



Youth Development Delivered

Helping grow youth development in 4-H and beyond!

Greetings to all of our favorite youth-serving friends!

We can't believe it's already July, and we hope that you and yours are able to find some time to rest, relax, and step away from the daily grind during these summer months.

A special shout-out to our 4-H folks! Whether you're fresh off the fairgrounds or counting down to the big week, we hope the experience was (or is) more memorable than stressful. Here's hoping for healthy animals, successful exhibits, and plenty of memories that make all those early mornings and late nights worthwhile.

As you can imagine, the three of us have been keeping plenty busy these past few months. From conference presentations and curriculum pilots to workshops galore, not to mention organizing and hosting the biennial 4-H Camping Conference, the life of an Extension Advisor is equal parts challenging, rewarding, and rarely dull. One of the best parts of our work is having the opportunity to connect with so many dedicated volunteers, educators, and youth professionals who continue to inspire us with their creativity, resilience, and commitment to young people.

In this issue, we're excited to share a few highlights from what we've been working on, along with resources, upcoming opportunities, and ideas that we hope will be useful as you continue making a difference in your communities. As always, thank you for all that you do to support young people!

Nate, Nicole, and Matt



Another day at the office. A beautiful morning headed to a workshop.

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About Us



Nathaniel Caeton

Nate is the 4-H Youth Development Advisor serving Shasta, Tehama, and Trinity counties. His lifelong passion for the outdoors guides much of his work, including improving camp programs, expanding opportunities for outdoor education, and fostering awareness and appreciation of natural resources. Other professional interests include life, college, and career readiness; drone and GIS applications in agriculture and natural resources; and youth disaster preparedness and resilience.

At the state level, Nate leads the implementation and delivery of Project Learning Tree (PLT) and My Preparedness Initiative (MyPI). He also co-chairs the 4-H Camping Advisory Committee and the 4-H Shooting Sports Advisory Committee.

Nate also holds a California CTE Teaching Credential in Agriculture and Natural Resources and Public Services.

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Nicole Marshall-Wheeler

Nicole is the 4-H Youth Development Advisor serving Butte, Colusa, and Glenn counties. Her work focuses on youth leadership, civic engagement, and volunteer development. Nicole is passionate about engaging volunteers and educators to help young people reach their full potential. Other professional interests include public speaking, youth leadership, camp, and youth mental health and well-being. She is also a certified Youth Mental Health First Aid instructor.

At the state level, Nicole co-chairs the Public Speaking and Communication Advisory Committee and the 4-H Camping Advisory Committee. She also serves as a member of the Civic Engagement Advisory Committee, Expanded Learning (Afterschool) Workgroup, and Developing Volunteer Capacities Workgroup.

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Matthew Rodriguez

Matt is the 4-H Youth Development Advisor serving Nevada, Placer, Sutter, and Yuba counties. His work focuses on volunteer development, positive youth development, and expanding access to high-quality 4-H programs and leadership opportunities. Matt partners with 4-H clubs, schools, and community organizations to support youth through educational programming and volunteer training. He is also a certified Youth Mental Health First Aid instructor.

At the state level, Matt co-chairs the Developing Volunteer Capacities Workgroup, Thriving Youth Workgroup, and Volunteer Development Advisory Committee. He also serves as a member of the Expanded Learning (Afterschool) Workgroup. To learn more about Matt and his work with California 4-H, visit his Thriving Forward blog:

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Cultivating Emotionally Healthy Beyond Ready Skills

Matthew R. Rodriguez

Introduction

We all have feelings. And they matter. Feelings help us learn about ourselves and others. Despite their benefit, many of us have a hard time identifying feelings. In his book, *Permission To Feel*, Dr. Marc Brackett encourages us to lean in to our feelings. By doing so, we can lead more healthy and productive lives. This becomes especially important for those of us who work in youth development programming, such as the 4-H program. By learning about our own feelings, we can help youth identify their own feelings. This blog post is a review of Brackett's book *Permission To Feel*.

