

‘Through the Lens of Lincoln’

Youth capture the mood of Covid-19 through 4-H photography contest

The “Through the Lens of Lincoln: Capturing COVID-19” photo contest serves as Lincoln University’s most recent program launch in response to the national and local health, social and economic climate impacted by the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Lincoln University’s 4-H Positive Youth Development Team established this documentary-style program to engage the youth of Missouri to share their voices, fears, strengths and perspectives through a program that is specifically designed to stimulate their awareness toward social justice issues across the country.

“Through the Lens of Lincoln: Capturing COVID-19” photo contest designer and 4-H State Specialist Adrian Hendricks, stated, “This program gives young people in the state of Missouri a way to harness social power through the vehicle of photography and creativity, whereby they can expand their voices and sharpen their communication skills.”

Our photo contest became a great way to engage existing and developing topics that are currently on the minds of many Missouri youth. The collaboration embedded in the program delivery gives the Lincoln University 4-H staff, local community residents and business owners a way to discuss prominent topics that greatly impact their day-to-day lives. “It’s great to be able to put on a program like this. However, it wouldn’t have been possible without the hard work of our team: Callie Newsom, Mariann Wright, Sherry Maxwell and Dawn Jordan, who all helped make this program a great success,” Hendricks said.

“Through the Lens of Lincoln: Capturing COVID-19” aligns with the Lincoln University and 4-H mission to give youth a voice to express who they are and how they can make their lives and communities better. This photography contest was an example of implementing the 4-H pledge, touching on each “H” of 4-H clover insignia: Head, Heart, Hands and Health.

The project involved mental tasks (Head) in the actual submission of contest entries. Each 4-H youth member outlined and planned his or her photography project with the following objectives in mind: depiction of passion, display of deep emotion (Heart), and



Is It Black or Is It White?

No matter if you are black or white we all see through the same lens if we choose to. COVID to a teenager means snacks, video games, and fly sneakers, but to a parent it means being stuck with their kids 24/7, chores, and no money being spent on lunch money. I see COVID as a time to be social via fortnight, but my parents see it as my brain turning to one big gushers candy (hard on the outside and juicy in the middle.) Rather your black or white, we all see through the lens of life as the way we once knew it changing...social distancing...rather you’re black or white...give me six feet.

“It was depressing to see the caution tape, especially after the wind unwrapped some of it. It looked like sad crepe paper.”



Waiting

I wish I could go to the park. The kids are especially sad that they can't go to the park. I took this picture of my sister.

use of instruments to complete the project (Hands), which are basic in the majority of 4-H's "learn by doing" approach. The physical effects from COVID-19 were the overriding theme of this contest (Health).

The images taken made statements about personal responsibility, civic duties and changes made due to the pandemic. Furthermore, the photography project and the contest results promoted the Lincoln University Cooperative Extension (LUCE) pillars and critical issues of entrepreneurship, health, social justice and environmental and natural resources.

As the late, great Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." During the last eight months as we embraced a new decade, social justice issues have become a much more prominent concern in our nation. Lincoln University Cooperative Extension's mission targets the underserved and overlooked in our community and state, creating programs to keep youth engaged in learning. The "Through the Lens of Lincoln: Capturing COVID-19" photo contest allows youth to express themselves in positive ways as they use available technology to capture- images of the events happening around them. It is extremely important that young people recognize events that could affect their ways of living in a society. Young people need to have safe and effective ways to have open dialogue concerning matters such as social justice, health disparities, protest, national policy and police brutality as they see it in both rural and urban settings around the state of Missouri.

Lincoln University Cooperative Extension has made social justice a long-term initiative. As a department, we have positioned ourselves to close the gap in communities

across the state, believing the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “the time is always right to do what is right.”

The Through the Lens of Lincoln: Capturing COVID-19 photo contest displayed the importance of community engagement by ensuring that youth were a part of the big picture in their community. Involving community residents provides input and insight on what is going on in or around their community. This project allowed the young community to express what goes on in their high-risk communities. Many rural communities face poverty and miseducation. Rural communities are sometimes the last communities included in information sharing. Youth were given the opportunity to be civically engaged with the health issues affecting their communities.

Innovation in learning was incorporated by tasking youth to create a visual representation of the COVID-19 pandemic. The guidelines for the photo contest were written to be as inclusive and open as possible. This allowed the participants to interpret the parameters as they saw fit, without added restrictions. The Through the Lens of Lincoln: Capturing COVID-19 photo contest not only let youth showcase original and critical thinking, but also allowed immediate and short-term participation in a LUCE 4-H activity. This contest was an opportunity for youth to use technology that was already available to them, but it challenged them to use that technology in a creatively different way. Entering this photography contest required youth to stimulate multiple brain areas by drawing upon visual art manipulation, written communication skills and responsibility.

Youth had the opportunity to submit two photos, enabling them to show more than one effect of COVID-19. Limiting the number of entries allowed for creative thinking while forcing linear thinking in the selection and editing process. Describing each photograph required organizing thoughts for written captions.



No Party Here

The playground near my house was wrapped in caution tape for several weeks due to the pandemic. We go there every day to walk our dog on the trail. It was depressing to see the caution tape, especially after the wind unwrapped some of it. It looked like sad crepe paper.

The University was challenged to adapt and demonstrate ways to engage with youth during the COVID-19 pandemic. This opportunity to stretch traditional boundaries of youth programming allowed educators to consider their role in innovative learning, using technology commonly found in Missouri households. As Apple Inc. cofounder Steve Jobs once stated, “Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower.” Lincoln University Cooperative Extension buys into this philosophy and incorporates it in its youth curricula to develop present and future leaders. ■