

More than cows: 4-H creates leadership opportunities for youth

By Sherry Swint, 4-H Extension Agent

So often we as parents and citizens miss the importance of staging opportunities for our kids to succeed. It is often the little decisions youth are given to make that can help youth develop into confident people that continue to make good choices.

4-H programs at their core are positive youth development programs. Yes, youth can raise cows, chickens, and dogs; but these creative 4-H programs focus on creating fun opportunities for youth to develop academic and social competencies and positively connect to our community.

Youth in traditional 4-H Clubs choose to complete projects on subjects they are interested in such as digital photography, watershed science, money management skills or ATV safety. As Jimmy Richie, 4-H alum and volunteer, says about learning the 4-H way, "(it's) Fun, Fun, Fun." Youth in clubs learn parliamentary procedures, healthy life choices, and the importance of giving back to their community through service. These experiences, guided by a caring adult leader, allow youth to develop self confidence, cognitive abilities, and social competencies that will help them interact with others.

4-H learning is found at the Kanawha County Fair and other special events in our county. Youth in grades third through fifth attending a school with 50% or more of their students eligible for free or reduced lunch can have a qualified health instructor provide seven to 12 weeks of health education in the classroom.

After school programs can have 4-H instructors provide activities to their afterschool coordinators and lead hands-on science activities to youth. Bringing education from the classroom to the real world, Every spring almost eight hundred fourth graders through their schools are eligible to attend an outdoor classroom day at 4-H Camp Tate, have lunch, and enjoy experiential learning activities.

This summer there are four opportunities for youth to try out 4-H. Youth ages 13 to 21 can be part of the "Let's Get Animated for 4-H" residential camp at Camp Virgil Tate tentatively scheduled for June 6th to the 10th and youth ages 9 to 12 can attend a residential 4-H camp June 13th to the 20th. For those that are a bit younger (5 to 8), a Cloverbud Day camp will be at Coonskin Park July 26th through the 29th while a Science Day camp will be held simultaneously for youth ages 9 to 14.

4-H supports our community and it supports our youth. As one youth teen leader who is actively involved in 4-H states, "4-H has provided me with a '4-H family' like no other. I am able to express myself without the harsh judgment of others."

If you or your child would like to volunteer or be part of 4-H, don't hesitate, run or (better yet) call me the new 4-H Extension Agent at 304-768-1202 ext. 163.