

4-H LIFE program has national impact

MU Extension 4-H LIFE (Living Interactive Family Education) program is one of three projects named to the National 4-H Mentoring Program. With national support, other states can access tools to replicate Missouri's model program for serving at-risk youth and families. Missouri's program leaders will provide training and technical assistance to other states interested in duplicating 4-H LIFE.

As a family-strengthening project, 4-H LIFE is designed to address the needs of children of qualifying incarcerated parents and their family members; the program's key components include mentoring, parenting skills classes and 4-H club participation.

"4-H LIFE is very important to young people who are facing separation from their parents through incarceration," says 4-H LIFE Lead Advisor Lynna Lawson. "4-H LIFE helps them remain connected to their parents in a skill-building setting; interaction with adult mentors will help them make good decisions for their future."

Currently operating at three state correctional centers, 4-H LIFE also will expand operations in three additional state facilities, with support of the Missouri Children's Trust Fund. Through this

grant, MU Extension 4-H LIFE Coordinator Tammy Gillespie will direct program training, research and expansion.

The 4-H LIFE Program partners with a wide range of stakeholders, including the **USDA Children, Youth and Families at**

Risk initiative, University of Missouri Extension, the Missouri 4-H Foundation, the Missouri Department of Corrections and the Missouri Children's Trust Fund.

4-H LIFE has earned kudos for innovation and effectiveness; in 2009 it was named a National 4-H Program of Distinction, and recently was cited as a promising parent education program in the Council of State Government's Federal Action Plan on Children of Incarcerated Parents. Land grant universities in five other states are being funded to replicate MU Extension's 4-H LIFE program.



Incarcerated parents who participate in the 4-H LIFE program attend parenting skills classes to develop and improve the skills needed to interact in a positive, age-appropriate way with their children. The 4-H LIFE family club meeting takes place monthly during visitation at the correctional center. Working together as a family on 4-H activities gives the parents an opportunity to show their children that they can provide capable and caring parental guidance.