

USU Extension Youth Honor 9/11 Through Service Across Utah

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Utah State University Extension youth in eight sites across Utah recently participated in community service projects as part of the 9/11 Day of Service, honoring the anniversary by supporting veterans, first responders, and community members in need.

USU Extension organized the effort through its Teens Lifting Teens program after receiving funding through a 9/11 Day of Service grant.

"We really want youth to feel empowered that they are capable of making a difference in their communities," said Megan Hall, USU Extension youth director of Teens Lifting Teens. "One thing we often say in our program is, 'We're not here to teach the leaders of tomorrow. We're here to empower the leaders of today.'"

Participating groups identified needs in their communities and developed projects to address them.

In Utah County, youth organized a dinner honoring veterans and assembled kits for first responders. Another group addressed food insecurity by preparing kits for children to take home over the weekend. Other youth wrote letters of appreciation to first responders, contacted local EMTs to identify needed supplies, and assembled kits that EMTs could distribute to people in distress. In Weber County, participants created appreciation letters and kits for correctional officers.

Each project also included an educational component about the events of Sept. 11 and their lasting impact. Because today's youth were born years after the attacks, organizers wanted participants to understand not only what happened but also the sense of unity and service that followed.

"It doesn't take a tragedy to help us come together and be united in our communities and be able to make a positive impact and change for good," Hall said. "We don't need to

wait for a crisis. We can find ways to connect with others and serve each other now."

The projects gave youth an opportunity to take the lead themselves.

In Utah County, 15-year-old 4-H member Darcie Thurgood took on the challenge of organizing a free banquet honoring veterans and first responders. She spent months arranging the venue, coordinating catering, contacting businesses for donations, and recruiting volunteers.

The event brought together approximately 120 people, including about 35 volunteers and 90 veterans, first responders, and guests.

Thurgood said the experience pushed her outside her comfort zone, particularly when it came to approaching businesses for support. As she gained confidence, she learned to delegate responsibilities, speak in front of unfamiliar audiences, and recognize what she could accomplish.

"I learned a lot more about being a leader and about pushing myself for the benefit of myself and others," she said.

That emphasis on youth leadership is central to Teens Lifting Teens, a statewide program with approximately 25 participating sites. The program focuses on helping youth develop positive relationships, build competence and confidence through peer teaching, and strengthen resiliency.

Service projects provide another way for young people to develop those skills while seeing the impact they can have in their own communities.

"Young people just need to know that they can do hard things," Thurgood said. "People love coming together to help each other out. They love being able to be a part of something bigger than themselves."

This was the first year the program participated in the 9/11 Day of Service grant, but organizers hope it becomes an annual event.

To learn more about Utah 4-H, [click here](#).

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