Why Feelings Matter

Feelings are information. Brackett writes, "Our multiple senses bring us news from our bodies, our minds, and the outside world, and then our brains process and analyze it and formulate our experience. We call that a *feeling*." Researcher Daniel Goleman in his book, *Emotional Intelligence* explains that emotional intelligence (EQ) is a better indicator of career success than intelligence quotient (IQ). Through learning how to manage our own feelings and learning how to recognize the feelings of others, we can improve our interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. By helping youth learn about emotions, we can help prepare them to be "beyond ready" for their current and future goals.

Feelings are also related to our physical health. While emotional stress can lead to physical sickness, positive feelings can lead to physical wellness. Research has linked hostility and anger to heart disease. Negative emotions are also related to hypertension (elevated blood pressure), increased heart rate, and decreased function of the immune system.

Because of the importance of feelings, Brackett provides a set of specific skills that we can develop that will help us to become emotion scientists. People



Beyond Ready

What Is Beyond Ready?

The 4-H Beyond Ready Initiative prepares young people to thrive in a rapidly changing world by helping them build the skills, confidence, and experiences needed for success in college, careers, and life. Through hands-on learning, leadership opportunities, civic engagement, and workforce readiness, 4-H youth develop essential life skills such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and adaptability.

Beyond Ready expands on the traditional 4-H pledge to ensure every young person is equipped not just to face the future, but to lead it. By connecting youth with caring adults, meaningful projects, and real-world experiences, 4-H empowers them to become confident, capable, and engaged citizens who are ready for whatever comes next.

who can identify feelings and can manage them in ways that promote wellness. Brackett provides an Acronym: R.U.L.E.R.

Developing RULER Skills

R. The first step to becoming an emotion scientist is to **recognize** when an emotion happens. To do this, we can observe a change in our own thoughts, energy, or body. We can also see someone else's emotions in their facial expression, body language, and tone of voice. These observations provide us with information about what feelings may be happening in ourselves and others.

U. The second step is to **understand** the cause of the emotions. When we understand the cause of emotions, we can see how the feelings shape our thinking and our decisions. Understanding feelings helps us forecast how we behave and how others behave.

L. The third step is to **label** the feeling. Labeling feelings includes the process of connecting an emotional experience to a descriptive word that describes the feeling. Having a robust vocabulary of feeling terms can increase our accuracy in describing emotions.

E. The fourth step is to **express** our feeling. Key to this step is knowing a helpful way to display our emotions and under which timing to do so. Social context can play an important role in helping us make decisions on expressing our feelings in meaningful and helpful ways.

R. The last step is to **regulate** our feeling. Regulating our emotions includes the ways we monitor and modify our emotional reactions. By doing so, we can increase our chances of personal and professional success.

