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The best part of fall, other than the weather turning cooler, leaves changing, and Friday Night Lights? It's the start of the Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge season across the Southwind District and the state of Kansas! What happens when we give a young person an idea and say, "Why not?" Maybe they have an idea for a product they want to create. Maybe they see a problem in their community and think they have a solution. Maybe they simply want to try something new. Whatever the idea may be, giving young people the opportunity to turn that idea into something real can teach lessons that reach far beyond the classroom.

Youth entrepreneurship isn't just about teaching young people how to start a business. It's about helping them develop the confidence, creativity, and problem-solving skills they will need no matter where life takes them. When young people develop a business idea, they quickly learn that having an idea is only the beginning. They must ask questions: Who would want this? What should it cost? How will I tell people about it? What could go wrong? How can I make it better? Those questions require critical thinking, decision-making, and a willingness to take risks. And sometimes, things don't work out as planned. That may be one of the most valuable parts of the experience. Young people learn that failure doesn't mean they weren't successful; sometimes, it simply means they learned something that will help them try again differently.

These are skills our communities need. We need young people who are willing to look at a challenge and ask, "Is there a better way?" We need future business owners, community leaders and engaged citizens who can recognize opportunities, develop solutions and work with others. This is especially important in our rural communities. If we want young people to become the leaders and business owners who help shape our future, we need to give them opportunities to practice those skills today. That might mean creating a lemonade stand, developing a product, participating in a Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge or identifying a problem and brainstorming a solution.

Not every young person who participates in entrepreneurship will become a business owner, and that's okay. The goal is to help develop a generation of problem-solvers, innovators and confident community members. As adults, we sometimes forget how powerful it can be to let young people try. Let them pitch the crazy idea, figure out how to make something work, make mistakes and discover what to do next. Those experiences build confidence and help young people recognize that they have something valuable to contribute.

There are opportunities right here in the Southwind District for young people to put their ideas into action! The Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge (YEC) gives students the opportunity to develop a business plan, pitch their idea, receive feedback from judges and showcase their business at a tradeshow. It's a hands-on experience that encourages creativity, builds confidence and helps students explore what it takes to turn an idea into a business. Watch for upcoming YEC events throughout the Southwind District and encourage the young entrepreneurs in your life to get involved! Another great opportunity is Lemonade Day, a youth entrepreneurship program that teaches young people the basics of starting and operating their own business through a lemonade stand. Participants learn about setting goals, creating a business plan, budgeting, marketing, customer service, and managing money, all while putting their ideas into practice.

More than A Business: Why Youth Entrepreneurship Matters

When we invest in young people's ideas, we are investing in the future of our communities. For more information on Upcoming Youth Entrepreneurship Opportunities in the Southwind District, please contact Community Vitality Agent Amanda Clasen at any Southwind District office or at amclasen@ksu.edu.