina community, but she aims straight, studies hard and is a sure shot. She is one of several women who attend classes at the Kingstown Computer Learning Center, which opened in the spring of 2003 as a result of leadership programs developed through The Cooperative Extension Program at N.C. A&T State University.

Residents formed as the nonprofit Kingstown Community Organization for Concerned Citizens through the leadership program *Community Voices*; and that program's sister advocacy, *Voices Reaching Visions*, helped the Concerned Citizens analyze their community needs and determine they needed a place where people could learn and use computers.

Kingstown residents helped renovate an old city-owned building into the Kingstown Computer Learning Center, where children come after school to do homework and get tutoring; and where people such as Wilson come to learn a new means of communication. Wilson's first response was to resist, when her cousin and Concerned Citizens board member, Jessie Parrish, lobbied her in March 2003 to attend the classes.

"I thought, 'I can't do it,'" Wilson says. "I said, 'I don't know anybody.' But after I got here, I loved them all. When one of us learns something, we help the other. I've made new friends; good friends."

Wilson learned basic keystroking, worked her way up to e-mail, spread her wings to the Internet and, most recently, was learning spreadsheets. Along the way, volunteers such as Lillian Corpew tutored the class in letter writing.

Those correspondence tips came in handy for Wilson, who gave her teenage grandson a check to

pursue a company's promise of helping him become an artist. When the company asked for more money, Wilson grew suspicious and tried several times to reach the company by telephone. When no one returned her calls she e-mailed a letter telling company officials that her family had no intention of sending more money and that she would pursue her complaints legally if they didn't refund the money she originally sent.

"Two weeks later, they sent me my check," Wilson says, a confident smile stretching across her face.

Corpew and computer instructor Derrick Haynes proudly tick off the milestones that the newly computer literate neighbors are achieving, particularly paying their bills online. Many older residents, and even their adult children in Kingstown, carry large sums of cash around as they drive 20 minutes into town to pay their bills in person. Wilson, who used to mail in checks, now pays online and says the process makes her life safer and "much easier."

Gaining Skills to Build Stronger Individuals, Families, and Communities

26 limited-resource communities organized to resolve community problems.

390 limited-resource leaders worked to improve their communities as a result of leadership training workshops.

19 public housing communities in Mecklenburg County participated in leadership development training.

284 community members developed and implemented action plans that improved the quality of life for their residents, resulting in an economic impact of more than \$180,000 for limited-resource communities.

Wilson is now able to use the computer in her home that once was the sole domain of the adult daughter who lives with her.

Camellia Norris, 64, another class attendee, bought a personal computer for her own home just a few weeks after starting classes at the learning center. She scans family pictures and sends them to a niece in Durham and to a nephew in Washington. Occasionally, she even stops to marvel at how much she's learned in the nearly two years since she became computer literate — how she now understands the formerly foreign language that consisted of such terms as "dot com," "the Internet" and "e-mail."

Norris will never forget the thrill of sending her first e-mail, to her daughter, Angela, the teacher in Winston-Salem.

Says Norris: "She sent me one back saying 'welcome to the 21st century'."

To Reach New North Carolinians Cooperative Extension is Developing:

Collaborative partnerships

Educational materials produced in Spanish

Staff more responsive to the Hispanic community



You Gotta Have Amigos

An outreach program helps Hispanic residents make a smoother, more cost-effective transition into American society.

TODD – In the 12 years that Ivette Rubio has developed from a tender middle-school immigrant into a confident, young college student, newspaper columnist and community advocate, the Hispanic population in Watauga County has more than quadrupled.

Rubio, 24, came here in 1992 with her parents and two younger sisters, after her father got a job in the Christmas tree industry. Only her father spoke a bit of English. Rubio vividly recalls those early years; how grade after grade after grade, she was the only Hispanic student in her school; how her mother felt isolated; but how the whole family was determined to make a success of their new life in America.

The transition of Hispanic families such

as the Rubios is easier now because of High Country Amigos (HCA), a private nonprofit agency formed in 1998 to provide translation services, educational programs, advocacy and outreach to area Hispanic residents. The program was started by area Catholic and Episcopal churches, with strong program support and guidance from Cooperative Extension.

Whereas many Hispanic residents are reluctant to get involved with government agencies, they trust Extension, says Sue Counts, Watauga County Extension director and a founding force of High Country Amigos. Counts works directly with the Hispanic women's group that meets every Wednesday morning at the Extension center. The weekly sessions vary

from health and safety issues, to cooking demonstrations, to discussions about domestic violence or child-care.

Watauga County Extension agent Jim Hamilton, and agricultural and natural resources technician Dale Roark, also work on occupational safety with Hispanic men involved in the area tree industry; and on pesticide certification.