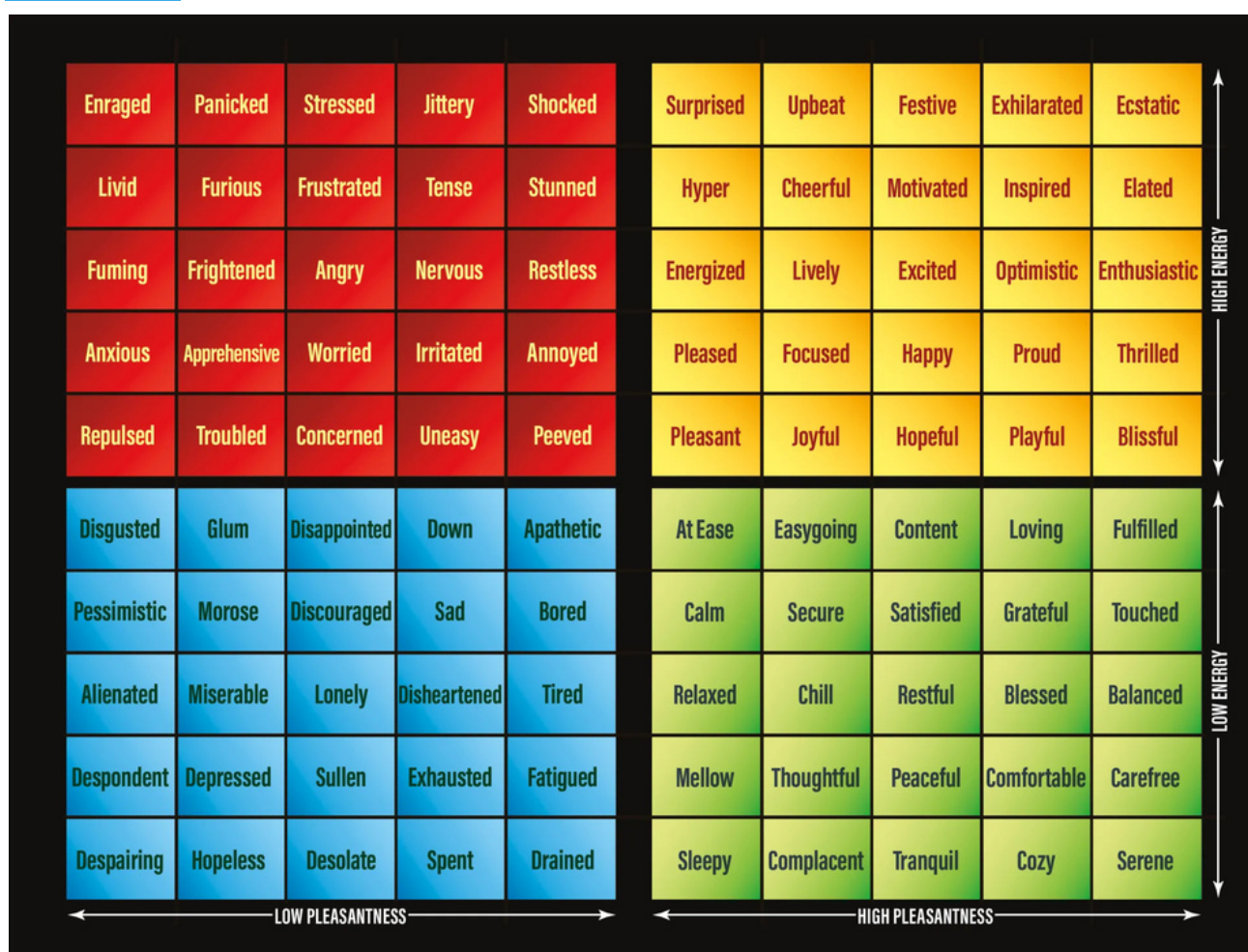
By practicing these R.U.L.E.R. emotional skills, we can increase our emotional intelligence and help others improve theirs as well. For those of us who serve youth, teaching youth how to develop RULER skills can help them better understand themselves and relate to their peers. In addition to RULER, Brackett provides one more important emotional intelligence tool called The Mood Meter.

Measuring Feelings Using The Mood Meter

The Mood Meter provides a matrix of feelings that are organized into four main categories: 1) Low Pleasantness and Low Energy, 2) High Pleasantness and Low Energy, 3) Low Pleasantness and High Energy, and 4) High Pleasantness and High Energy. In Figure 1, we see that each category is represented with a color: Blue, Green, Red, and Yellow. In general, the blue color represents when a person feels lonely, the green color represents when a person feels restful, the red color represents when a person feels angry, and the yellow color represents when a person feels excited.

But because emotions can vary, there are gradients of feelings that can occur within each of the four quadrants based on the degree of pleasantness and energy. For example, a person may feel more than angry, they can feel enraged because they feel a very low rate of pleasantness and a very high rate of energy. This person feels more than just angry, they feel enraged. In this example, the descriptive word "enrage" more accurately describes the person's feeling than merely "angry." Or suppose a person just got married and feels more than excited, they feel ecstatic. While excited may describe the person's feeling, if they have a high rate of energy and a high degree of pleasantness, a more accurate descriptor of excited would be the word "ecstatic." These two examples show the power of using labels that accurately describe our feelings.

Figure 1. The Mood Meter by Dr. Marc Brackett. See his website to [download The Mood Meter](#).



