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## Denise Miller Innovator Award (Team)

### Executive Summary of Innovation

**YA4-H! Youth Advocates for Health: Engaging Youth in Participatory Health Research and Action** is a new program that was developed based on an interdisciplinary review of current research and best practices. YA4-H! incorporates several key program components, including youth-adult partnerships, teens as teachers, and youth participatory research and action.

### Description of Innovation

Three opportunities for youth development programming were brought together to create the **YA4-H! Youth Advocates for Health: Engaging Youth in Participatory Health Research and Action** program. The first is the pressing need to address health concerns of adolescents in their communities. We are bombarded each day with information about health concerns for youth. Second, there is an increased need for programming for and with teen audiences. As the demands of high school and competing opportunities come into play, teens need innovative and engaging programs to stay involved in 4-H. Third, there is a convincing body of research literature that outlines the impact of engaging youth in participatory research and action. These impacts include an increase in levels of positive development, better critical awareness, development of skills and mastery, and the development of social capital. The **YA4-H!** program combines all three programming opportunities into a dynamic, engaging, rewarding, and fun program for teens.

### Program Need

HEALTH! Has always been a part of 4-H, and many youth over the past 100 years have **pledged their health for better living**. Currently, healthy lifestyles is one of the three mission mandates identified by the national 4-H leadership. However, the Oregon 4-H program has not emphasized its health-related youth programming in past years. Recently, the 4-H program joined the new College of Public Health and Human Sciences at Oregon State University, which provides a perfect opportunity to develop 4-H programming in a health context. Furthermore, emerging research in the field of youth development indicates that engaging youth in participatory action research (YPAR) provides a rich context for the development of youth skills and other positive attributes. Despite the clear evidence of the effectiveness of YPAR programs on youth, few 4-H programs currently utilize a YPAR format, and of those, even fewer have a complete training curriculum developed for use in the program. Additionally, there is evidence that engaging teens as teachers of younger youth is an effective strategy for learning, both for