

Benefits of Cultural Immersion Experiences for Rural and Sub-Urban 4-H Teens



Enhanced Global Awareness and Understanding. One of the most significant benefits of cultural immersion experiences for 4-H teens is the development of an expanded global awareness and an understanding of different cultures. By engaging with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, teens gain firsthand knowledge of diverse traditions, values, and lifestyles. According to her dissertation study of High School Cultural Immersion programs, these types of experiences can lead to increased cultural empathy and understanding, as teens learn to appreciate and respect cultural differences (*Livermore, 2022*). These intercultural encounters and awareness foster a more inclusive and open-minded worldview, preparing teens to better understand what it is to be different and navigate an increasingly interconnected world.



Academic and Career Advantages. The advantages of cultural immersion experiences go beyond personal and social development, offering real-world advantages for teens' academic and career pathways. Research has shown that students who engage in cultural immersion experiences increase their academic performance, demonstrate higher levels of cultural competency, and develop an increased interest in global issues (*Savicki, V. 2023*).

For rural and sub-urban 4-H teens, the skills and knowledge gained from cultural immersion experiences increases their academic success and prepares them for future career opportunities in an increasingly globalized workforce. By immersing themselves among different cultures, languages, and customs, teens develop a competitive edge in their academic and future career pursuits. In addition, participation in such experiences can be an asset when submitting resumes and college applications. Admissions officers and employers often value candidates who have demonstrated a commitment to cultural understanding and global awareness. (*Noddings, N. 2005*) Teens who have engaged in cultural immersion experiences can leverage these experiences to demonstrate their adaptability, open-mindedness, and cross-cultural communication skills, setting them apart from other applicants.



Cultural Engagement and Connections. Cultural immersion experiences encourage the development of long-lasting cross-cultural connections for 4-H teens. By interacting with individuals from different backgrounds and forming friendships with peers from around the world, teens build enduring relationships that transcend geographical boundaries. These connections not only enrich teens' lives but also contribute to a sense of global citizenship and interconnectedness while helping to diminish implicit bias and better understand the value of diversity.



Ohio 4-H Cultural Immersion Project Puerto Rico (CIP)

The Ohio 4-H Cultural Immersion Project – Puerto Rico is an 8-day cross-cultural immersion experience for 4-H teens in two different locations on the island. The experience focuses on building skills and abilities to prepare 4-H teens to better understand and work with those who are different. Teens also develop a new appreciation for unfamiliar cultural and ethnic environments while engaging in mutual connections, cross-cultural learning and service projects. Local community interaction is emphasized through participation in local community events, farm visits, host family meals, daily discussion groups, and recreation. 4-H Teens ages 15-19 are eligible.

Program Components

- Cultural events and festivals
- Cooking and eating cultural foods
- Community Service Projects
- Exploring Puerto Rico 4-H program
- Sessions learning Puerto Rican music and culture
- Community engagement activities and group challenges
- Hiking and nature activities

Program Impact:

Past teen participants consistently reported their experience was the first of its kind traveling out of mainland US, being in a tropical island, eating different foods, living in a “foreign” place with people they didn’t know, hearing another language and learning about living in another culture.

As reported in previous post-trip evaluations, 98% of teens said they will seek similar experiences in the future and will spread the word to others that cultural immersion experiences are valuable and life changing.



By the Numbers

48

Number of 4-H Teens who have participated in the CIP - - Puerto Rico Immersion experience since 2015

12

Number Counties in Ohio and Minnesota that have sent 4-H’ers on the CIP experience

32

Number of unique cultural / ethnic events and community challenge activities participants have experienced during the CIP

References

Livermore, M. (2022). Growing Through Connection: A Phenomenological Study of High School Cultural Immersion Programs.

Savicki, V. (Ed.). (2023). Developing intercultural competence and transformation: Theory, research, and application in international education. Taylor & Francis.

Noddings, N. (Ed.). (2005). Educating citizens for global awareness. Teachers College Press.