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Giving Benzie County Better Kid Care

This spring, Benzie County residents who care for their relative children were given an opportunity to take free classes to inspire quality care for those children.

The classes covered everything from child development to positive discipline, to early learning, health, safety and CPR. Ten participants graduated from this 18-hour series.

The certificate they received allowed them to apply for cash incentives to increase their DHS subsidy payments.

The classes were funded through the Michigan Better Kid Care program (MiBKC) and took place in the Benzie County Government Center. The formal evaluation indicated that nearly all (more than 90 percent) of the participants found the information useful and reported that it met their needs.

The vision of MiBKC is for all of Michigan's children to receive high-quality care and education so that they are ready for school and life.

To achieve this goal, MSU Extension works to educate and support current and potential child care providers by providing professional development opportunities to child care providers, aides and relative caregivers. Classes are offered in every Michigan county throughout the state.

The program is funded through a contract with the Early Childhood Investment Corporation.

Contact: *Therese Povoio, B. Ph*
Family Nutrition/Better Kid Care Programs

4-H Summer Club in full swing

Throughout the summer, Benzie County fifth through eighth grade students are hiking local trails, cooking with local foods, pounding on African drums and lending their hands to community service projects as part of the 4-H Summer Club.

The program offers children the opportunity to participate in eight themed week-long day camps. Campers can enjoy weeks that give them the chance to learn about topics related to science, cultures, natural resources and outdoor recreation.

For example, during "Dirt to Dinner" week the campers visit farms to learn about agricultural production, tour farmers' markets and test their skills in the kitchen.

During "Culture Shock," they take part in Indian Hip-Hop dancing, exchange letters with youths from Ghana and taste the flavors of a Hawaiian luau.

This year, the summer club is led by eight highly qualified and trained young adults. All staff members have CPR and first aid certification and basic water safety instruction. A certified lifeguard is also on staff.

4-H Summer Club is made possible through partnerships with the Corporation for National and Community Service, which provides full-time AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers, the Benzie County Human Services Collaborative, The Benzie County Community Chest, The Benzie County and Frankfort-Elberta Area Schools and many volunteers.

Contact: *Patricia Roth, Extension Educator*
4-H Children, Youth and Family Programs

Benzie County MSU Extension helps build leaders for a strong future

Communication between people who work in departments in different parts of an organization can be challenging. To help improve teamwork, communication and interactions between employees in Benzie County government, MSU Extension offered a workshop for county employees focusing on the qualities of effective leadership.

Mary Robb, Muskegon County MSU Extension director and a trained facilitator led the workshop, which was targeted at department leaders based on requests from these individuals, the Benzie County Board of Commissioners and the county administrator/controller.

All county departments were represented at the June 11 event, which received very positive verbal and written feedback. Robb guided the group through a series of engaging exercises during the day-long event. She focused on team building and effective communication.

Based on written evaluations, 80 percent of the participants learned at least one leadership skill that they were going to use in the workplace in the near future. The most highly rated skills included communication on a regular basis and sharing statements of appreciation with staff members.

A written evaluation will be completed by both department heads and support staff within the next six months. This document can help all participants as they move forward into the future to provide service to the county's residents.

Contact: *Steven Fouch, County Extension Director*

Sending Kids to Camp

Each year The Benzie County Camp Scholarship Committee sends close to 100 local low-income youths to summer camps.

The committee is a working group of the Benzie County Human Services Collaborative and its membership represents all youth-serving organizations in the community. Members work together to identify youths who would benefit from a summer camp experience. Contacts are then made with families to identify camps that meet the needs of the children and their families.

Children have attended camps around the world to learn about such topics as karate, forensics, music and environmental studies. A large number of youths attend local camps with which the collaborative group has established strong partnerships. Several camps offer an addition discount to these campers, making the committee dollars stretch further.

Funds to sponsor this program are donated through an annual "adopt-a-camper" campaign. Benzie County 4-H also hosts a basketball camp titled "Camp for a Cause," led by Eldon Miller, a former NCAA coach. Proceeds from this volunteer-driven camp are donated to the Camp Scholarship Committee.

This summer 105 children are enjoying the wonderful experiences summer camps have to offer.

Contact: *Patricia Roth, Extension Educator
4-H Children, Youth and Family Programs*

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