The women get the chance to network with one another. HCA also works to help women get their driver's licenses and advocate for their children in school.

Such programs not only help Hispanic communities, but the greater community as well, Counts says. In a region with very little public transportation and families living in isolated areas, where husbands are

away at work all day, a driver's license is a passport to independence and interaction.

"Before we started High Country Amigos, a lot of the women were depressed because they were out there in these isolated areas," Counts says. "Does the public want to pay for treating depression and other issues, or do they want to encourage the involvement of all our communities?"

Maria Alcaraz, who moved to Boone seven years ago and got involved with HCA soon after, agrees that she would have been "very sad," bored and lonely, had she not made the friends and found help through the agency. When her niece, Elizabeth Alcaraz, moved here just a few years later, Maria Alcaraz recruited her immediately. Elizabeth Alcaraz had studied

English in school in Mexico, and knew how to write it. But hearing the English language was so vastly different for her than writing it, that she credits HCA with helping her to "improve how I pronounce English." That's important to Elizabeth Alcaraz, as she advocates on behalf of her first-grade daughter and in teaching her 3-year-old son.

Rubio looks at many of the young women immigrants and sees, not so much herself, but what her mother had to endure the hard way.

"If there were no High Country Amigos," Rubio says, "they would feel very isolated and wouldn't know how to do normal things, like enrolling their children in school, going to the doctor or getting their driver's license."



Building Strong, Healthy Families

399 Department of Social Services–referred parents improved interaction with their children.

Parents of youth in the 4-H K–3rd Grade Program have a 93 percent increase in their interaction with their children; spending an average of more than five hours assisting them with learning activities.



Family Business

A holistic relationship with Cooperative Extension helps a young mother break a dependency cycle and successfully raise her children.

REIDSVILLE – Erica Bradley Noell has had a 12-year relationship with the Cooperative Extension Program.

Extension has factored into most of the major milestones in Noell's life since 1992, including successfully raising her children, getting off public assistance, getting her cosmetology and business licenses, finding steady full-time work as a hair stylist, remarrying, becoming a home owner and helping her four children set goals to improve their young lives.

"Until I took those self-help classes, I really didn't have good esteem," says Noell, 33. "I learned so much through these programs."

As a 21-year-old mother of a toddler son, with twins on the way, Noell was separated from an abusive husband and in need of comfort, guidance and instruction. That's when she found *Becoming a Mother*, an Extension program designed to give pregnant teenagers and young mothers

decision-making and sound parenting skills. *Becoming a Mother* also offered positive outings to Noell and provided a network of other young mothers who supported each other. The program helped Noell become a better mother and to plan for her future.

"We'd just do things like have lunch and tea, and conversations," Noell says. "We would discuss remedies and share information about raising children."

Edith Wiley, a family and consumer sciences program assistant with Rockingham County Cooperative Extension, tracked and stayed in touch with Noell and her young family. Noell stayed involved in the program through the birth of her fourth child. Extension programs had reignited a desire in Noell, who says her first husband worked hard to demean and discredit her.

After the *Becoming a Mother* program, she was determined to get off public assistance.

She didn't want welfare to be a way of life for her family. She worked fast food jobs and quickly realized that she'd have to find better paying jobs, and to do that she'd need help. In the mid 1990s she attended human resources development classes offered at Rockingham Community College in collaboration with Extension.

The program helped her identify her strengths and interests, set goals and pursue a plan for attaining them. Determining that she had an aptitude for hair design Noell studied for and obtained her cosmetology license in 1996. She also remarried that year, to Charles Noell, who willingly took on responsibility for all four of her children: Emanuel Norman, 14; twins Jasmine and Amber Norman, 12; and Katie Bradley, 10.

Her children have all had experiences with the 4-H *Mini-Society* program, which encourages young people, ages 8 to 12, to set up their own model societies and learn

entrepreneurship through goal-setting, creativity and persistence. The children each have dreams and plans about what they want to be in the future. They even apply their *Mini-Society* lessons to their lives as children. When trying to plan for a trip to the Paramount's Carowinds amusement park in 2003, they researched ticket prices, learned they could get better rates in September — when four of them could get in for \$99 — and determined that they each needed to save about \$25.

"They saved their money and they went last year, and they're planning to do the same thing this year," Noell says proudly of her children.

What's more, Noell is taking all that she learned and absorbed through Extension and is working with young people at her church, Zion Baptist.

Says Noell: "I'm giving back what Cooperative Extension has given me."

Cooperative Extension: We're Here for You

Our Mission: Improving the quality of life for limited-resource individuals, families and communities in North Carolina, through education.

Enhancing Agriculture, Forest and Food Systems

Developing Responsible Youth

Strengthening and Sustaining Families

Conserving and Improving the Environment and Natural Resources

Building Quality Communities

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