

Summary

4-H Health Rocks! is part of the solution to the perils of alcohol, tobacco and other drug abuse. The youth perceive that they have gained knowledge, skills and assets for productive living. Young people are living up to the 4-H pledge which concludes with "...I pledge my health to better living for my club, my community, my country, and my world." The future is bright for Tennessee as young people pursue healthy futures.

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Acknowledgements

The Tennessee **4-H Health Rocks!** program would not be possible without the dedication and professionalism of University of Tennessee Extension and Tennessee State University Cooperative Extension Program employees. The program also depends on the cooperation and involvement of countless volunteers, schools and organizations. UT Extension acknowledges the lead author of the **4-H Health Rocks!** curriculum, Marilyn Fox of the University of Nebraska, as well as Jeanine Goldsmith, National 4-H Council accounts manager. Megan Miller Smith of the YMCA of Middle Tennessee and Melissa Dove of the Boys and Girls Club of the Smoky Mountains are acknowledged for being key partners. This program is funded by grants from the National 4-H Council.



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17-0014 1M 10/16

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SP 792

Decisions for Healthy Futures



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Youth face tremendous risk from abuse of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.

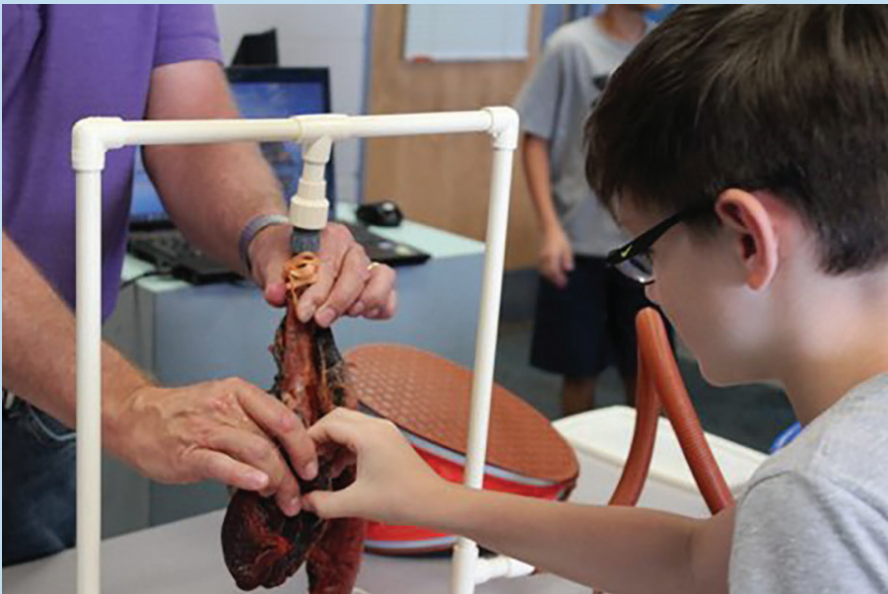
- The average age for a girl to try her first alcoholic beverage is 13 years of age and a boy is 11 years old (Harvard Health Publication, 2014).
- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 6.7 percent of middle school youth and 23.3 percent of high school students currently use tobacco products, including cigarettes, cigars, hookahs, smokeless tobacco, electric cigarettes and other tobacco products (2015).
- A 2012 study determined that 23.9 million Americans 12 years old or older have used an illicit drug or abused a prescription medication (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2014).

The health consequences are enormous.

- Alcohol has negative effects on judgement, reflexes, respiration and heart action (Whitney & Rolfes, 2011). Alcohol is linked to nutritional deficiencies of vitamin B6, thiamine and folic acid, which causes nervous system problems (U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2014).
- The risk of developing cancer is about 23 times greater for men who smoke cigarettes and 13 times higher for women compared to those who have never smoked (CDC, 2015). Smokers have an increased risk of strokes, heart diseases and lung problems.
- Prescription drugs that are abused by young people include stimulants that cause the heart rate to increase, raise the body’s temperature to dangerous highs, and cause seizures (CDC, 2013).

The problem is highly complex and multifaceted.

- Media – Youth who experience excessive advertisement and media influence are more likely to become involved with alcohol (Anderson, 2008).
- Peer and Community Pressure – Almost all youth ages 12-14 are at risk for trying a substance due to peer pressure or it being the norm in their communities (Miller & Hendrie, 2008).
- Access – In one study, 37 percent of eighth graders, 69 percent of 10th graders, and 82 percent of 12th graders reported it was very easy for them to obtain marijuana (Johnston, 2012).