Conclusion

Feelings play an important part in our lives. As such, we have the privilege (and permission) to feel. By leaning into our feelings, we can explore a wonderful world of emotions. We can also help others tap into their own emotional world as well. For those of us who work in youth development, helping young people apply their R.U.L.E.R. skills can help them increase their emotional intelligence so they can become "beyond ready" for their current and future goals. And helping youth learn how to label their

emotions by using The Mood Meter can help them better describe their emotions. As we increase our emotional literacy, we can lead healthier and more productive lives.

References

Brackett, M. (2019). *Permission to feel: The power of emotional intelligence to achieve well-being and success*. Celadon Books.

Goleman, D. (2005). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. Bantam.



Working with Youth Leaders

Nicole Marshall-Wheeler

Leadership skills are sought after in a variety of contexts and needed for jobs, community organizations, volunteer boards, academics, and personal life. With the need for leadership skills, it's an area where youth development programs and educational organizations can continue to provide youth with opportunities to grow their skills and experiences.

Youth leadership opportunities may look like youth planning and leading an educational session, being a camp counselor, an officer in a club or organization, and more. There are often adults supporting the youth as they learn and lead – sometimes called youth-adult partnerships.

Youth-adult partnerships done well allow for active youth decision making, engagement, and growth. When adults and youth work together to find a balance in shared power, it creates a meaning experience for both.

Finding that balance can take practice for both youth and adults. This checklist may be helpful if you plan on working with youth leaders¹:

Checklist for youth and adults working together

- learn about each other before starting an activity
- develop job descriptions
- identify expectations of youth and adults
- identify goals
- identify activities and the who, how, where, when, and why of each task
- encourage and support all partners; recognize their accomplishments

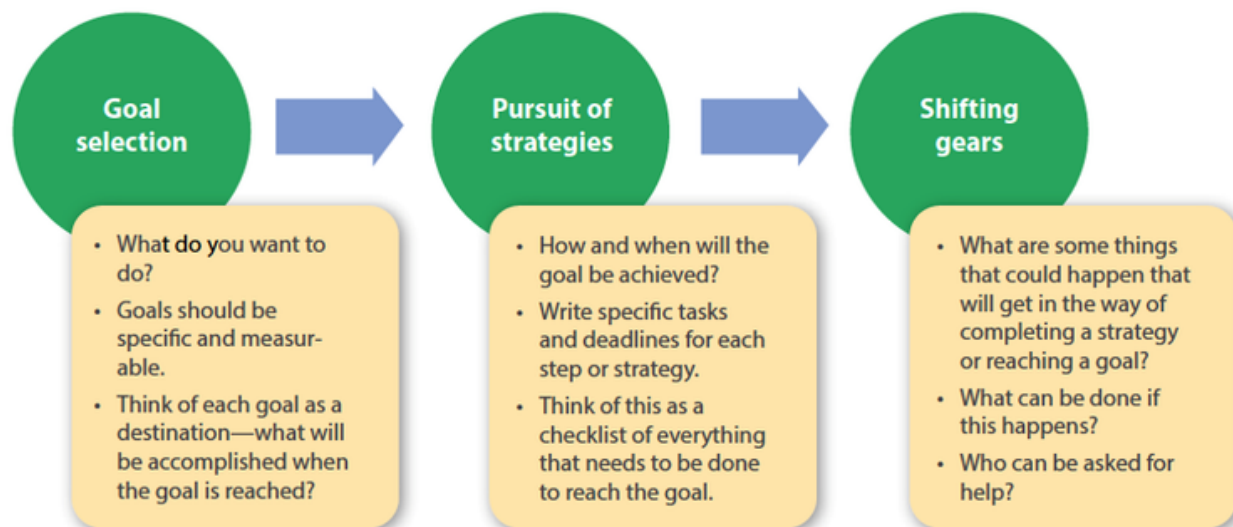
Checklist for working with youth leaders. Image from the UC 4-H Volunteer Educators' Guide (2023)



2025 Butte County 4-H Camp Directors: Adult and teen directors work side by side to plan and lead a high-quality camp experience, exemplifying youth-adult partnership in action.

