

## Opportunities Abound in 4-H

Youth from ages 7-18 have a wealth of opportunities to learn, create and improve skills through 4-H!

The mission of 4-H is Learning Through Doing and the Cottonwood Extension District through K-State Research and Extension provide many different opportunities for learning.

When most people think of 4-H, they think of the fair with the many purple, blue, red and white ribbons. While the ribbons represent what a 4-H member has learned, working on the project itself is, by far, the most important part. Work ethic, responsibility, time management and budgeting are all important life skills gained by working on a project during the year. We encourage 4-H members to set goals early in the 4-H year and reflect on those at the end to review the important lessons learned.

4-H Club Day is coming up in February and this is an opportunity for 4-H youth to present a demonstration or illustrated talk, work together as a club to showcase a skit or model meeting, or really challenge their skills with extemporaneous or public speaking. Public speaking doesn't come easy for many of us and it is heart-warming to watch a young one who, last year couldn't stand in front of their club, now looking a judge in the eye and presenting their information. This requires research skills, practice, development of visual aids and, most importantly, honing their communication skills.

Skills judging from livestock and meats teams to photography, horticulture and FCS (Family and Consumer Science) give 4-H members time to practice analytical and critical thinking skills.

Club leadership and 4-H service projects allow 4-H members an opportunity to improve leadership skills and understand civic involvement.

Day camps, Discovery Days and 4-H Camp let 4-H members stretch their horizons, meet new people and have new experiences.

Several exciting opportunities for older 4-H members happen throughout the year. One of these is serving as a camp counselor which is a great way for young people to practice leadership and communication as well as responsibility! Citizenship In Action occurs over President's Day weekend and provides a unique opportunity for 4-H members to meet in Topeka to develop, debate, and vote on a bill. Citizenship Washington Focus is a state-wide trip which selects 50 4-H youth across Kansas to travel to Washington DC in June to meet with legislators, tour landmarks, and learn a considerable amount about the United States government. The Kansas Youth Leadership Forum (KYLF) happens the weekend before Thanksgiving each year and the Cottonwood District was well represented again this year.

Providing opportunities to practice the important life skills of leadership, civic involvement, communication, planning/time management and budgeting are truly the goals of 4-H Youth Development. As a lifelong learner, I continue to look for opportunities to stretch my ability, broaden my way of thinking and continue to practice my own life skills. What opportunities have you taken advantage of today, this month or this year?

"Today is an opportunity to get better; don't waste it!" anonymous

*Michelle Beran is the 4-H Youth Development Agent in the Cottonwood Extension District. For more information on this article or other 4-H Youth Development resources, email Michelle at [mberan@ksu.edu](mailto:mberan@ksu.edu) or call 620-793-1910.*

*Kansas State University is committed to making its services, activities and programs accessible to all participants. If you have special requirements due to a physical, vision, or hearing disability.*