4-H works to provide solutions.

4-H Health Rocks! is a UT Extension program that helps young people gain the knowledge, skills and assets they need to resist alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. The evidence-based curriculum helps youth to make better decisions and be less influenced by peer pressure, media and other emotional factors. The curriculum is taught for at least 10 hours with the youth. It is delivered in schools, afterschool programs and camps in partnership with Tennessee State University and YMCA of Middle Tennessee. Major funding is provided by the National 4-H Council.

Since 2008, more than 100,000 Tennessee youth in grades four through 12 have completed the program. In 2013 and 2014, 20,618 youth completed the program, and 870 were randomly selected to complete a retrospective post-then-pre survey. The retrospective post-then-pre surveys were completed at the end of the program and asked participants to indicate their status (knowledge, skills and assets) after the program and then in a second question to indicate their status before the program. This design helps the respondents to have the knowledge needed to accurately answer the question (Rockwell & Kohn, 1989). The survey results, compiled with comments from the youth, show positive impact on youth’s perceptions of their knowledge, skills and assets.

“Health Rocks was a great experience for me, and it helped me learn more about the world around me.” – *Sixth grade Obion County participant*

“I thought it was really cool, learning things that makes us think twice before doing drugs and smoking. It was really awesome.” – *Seventh grade Crockett County participant*