Intentionally Planning for Leadership Skill Development

Building leadership skills often happens as an afterthought or is the byproduct of another project. For example, the project you are doing with youth may be community service, planning an event, or another specific project, yet in the end, the youth come out with some leadership skills too. Finding the time to do specific leadership skill building can be challenging as you navigate getting the other parts of the project done. One thing you can do as the adult supporting the youth is to help youth in planning and reaching their leadership goals. One system for goal management is the GPS (Goal Selection, Pursuit of Strategies, and Shifting Gears) acronym. This system allows for the project, regardless of content, to continue but intentionally helps youth frame leadership goals.



G.P.S. goal management model. Image from the UC 4-H Volunteer Educators' Guide (2023).

Some additional considerations when working with youth leaders:

As an adult working with young people in leadership roles, there will almost always be an inherent power difference between youth and adults. Adults often have more access money, transportation, life experience, etc., but that doesn't diminish the experiences and viewpoints which our young people bring. Before and throughout the project, take some time to reflect on your biases about the capabilities of youth and remember to share the power and decision making. Even when youth seem like they can't do the task at hand, let them try. These opportunities allow youth to learn and grow their leadership skills. Don't forget, leadership doesn't always look the same. Celebrating our differences and sharing wins will support our young people in their leadership journey, as we travel beside them.

References

¹Marshall-Wheeler, N., Miner, G., Worker, S.M., Espinoza, D., Miller, J. & Kok, C.M. (2023). UC 4-H volunteer educators' guide: For those facilitating educational experiences. UC ANR Publications [8724]. <https://doi.org/10.3733/ucanr.8724>



Building Partnerships, Strengthening Communities: Expanding Youth Mental Health First Aid Across Rural California

Nathaniel W. Caeton

Seeing the Need

When a young person is struggling with their mental health, the first person to notice is usually not a counselor or healthcare provider. More often than not, it is a trusted adult; a teacher, a 4-H volunteer, an afterschool educator, a coach, a scout leader, or some other youth-serving individual. The challenge here is that many caring adults have never received formal training on how to recognize warning signs, begin a supportive conversation, or connect youth with appropriate resources.

