



Kids' Community

4-H Teen Takes Bite Out of Mosquito Threat

(NAPSA)—More than annoying, mosquitoes often carry disease like the potentially deadly West Nile virus.

Seventeen-year-old 4-H member Ashley Buford brought together hundreds of 4-H youth and adults to control Crisp County, Georgia's mosquito population to minimize the spread of West Nile.

Ashley loves horses. She wanted to help prevent the dangerous infection when she learned that many horses in her area had become ill. Then, she found out that West Nile had killed seven people in her home state. "I thought, this is about more than horses, this is affecting our entire community!" Ashley said.

In fact, more than 15,000 human cases of the virus, which causes inflammation of the brain, have been reported in 48 states since 1999.

Ashley conducted research and found that fathead minnows are natural predators of mosquito larvae. So, she put the minnows in her horses' water troughs to see if the tiny fish devoured the larvae. It worked.

The teen organized a 4-H Afterschool project in which youth and adults worked together to release minnows into standing water throughout the county. 4-H Afterschool is sponsored nationally by the JCPenney Afterschool Fund.

The impact of Ashley's project has been substantial. The mosquito population has decreased significantly, and no new local cases of West Nile virus have been reported.

"Who would have thought someone of her age and experience could have come up with such a simple and unique idea," said Crisp County Chairman Ferrell



Ashley Buford, at right, leads a minnow release to help eliminate the threat of West Nile virus in her community.

Henry, "It seems like some of us adults should have thought of it."

Leading this 4-H Afterschool project has been a major undertaking for Ashley, who had been so terrified of public speaking that she once refused to give a speech for her 4-H project until everyone left the room.

"Ashley did not know the leader she could become," said Crisp County Extension 4-H Agent Sandra McKinney. "She wants to make a difference in her world, and she's found a way to do that through 4-H."

Ashley continues leading minnow releases. "This experience is absolutely life-altering," she said, "One of the greatest things is to see how positively the community reacts to the project."

Ashley makes a difference in her community through 4-H, a community of young people across America who are learning leadership, citizenship and life skills. Learn how you can be part of the 4-H adventure at www.4husa.org.