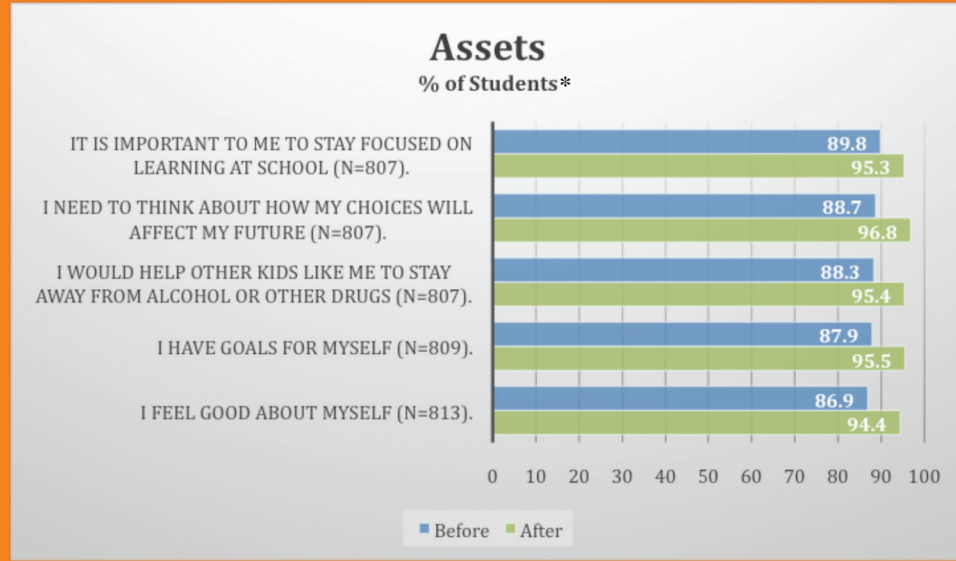
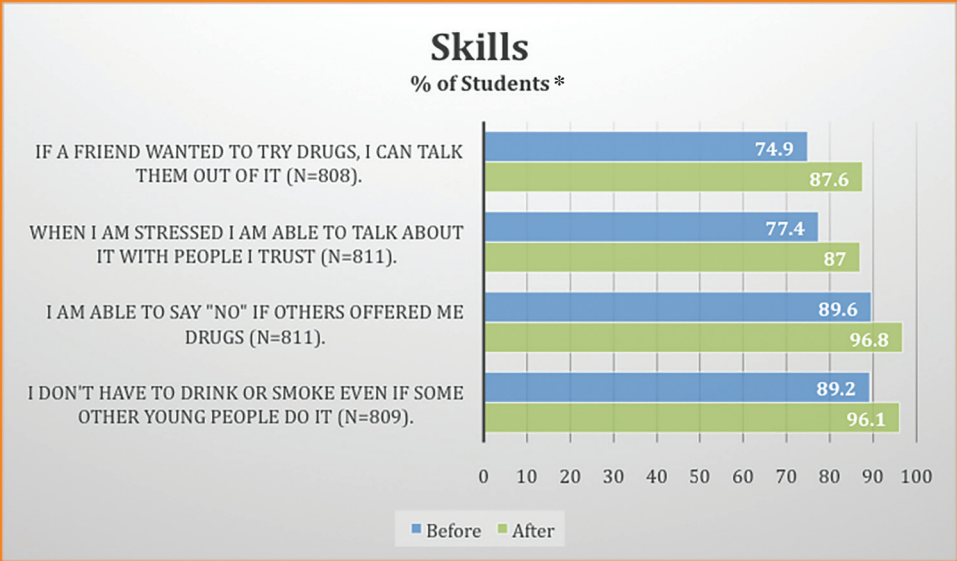
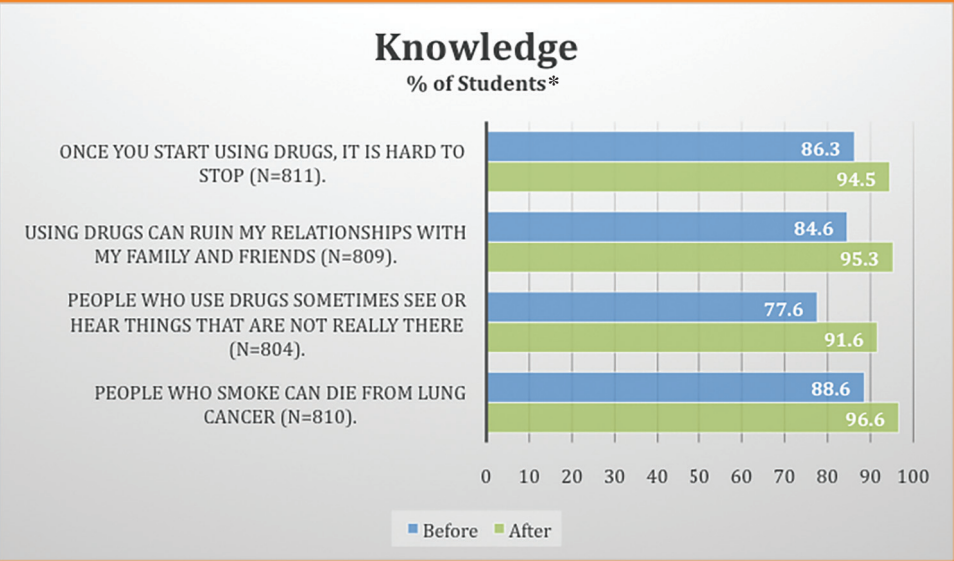
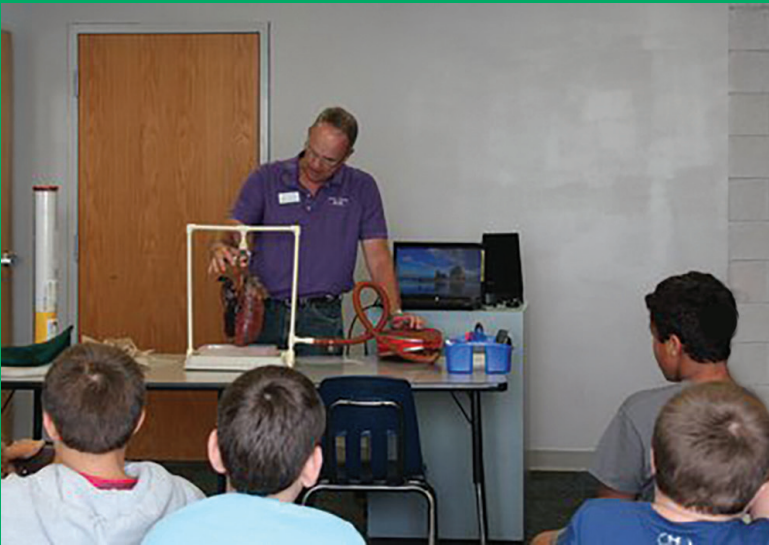
“I will never smoke or do drugs. I want to succeed in life.” – *Sixth grade Bradley County participant*

“I like the program I think it’s a good way for kids to learn and grow from their mistakes. Also not to die at a young age. I like that I can learn and regret the mistakes I have made in the past.” – *Seventh grade Grainger County participant*

“I learned a lot. It really help me through life knowing what’s right.” – *Ninth grade Robertson County participant*

“I think this program will really help kids learn a lot about smoking, drugs, etc.” – *Eighth grade Dyer County participant*

“Health Rocks! was a great experience! It was very interesting and influential. It really inspired me to take a stand by saying ‘no’ to drugs, tobacco, and alcohol.” – *Eighth grade Marion County participant*



*Percentages reflect those students who “agreed” or “strongly agreed” on a four-part scale where: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, and 4 = strongly agree.