

# Program develops individual strengths to create stronger communities

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Dr. Cathleen Love | University of Connecticut College of Agriculture, Health, and Natural Resources | This article previously appeared on the UConn Extension website



The University of Connecticut Extension's People Empowering People (UConn PEP) is a personal and family development program with a strong community focus. With support from USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), UConn PEP builds upon each person's strengths to help them grow in communications, goal setting, problem solving, parent and family relationships, and community involvement. They also find their voice, share stories, and begin to believe they can make a difference.

UConn PEP expanded to other states, including Michigan, California, Missouri, Massachusetts, Vermont, and Florida. Connections were made with professors in South Africa and Egypt to establish the program in universities in those countries as well.

PEP facilitators undergo intense two-day training that begins with an overview of reflective practice and understanding diversity. Ten two-hour sessions follow that focus on values, communication, problem solving, parenting, leadership skills, and community issues. The participants engage in an individual or group project designed and implemented by them to achieve personal or community goals.

Through PEP, participants realize their leadership potential and invest in themselves, their families, and their communities. The program continues to grow through support from our partner organizations, including school districts, nonprofit organizations and faith-based communities. Funding for the programs comes from the state and local government, foundations, and local businesses.

Questionnaires are administered to all participants before and after the program. Key findings from the responses were that participants showed significant positive changes on self-assertive efficacy, sense of mastery, parental satisfaction, family problem solving, communication, and community engagement.

PEP's most valuable contribution to the participants is through its focus on the connections between individuals and their communities.

UConn PEP has positively influenced more than 50 communities across the state in the last 20 years. Participants enjoy the classes, the stories shared, the laughter, the trust within the group, and the comfort in sharing and speaking with one another. UConn PEP conversations empower participants to accomplish or obtain something. Every moment, every word, every tear, every laugh and every lesson becomes permanently ingrained in their minds and in their hearts.

*NIFA invests in and advances agricultural research, education and extension and seeks to make transformative discoveries that solve societal challenges.*

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