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## Targeting More than Activities

*Leadership and life skills increase, adult-youth partnerships strengthened, through Delta County 4-H shooting sports.*

### Situation

Delta County community support for the 4-H shooting sports program has always been strong; youth have increasingly participated in it since the mid-1990s. In the early 2000s the county government sponsored and dedicated a 4-H shooting range. Member involvement steadily grew in every discipline—archery, .22 rifle, air pistol and air rifle, muzzleloading and shotgun—even while increased youth participation was limited because of certified leader shortage. The leaders are pivotal in helping youth develop leadership and life skills.

### Extension's Response

In 2003, Delta County 4-H Youth Development agent for Colorado State University Extension, Isaac Muñoz, in cooperation with 4-H shooting sports leaders, created a countywide program that streamlined practice sessions and consolidated and strengthened volunteer efforts.

- Under the guidance of certified leaders, members started practicing together by discipline, not by club. They made new friends, created bonds over common interests and were exposed to other 4-H members of all ages.
- Both member and leader participation grew. Increased member enrollment led to more parents becoming certified leaders.
- Volunteer certified leaders worked more closely together, regardless of club affiliation.

Next, Muñoz established a volunteer-led county 4-H shooting sports leader's council to develop by-laws, elect officers, schedule season-wide events (including practices and competitions), organize the county invitational, provide shooting safety training and resolve issues as they arise. According to Muñoz, the council increased volunteer involvement and encouraged greater ownership of the program.

Muñoz and fellow Tri River Area 4-H Extension agents also created two new opportunities for youth members. Tri River Area counties (Delta, Montrose, Mesa and Ouray) were encouraged to each host an invitational shoot. These separate competitions replaced a combined Tri River Area Invitational and offered members a chance to gain experience competing in other counties. Muñoz says this prepares members for larger competitions, such as the state shoot and national invitational.

Next Muñoz introduced the *State 4-H Shooting Sports Junior Leader Program* for experienced shooting sports members ages 14 to 18. To become a Junior Leader, members complete the same leader certification training as adults. Junior Leaders develop leadership skills by mentoring younger members and working alongside adults at practice shoots and invitationals. Muñoz says this component offers older 4-H members a meaningful way to stay involved by developing leadership skills, giving back to the program and sharing their experience.



*Members and coaches of the 2011 State Grand Champion Muzzleloading Senior Team were from Delta County 4-H (above). In addition, the .22 Hunt Rifle Senior Team earned State Reserve Grand Champion and the Compound Limited Bow Jr. Team placed fourth in the state.*

### Safety First

Leader certification, required by the Colorado 4-H shooting sports program, ensures youth and volunteer safety, at all times. To earn certification, volunteers complete a standardized, discipline-specific, two-day course that teaches program management, proper shooting technique and how to safely run a shooting practice and competition.

## Results

Nationwide, 4-H shooting sports is known for its ability to help youth develop essential life skills. Through periodic interviews, Colorado shooting sports members say they have learned respect, discipline, self-control, leadership, problem-solving, sportsmanship and role modeling. In Delta County, the switch to a discipline-focused, countywide program strengthened youth-adult partnerships that went on to develop life skills in teamwork, cooperation, sharing, and contributing to a group effort.

The change also resulted in programmatic success. Leadership-by-discipline built new efficiencies and expanded the overall volunteer base, allowing youth members the opportunity to work closely with a greater number of caring adults. The countywide program has also improved communication and trust among leaders, members and parents. "There's a higher level of accountability for our actions since we're all role modeling for each other and the kids we work with," says Muñoz.

Members and leaders have all benefitted from the Junior Leader program. According to junior leader Ben Gruber, feedback from adult leaders on how he works with junior members has taught him to be a better leader and role model. "It's a pretty cool reward being able to say I helped a kid get a skill," Gruber says.

According to junior leaders Kasey Miles and Tory Welt, the learning goes both ways. Junior Leaders bring first-hand, youth-focused shooting experience that helps them relate easily to younger members. "A lot of times the junior leaders can give shooting advice and the kids will understand better than when the adults tell them," says Delta County 4-H volunteer leader and parent, Heidi Simpson. As a result, adults often learn how to improve younger members' shooting technique by following suggestions that junior leaders share.

Miles and Welt say the junior leader program also provides the unique opportunity to witness and learn how to collaboratively problem-solve. By watching adults work through differences, they develop insight on effective problem solving and learn to respect opposing viewpoints. According to Miles, working with adults has increased his respect and ability to ask questions. "I can talk to anyone and be alright with it," he says.

Simpson says that role modeling is just one of the many benefits of the junior leader program. "My son is nine and he wants to emulate everything the junior leaders do," she says. As a result, discipline, when it comes from a peer, means more than when it comes from an adult.

For junior leaders, the role modeling from adults is equally important. "We've had the privilege of learning life lessons of responsibility and respect," Welts says. "They don't just stand back and watch us. They are very hands on."

*"Working with adults is just a great pleasure."*

– Kasey Miles, Delta County 4-H shooting sports member, and 2010 State 4-H Shooting Sports Ambassador

*"Without this being a countywide program, we wouldn't be where we are."*

– Isaac Muñoz, Delta County Extension 4-H agent

*"When issues come up, we can now address these based on the common good, rather than individual interests. I believe that overall, there's a higher level of trust among leaders, members and parents."*

– Vicki Miles, volunteer 4-H shooting sports leader and parent

*"It's one of the best sports for developing discipline and leadership skills. It's one of those great things in 4-H."*

– Heidi Simpson, volunteer 4-H leader and parent

## Contact Information

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