

# What is 4-H?

4-H is much more than cows and cooking! 4-H is an exciting world and is a family affair but what is it all about? Hopefully this article will help address some of those questions.

## **The 4-H philosophy**

The philosophy behind 4-H is to strengthen the mental, physical, moral, and social development of youth to help them develop into competent, committed, and self-assured adults. 4-H is intended to supplement, not replace, other learning experiences young people may have through other institutions. 4-H is for everyone regardless of race, color, creed, age, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, sexual orientation, or parental status.



## **The roots of 4-H**

4-H got its' start in the 1900's as a means of reaching parents with improved farm and home practices. Educators observed that while most adults were reluctant to experiment with technological advances, they were willing to allow their children to do so on a limited basis. Once adults observed the positive results, they moved quickly to accept/implement these innovations.

The first 4-H clubs covered single topics such as corn production or canning tomatoes. Many of the objectives of the teaching practices were to help the war efforts during World War I and World War II with "food for victory" and "keep them on the farm" campaigns. Today our objective focuses on the personal development of youth, providing them with a wide variety of learning opportunities. 4-H offers something for everyone; every interest, whether you live in the city or the farm.

## **How do young people learn in 4-H?**

4-H utilizes the "learning by doing" model. Youth, with guidance from adult volunteer leaders, are involved in hands-on experiences where they gain useful skills and learn how to live with people and serve their community and country by practicing these skills in real-life situations. Each 4-H member can learn by choosing to participate in a variety of opportunities, including

- Project work
- Oral presentations
- Record Keeping
- Recreation
- County Contests
- Exhibits
- 4-H Ambassadors
- Fund Raising
- Community Service
- 4-H Clubs

## **Getting Involved - 4-H Clubs**

4-H clubs consist of an organized group of boys and girls, with officers appropriate to the group under the supervision of one or more certified volunteer leaders – referred to as organizational leaders. Clubs are organized within a neighborhood or geographic region within a county. These clubs conduct fundraising and conduct at least one community service project annually. In Boundary County 4-H Clubs hold meetings once a month. In addition to the 4-H Clubs youth participate in 4-H through special projects that focus on one topic.

4-H Club meetings are designed to provide youth with new information, help develop social skills, learn to conduct meetings, and acquire leadership and citizenship traits. Each 4-H member is expected to attend all club meetings. **Parents are strongly encouraged to attend meetings with their children.** Parental involvement demonstrates support for 4-H members, keeps them informed on club activities, and enables them to actively assist leaders as requested. Remember, 4-H is a family affair!

## **Getting Involved - 4-H Projects**

Projects are one of the teaching tools utilized to facilitate development of life skills in addition to project knowledge. It is essential to recognize that although the focus may appear to be on subject-matter knowledge, the development of the individual is the most important purpose of 4-H.



What are projects? Projects are a series of "hands-on" experiences where members are actively involved in learning both subject matter, personal development skills, such as decision making, communication, problem solving, teamwork, etc. First, and foremost, they are designed to be FUN!!

4-H Projects are selected early in the 4-H year as enrollment forms are completed. To increase the opportunity for members to succeed and have a positive experience, it is important that families know and fully understand what is expected of the 4-H member before enrolling in a project. For new or younger members, it is generally wise for parents to limit members to enrolling in just one or two projects to insure sufficient time to successfully complete their project. Older, experienced members are usually able to complete several different projects, including those that are more difficult.

When selecting a project consider:

- Does the project meet the needs and interests of the member?
- Is the project appropriate based on the age and ability (both physical and mental) of the member? Will it challenge him or her educationally?
- Is the project acceptable to you as parents and does it fit into the family needs and situation?

(continued on next page)

## What is 4-H? (cont.)

- How much will the project cost?
- How much of a time commitment is involved with the project?
- Is adequate space and equipment available at home?
- What are the opportunities for ownership and management responsibilities?
- Does your club have leader(s) to help with the project? Are you willing to become a project leader if necessary?

