



OUTCOMES & IMPACT QUARTERLY – WINTER 2025

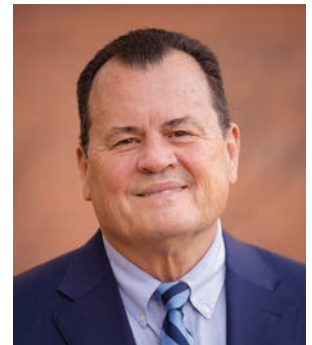
INTRODUCTION

As we welcome a new year, it's the perfect time to reflect on goals that inspire growth, connection, and well-being. At USU Extension, we are kicking off the year by highlighting programs that strengthen relationships, empower teen leadership, and promote healthier lifestyles. From activities that encourage teens to lead with purpose to initiatives that support nutrition and wellness, these efforts align perfectly with the spirit of New Year's resolutions—helping individuals and communities thrive throughout the year ahead.

Sincerely,

Kenneth L. White

Senior Vice President, Statewide Enterprise and USU Extension



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- IMPROVING RELATIONSHIPS — HIDDEN GEMS ADVENTURE GUIDES -

Naomi Brower, Shannon Cromwell, Elizabeth Davis

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted individuals, families, and couples, leading to financial strain, school closures, and increased stress on relationships. Research highlighted a need for resources to support family well-being, mental health, and the development of positive relationships. In response, USU Extension developed the Hidden Gems Adventure Guides – free online resources offering one-hour activities designed to strengthen connections and promote healthy relationships.

Targeting families and couples, the guides provide fun, low-cost activities paired with discussion prompts to enhance communication and problem-solving skills. Since their initial release in 2020, over 100 guides have been developed, peer-reviewed, and downloaded more than 43,000 times across Utah, other states, and countries. Popular examples include family activities like obstacle courses and couple-focused recipes that nurture admiration and fondness.

The guides' popularity reflects their value in fostering meaningful relationships and improving mental health. Future expansions will cater to multiple audiences, allowing these resources to continue to strengthen communities worldwide.

>100
guides

29
authors

43,000
downloads



Family Fun Out
and About
Adventure
Guides



Date Your
Mate
Adventure
Guides



Living Your Best
Life Adventure
Guides



Family Fun at
Home
Adventure
Guides



Learn more

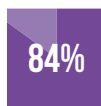
Recent participants reported:



Increased time
spent with
their family.



Developed
stronger
connections.



Improved their
communication
skills.

Couples reported improved:

COMMUNICATION

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

THE VIRTUAL UTAH MARRIAGE CELEBRATION

Naomi Brower, Lisa Schainker, Jared Hawkins

Between 2021 and 2023:

>1,000
couples
registered

3,610
presentations
views

Areas where participants saw improvements:

- COMMIT MORE TIME TO THEIR MARRIAGE
- STRONGER RELATIONSHIPS
- BETTER COMMUNICATION
- DEEPER CONNECTIONS
- RENEWED COMMITMENT

Relationship challenges, including dissolution, significantly affect individuals, families, and society. Needs assessments and research highlight the importance of relationship education to strengthen bonds before they require intervention. However, barriers such as travel, childcare, and costs often hinder participation in such programs.

In response, the Utah Marriage Celebration, created to strengthen couple relationships, transitioned to a virtual format, offering accessible, research-based workshops designed to strengthen relationships. Held annually as a virtual date-night event, it features nine live workshops and a keynote session led by experts on topics like communication, problem-solving, and intimacy. Participants also gain access to a library of recorded presentations, making it convenient for couples across Utah and beyond.

The virtual format has been shown to reduce barriers and enhance content delivery, ensuring its sustainability and reach to many audiences and locations. The Utah Marriage Celebration will continue as a yearly virtual event, as it proves invaluable in promoting healthy, enduring relationships.