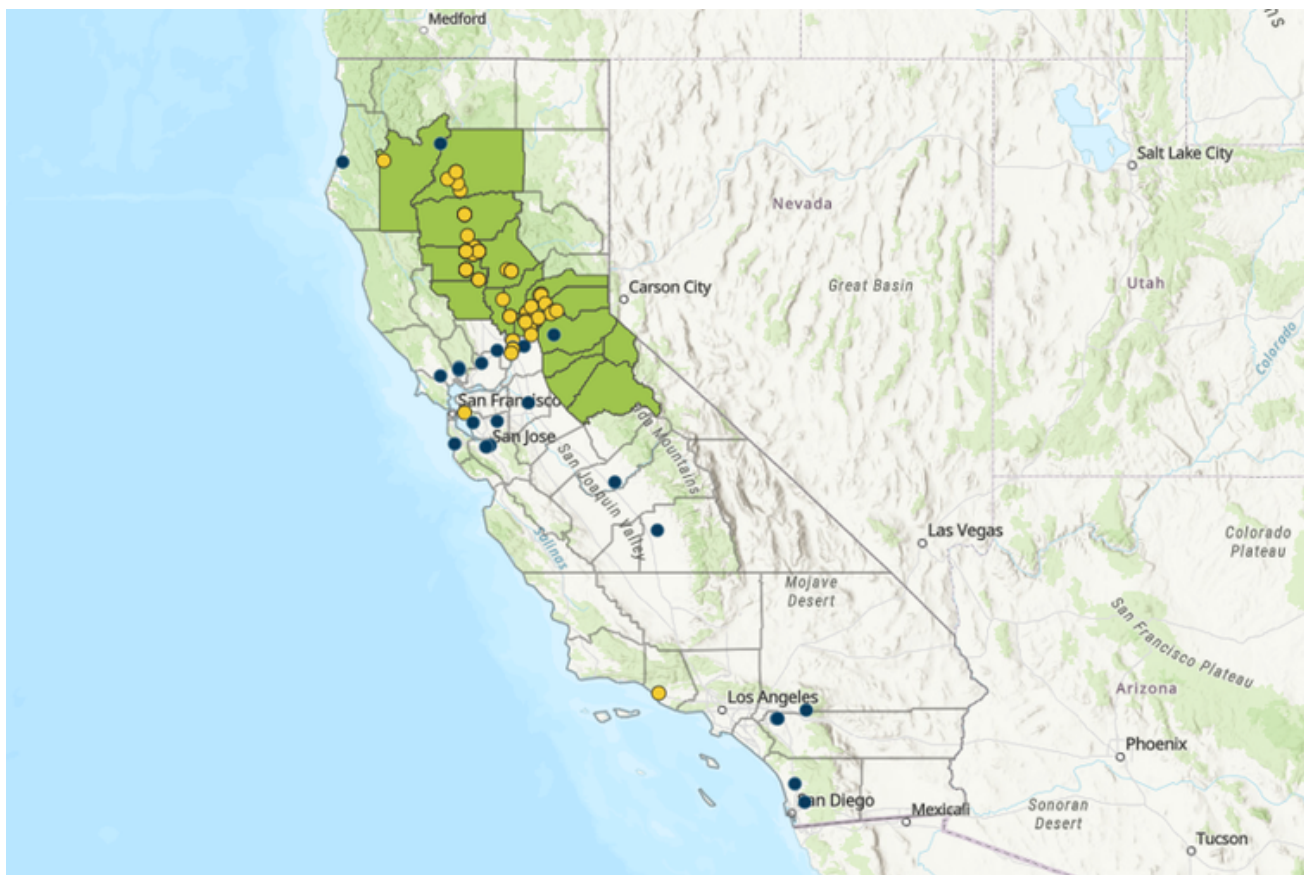
Recognizing this need, Matt, Nicole and I, along with several other colleagues across UC ANR began efforts to expand Youth Mental Health First Aid (YMHFA) training throughout rural Northern California. With support provided by an Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN) Development Grant, our project sought to strengthen community resilience by increasing mental health literacy, expanding local instructor capacity, and building partnerships with organizations that serve young people every day.

Building Community Capacity

One of the first outcomes of the project was expanding UC ANR's own capacity. Through the grant, Nicole and I became certified YMHFA Instructors, joining Matt and 3 other colleagues in delivering trainings throughout Northern California. Together, we are now able to continue offering YMHFA well beyond the life of the grant. Our original goal was ambitious: certify 100 adults working with youth across fifteen rural Northern California counties in a span of eight months. By the end of the project, 150 adults had completed Youth Mental Health First Aid certification, exceeding our original goal by 50%. Yet one of the most interesting outcomes wasn't the number of participants; rather it was where they came from.

Meeting Communities Where They Are

Our project was designed around 15 rural Northern California counties, but we didn't want geography to become a barrier. If someone outside our focus area found one of our workshops and wanted to participate, we welcomed them. All told, adults from 10 of the target counties attended alongside participants representing 16 additional California counties, extending the project's reach to 26 of California's 58 counties – a response that demonstrated that the need for accessible mental health training extends well beyond any single region.



Although the project focused on 15 rural Northern California counties, participants ultimately represented 26 California counties, illustrating broad interest in accessible Youth Mental Health First Aid training.

For me, one of the most rewarding aspects of the project was how those partnerships developed. Rather than focusing solely on organizations that already had well-established professional development systems, I intentionally reached out to smaller charter schools and remote school districts where educators often have fewer opportunities to participate in specialized training. Instead of expecting teachers and staff to travel long distances to larger population centers for professional development, we brought the training to them whenever possible. The response was overwhelmingly positive.

Relationships That Last

Many of these educators were eager for opportunities like YMHFA and deeply appreciated having high-quality professional development offered either virtually or within their own communities. Those initial conversations have grown into lasting partnerships that continue well beyond the original grant.

