Youth from two rural communities will take the lead in promoting ATV safety courtesy of an opportunity provided by the Cooperative Extension Service.

A new 4-H project funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Children Youth and Families at Risk Program (CYFAR) will bring together teens and adults in both Bethel and the Glennallen/Copper River communities to develop and spread a message of responsible ATV riding among youth in their communities.

ATVs provide transportation, haul supplies and generally make life easier, particularly in rural areas. Training and proper use are essential to avoid injury. The ATV industry provides rider training but seldom in rural communities. In 2007, a group of 4-H teens from Kenny Lake decided to do something to fill this gap. With assistance from local agency representatives, Extension and Alaska Trails, the group has offered rider trainings, safety demonstrations, educational workshops and school presentations in Kenny Lake, Glennallen and Fairbanks over the last year.

Building on the successes of this 4-H club, the CYFAR grant will provide support to continue and expand this group while establishing a similar program in Bethel. Extension staff will visit these two communities in the coming months seeking local partners — individuals and groups with common goals for local youth and their safety. Coordinators will be hired in each community by December who will then build teams of local teens and adults. These teams, guided by Extension faculty and staff, will develop and deliver a safety outreach program.

Training for leadership development and ATV rider skills will be provided in both communities throughout the year, beginning in February 2009. A summer skills camp will be offered in July 2009 for participating teens from both communities in a central location. The long-range goal of this effort is to go beyond Bethel and Glennallen and share this safety message with other rural communities in Alaska.

If you would like to be a part of this program or would like more information, contact Meg Burgett at 907-746-9472 or pnasb@uaa.alaska.edu.

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