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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Partnership with Greene County Commission Makes Addition of MU Extension 4-H Youth Associate to Greene County Juvenile Program a Reality in 2019

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. -- Greene County Commissioner Harold Bengsch often points out that you will not find 4-H members in the county juvenile program.

With that idea in mind, David Burton, county engagement specialist for Greene County MU Extension, and Bill Prince, family court administrator and chief juvenile officer for Greene County, began dreaming in 2018 about how to develop a program that would benefit Greene County youth.

“If 4-H can keep youth out of trouble, let’s see if the positive youth development approach can also help turn some lives around. That was our basic premise and approach,” said Burton.

The County Commission and University of Missouri Extension are each funding 50 percent of the position. The Greene County Extension Council is funding memberships for the students as well as supplies and other expenses related to the program.

“We are pleased to announce a program such as this as a collaborative venture with MU Extension. As far as we can determine is a first in the state. It is further evidence of Greene County's desire to help our troubled youth with programs of proven worth,” said Bengsch. “Preventing only one person from being incarcerated in our jail at the current cost of \$63 per day, we would recoup the \$16,000 county investment in this venture in 254 days.”

NEW HIRE

Justin Kastning of Seymour has accepted a job offer and began work as the 4-H Youth Associate on Jan. 7, 2019.

Kastning grew up in the 4-H program. He has also worked for the Missouri Department of Mental Health, Division of Youth Services, and as a park and recreation director. He has served

as a foster parent for some years and most recently has been self-employed on the family farm.

“Our limitation is not ideas; it is going to be time and partners. Lots of great opportunities here that we believe will create real results,” said Kastning. “But there will certainly be a phase-in period as I learn the ropes, as we gain partners, volunteers and resources.”

COUNTY JUVENILE FOCUS

According to Prince, the Greene County Juvenile Office receives between 1,400 and 1,600 referrals each year for delinquency violations (behaviors that would be criminal if committed by adults) and status offenses (things like truancy, running away from home). Those referrals may result in formal probation, informal probation or diversion services. The juvenile office also serves about 600 youth who are subject to the court’s jurisdiction due to abuse and neglect.

The Greene County Youth Academy (GCYA) is a day treatment program that provides services to youth placed in that program by the court. Those youth go to school there during the day and participate in programming after school.

“We also provide other services and programming to those youth and others who may be on formal or informal probation but not ordered into GCYA. We also provide services to youth who we are attempting to divert from formal court involvement at our Community-Based Services Building as well,” said Prince.

GCYA is going to be the focus of the new 4-H program. However, programs are being developed for youth in the diversion program and other programs.

Students in the program will be enrolled in 4-H. Through volunteers and partners the students will receive training in projects of their choice — like sewing, gardening, robotics, cooking or leadership — and have the opportunity to take part in 4-H contests, camps and the fair.

“After graduating from the program, our second goal is to develop more 4-H Clubs in Greene County so these academy graduates can stay connected with 4-H and keep learning and growing,” said Burton.

POSITION FOCUS

The 4-H Youth Program Associate will assist in planning, managing and supporting a program at the juvenile office but also working to keep graduates of the program connected with Greene County 4-H.

Current 4-H Youth Development Specialist Karla Deaver, who is headquartered in Lawrence County, will supervise the position.

“This is a tremendous opportunity for us to expand our programming efforts in Springfield and Greene County. We are looking forward to developing partnerships within the community and plan to establish an adult mentor program to keep youth connected,” said Deaver.

This new 4-H youth associate is being asked to advocate for positive youth development in community and extension.

To do this, Kastning will need to develop and maintain a positive relationship between 4-H Council, Extension Council, County Commissioners, the community and other stakeholders. He will also need to provide local leadership for programs. He will need to plan, implement and evaluating those programs as well.

PARTNERSHIPS ARE NEEDED

The Greene County Extension Council is looking for grants or sponsorships to cover some unique costs associated with this program.

For starters, the county extension council wants to be able to pay the \$20 annual enrollment fee to 4-H for each youth in the juvenile academy. That is estimated to cost \$2,000 a year.

There is also a need for monies to cover costs for curriculum and materials related to various projects, like the robotics program. This is estimated to cost about \$2000 - \$3000 per year.

Ultimately, the county extension council would like to provide a 10-hours-per-week assistant to help with 4-H program paperwork and reporting. This is an estimated to cost about \$8,000 per year according to Burton.

“This is a significant investment in the 4-H program for Greene County. Not just for at-risk youth but ultimately for all youth in the county who could benefit from having a more robust 4-H program in the county,” said Burton. “But we cannot make this happen without resources, partners and volunteers.”

MORE INFORMATION

For further information, contact Kastning at the Greene County MU Extension center by telephone at (417) 881-8909 or by email at kastningj@missouri.edu.

There are several existing 4-H Clubs in Greene County open to new members, and that information can be found online at <http://extension.missouri.edu/greene>.

For individuals interested in serving as a 4-H volunteer in a club, on a project, or in a new SPIN Club, please contact 4-H Youth Development Specialist Karla Deaver by telephone at (417) 466-3102 or by email at deaverk@missouri.edu.

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PHOTO AVAILABLE FOR USE WITH THIS STORY

Mug shot of Justin: <https://flic.kr/p/QuqHHM>