One such partnership with a local charter school illustrates how Extension relationships can evolve over time. Although scheduling constraints and existing professional development commitments prevented the school from participating in YMHFA during the grant period, the conversations that began through this project strengthened an already growing partnership. Combined with other Extension programming delivered at the school, those relationships have opened the door to

new opportunities. As the school's previous professional development contract has concluded, we are now exploring YMHFA for school staff as the next step toward implementing Teen Mental Health First Aid (tMHFA) within the Youth Disaster Preparedness Career Technical Education (CTE) course I teach at the site.

The National Council for Mental Wellbeing requires schools to establish a network of adults trained in YMHFA before implementing tMHFA, ensuring that students have a knowledgeable support system in place. What began as a conversation during a grant-funded project has evolved into a broader partnership with the potential to support both educators and students for years to come.

Evaluation findings reinforced what we observed throughout the project. Participants demonstrated meaningful gains in their knowledge of youth mental health, particularly in applying the ALGEE Action Plan; a practical framework that helps trusted adults assess situations, listen without judgment, provide reassurance, encourage appropriate professional support, and connect young people with additional resources. Just as importantly, instructors identified trust, existing relationships, and intentional outreach as the foundation for successful community partnerships.

One story shared during our evaluation continues to resonate. At last year's California 4-H State Leadership Conference, a trained volunteer noticed concerning behavior in a young person and confidently used the ALGEE Action Plan to begin a supportive conversation and connect the youth with help. Reflecting on the experience, the volunteer shared that before receiving the training, they likely would have noticed the warning signs but would not have known how to respond. Stories like these remind us that building confidence in trusted adults can make a meaningful difference when youth need support most.

Looking Ahead

The project also provided an opportunity to contribute to the broader Extension community. Matt and I presented our findings and lessons learned at the 2025

What We Learned About Building Rural Partnerships

One of the greatest outcomes of this project wasn't just the number of adults trained—it was the relationships built along the way. As we reflected on both the evaluation findings and our own experiences, several lessons emerged that may help others looking to expand youth development programming in their communities.

- **Look beyond the obvious partners.** Some of our strongest relationships emerged from smaller charter schools and rural districts that often have fewer opportunities for specialized professional development. Intentionally reaching underserved audiences can open doors to meaningful and lasting collaborations.
- **Meet communities where they are.** Offering training virtually or within local communities reduced travel barriers and made it easier for educators and youth-serving professionals to participate. Bringing professional development to partners, rather than expecting them to come to us, helped increase access and strengthen relationships.

Extension Disaster Education Network Annual Conference in Portland, Maine, sharing not only the project's evaluation results but also practical strategies for building and strengthening partnerships in rural communities. Those findings have since informed additional scholarship and will continue through future peer-reviewed publications.



Sharing lessons learned from expanding Youth Mental Health First Aid across rural California at the 2025 EDEN Annual Conference in Portland, Maine. Left to right: Fred Schlutt, Regan Weeks, Matthew Rodriguez, and Nathaniel Caeton.

As Extension professionals, we often measure success by the programs we deliver. This project reminded us that one of our greatest strengths lies in something even more enduring: the relationships we build. Every new partnership expands our ability to respond to community needs, whether through youth mental health, volunteer development, disaster preparedness, or future educational programming. And while this grant has concluded, the work continues. The instructors, partnerships, and relationships developed through this project have created a foundation that will continue expanding access to Youth Mental Health First Aid and other youth development opportunities throughout California for years to come.

Extension has always been about people and relationships. This project reminded us that when we invest in trust, listen to community needs, and meet people where they are, those relationships often become the foundation for opportunities we never could have anticipated.

- **Build on trust, not transactions.**

Successful partnerships rarely begin with a single program. They grow through consistent communication, shared goals, and a willingness to listen to community needs. Trust established through one project often creates opportunities for many more.

- **Align programming with partner priorities.**

Understanding what matters to a partner creates mutual value. For example, Youth Mental Health First Aid can help California schools support staff training expectations under Education Code § 49428.15 while also building the adult support network required before implementing Teen Mental Health First Aid.

- **Think beyond the grant.**

Grants may provide the catalyst, but relationships sustain the work. The partnerships formed through this project continue to create new opportunities for Youth Mental Health First Aid, Teen Mental Health First Aid, Career Technical Education, and other Extension programming long after the original funding has ended.

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