ERASE AND REPLACE: A SERIES OF HEALTH & WELLNESS ACTIVITIES

Gabriela Murza, Christina Pay, Eva Timothy, Melanie Dabb, Cris Meier

In 2023, Utah reported alarming mental health trends, with 33% of adults experiencing anxiety or depression and loneliness at an all-time high. Utah also faces a shortage of mental health providers, particularly in rural areas where mental health concerns are higher than the national average. Poor mental health correlates with worse physical outcomes and increased healthcare costs, necessitating community-driven interventions to complement clinical support.

Utah State University Extension introduced "Erase and Replace," a series of 34 activities in 13 counties from 2022–2023. The initiative replaced negative coping strategies with positive ones by promoting stress management, physical fitness, art, and skill-building hobbies. Activities such as Tai Chi, art sessions, and ukulele classes fostered community connection and emotional resilience.

Continued faculty efforts and additional funding have sustained and expanded specific programs. Erase and Replace demonstrates the role of skill-based, community-driven programs in fostering mental, social, and physical well-being while addressing the mental health crisis in Utah.



Learn more

"Erase and Replace" Series

34

activities

13

counties

532

participants

IN-PERSON & VIRTUAL



Post-program surveys showed:

71%

Felt more connected to their community.

85%

Expressed confidence in attending future events.

86%

Gained new knowledge.

Positive behavioral shifts included:



PRIORITIZING MINDFULNESS



REDUCING PHONE USAGE



ENGAGING IN FAMILY ACTIVITIES

SNAP-ED SOCIAL MARKETING CAMPAIGN

Brittney Johnson, LaCee Jimenez, Lea Palmer, Heidi LeBlanc

Utah's low-income communities face high rates of chronic diseases linked to poor nutrition and limited physical activity. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) aims to support individuals at or below 185% of the poverty line to help them make healthy nutrition and physical activity choices.

Effective social marketing and policy, system, and environment initiatives are critical to improving health outcomes, but outdated social marketing strategies were not increasing engagement and impact.

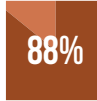
The Create Better Health (CBH) team refined its social marketing strategy to better serve Utah SNAP-Ed participants. Using a needs assessment survey, CBH identified Instagram and Facebook as preferred platforms and tailored content to audience preferences, emphasizing food demonstrations and barrier-focused solutions. A subsequent survey evaluated the revised strategy's impact. Adjustments included improved engagement tactics, such as polls, and culturally relevant content, such as Spanish-language recipes.

Outcomes highlight social marketing's role in reducing disparities and fostering long-term health improvements. Ongoing evaluation and adaptation will sustain CBH's public health impact, bolstering food accessibility and community support systems statewide.

A post-survey indicated that:



Reported increased motivation for healthy behaviors like home cooking and exercise.



Adopted healthier lifestyle changes due to CBH posts, with improved social media reach observed across platforms.



STATEWIDE TEEN LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Meggan Callister, Shannon Cromwell



Adolescence is a critical developmental period marked by physical, emotional, and social changes, often influencing teens' decision-making and coping abilities. The 2024 Utah Youth Needs Assessment identified mental health as a primary concern, emphasizing the need for programs that build protective factors and leadership skills to reduce risky behaviors.

The Junior Youth Conference (JYC) Teen Leadership Program addresses these needs by engaging Utah teens in 9th-12th grade in planning and delivering experiential workshops for 5th-6th graders. Through mentoring and structured activities, teens develop leadership, self-awareness, and communication skills. Teens who are selected to lead commit to monthly planning meetings, leading workshops, and facilitating opening and closing ceremonies.

By fostering essential skills, the JYC program enhances teens' personal development, promotes positive youth outcomes, and helps mitigate risky behaviors, underscoring its value to Utah communities.



2024 Program Numbers:

18 teen leaders with diverse backgrounds

86 youth participants

3.5 hours of interactive sessions

2024 evaluations showed significant gains in teens':

LEADERSHIP

TEAMWORK

SELF-AWARENESS

COMMUNICATION

CONFIDENCE

ADAPTABILITY

ABILITY TO VALUE OTHERS' OPINIONS

"It improved my confidence in leading, and it helped me focus on leading people who are younger than me."

- Program Participant