### **Parents make a difference in 4-H!**

Parents and families play a critical role in the success of the 4-H program. Youth join 4-H to belong, to do things with their friends, to meet new friends, to have fun, to be recognized as a person, and to achieve. It is much easier for youth to succeed in 4-H and continue to grow when they have parental support and understanding. The leader can do only so much; children need the support of their parents.



Parents are encouraged to attend BOTH club and project

meetings with their child. It is essential that parents serve as effective role models by helping youth keep commitments they make, assisting them to think through decisions, and see that they continue working toward achieving their goals.

4-H is truly a family affair! Youth need adult guidance to encourage and direct them in their character development. As a parent, you can be a project leader, activity leader or even a club leader. All parents are encouraged to assume some responsibility within the local 4-H club because all adults are busy. More hands makes less work; share the load!

A successful 4-H program takes the combined efforts of parents, volunteer leaders, and Extension

professionals - great youth programs just don't "happen". Active involvement and commitment by each and every player is crucial for any team to be successful; parents included. 4-H is a team, please make sure not to let your 4-H team down - they are counting on you.

### **How to be a 4-H MVP (Most Valuable Parent)**

- Learn what 4-H is all about; keep informed on what is happening in your club and county.
- Show a genuine interest in 4-H and your child.
- Attend 4-H meetings and activities with your child; encourage your child to participate in 4-H events such as Demonstration Day, Livestock Judging, etc.
- Make 4-H a priority in your home – read your 4-H mail (CloverTalk) promptly, visit the 4-H website, and mark 4-H activities on your calendar.
- Provide encouragement and help in your child's project work with record keeping, demonstrations, judging, and completion of attempted work - WITHOUT doing the work yourself.
- Provide transportation to local club and project meetings, activities, and county-wide events
- Provide a meeting place for a project group. Assist leaders by providing refreshments or simply asking how you can help.
- Share your special talents by volunteering to be a project leader.
- Help members select, finance, and manage their projects. There are minimal costs required for project literature and materials.
- Help leaders conduct project work.
- Help leaders locate and secure other qualified adults to assist with project work or 4-H activities.



### **Remember: 4-H members are the focus!**

The 4-H program utilizes the learning by doing which

means that 4-H members and their families must assume a greater level of responsibility for their own learning and involvement in program opportunities. To get the very most out of 4-H, members must:

- Attend and participate in all club and project meetings
- Support and work and club events and activities
- Participate in activities and events that enhance project learning
- Keep up-to-date on project-related work
- Exhibit pride in being a 4-H member

The 4-H member is significantly more important than their project or the blue ribbon. A blue ribbon 4-H'er with a red ribbon exhibit is more desirable than a red ribbon 4-H'er with a blue ribbon exhibit.

### **The 4-H Members**

Some members work to keep clubs strong,  
While others join just to belong.  
Some dig in, some serve with pride,  
Some go along just for the ride.  
Some volunteer to do their share,  
Some lie back and just don't care.  
Some do their best, some help, some make  
Some give nothing, only take.  
Some greet new members with a smile,  
and make their coming more worthwhile.  
While some go on their merry way,  
and rarely have kind words to say.  
Some help their leaders do and show  
When asked to help, they don't say no.  
Some drag, some pull, some don't, some do.  
Consider, which of these are you?

Author Unknown

Information for this article is from the *New 4-H Family Handbook* publication. The Idaho Panhandle 4-H Team would like to acknowledge Montana State University Extension Service for granting permission that enabled us to utilize their original publication as a template. Special thanks is given to the Montana 4-H Council and the design team of Suzi Taylor, Holley Smith, Shari Oiestad, Karin Lundeman, Jean Harrison, and Kirk A. Astroth for their initial efforts and dedication in helping to more effectively communicate with new members and their families the objectives of the 4-H program. We encourage the use of this publication for non-profit educational purposes.