

# Introduction

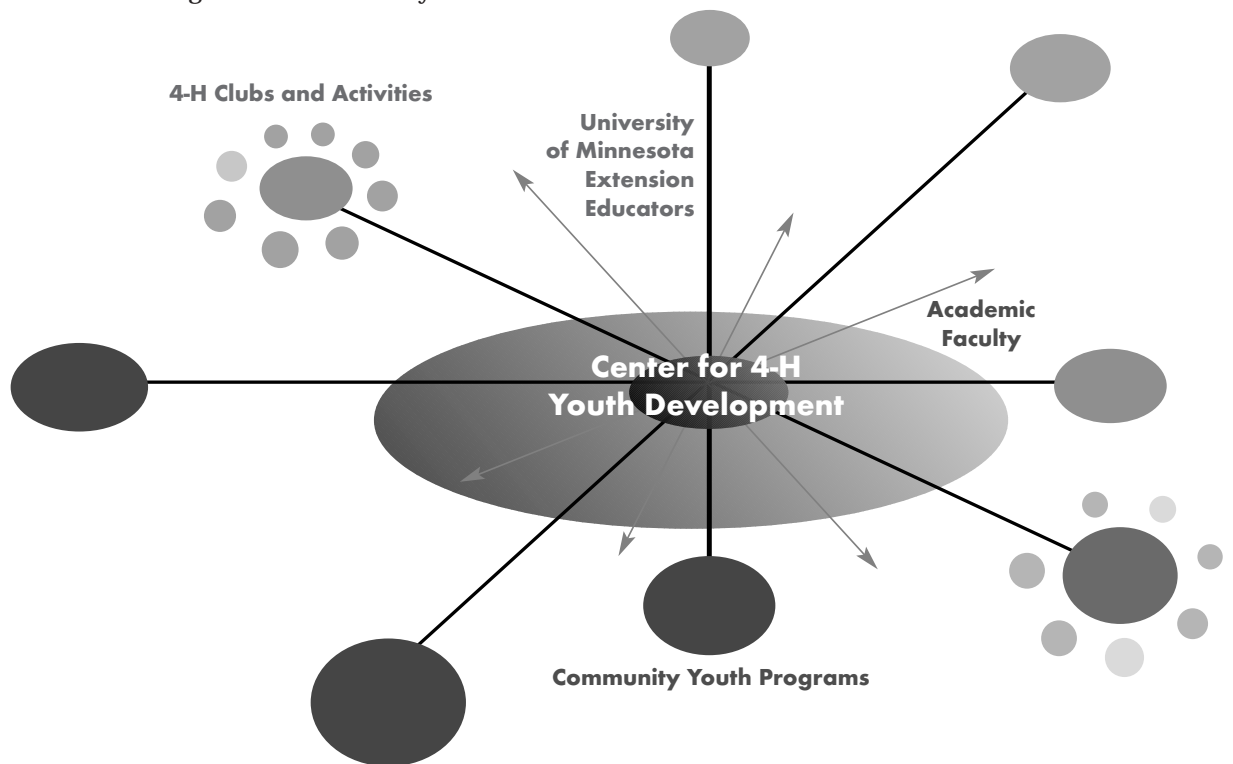
*Carol Shields and Stephan Carlson*

**T**he Center is a new publication geared toward helping youth development professionals view their work with greater insight and understanding. As 4-H moves into its second century, it is fitting to create a forum that looks at where we have been and where tomorrow's 4-H programs may go. If today's motto is "To Make the Best Better," tomorrow's motto may be "Connecting Youth to the World." Connecting youth to youth, youth to adult, youth to the World Wide Web, and youth to service in communities, state, and country builds self-directed, productive, and contributing members of society. These articles

help us make connections with our past as we define and shape our future.

4-H has a rich history that began with "corn clubs" in the early part of this century. It was rooted in an agrarian culture and the land-grant university philosophy nationwide—to bring knowledge out to those who could not attend the universities.

Today's 4-H program continues to be an outreach component of land-grant universities. It connects research and knowledge with the people of the state.



The first article, "Helping Hands Brings Youth Leadership to Flooded Community," demonstrates the capacity of university outreach during and after a disaster. Communities in northwestern Minnesota were flooded in the spring of 1997. While families put their lives back together, young people from 45 counties came together to help run day camps for displaced children. This is a good example of how learning is a two-way street—youth teach younger children and come home learning more than they gave. This theme can also be found in an international exchange paper written by David Pace, "4-H International Exchanges After the Cold War." David describes the history of the exchange programs and helps us to see the value of international connections for today's young people.

Papers by Joyce Walker and colleagues provide the framework on how youth development is conducted in community settings with caring adults. They identify critical elements of successful programs and help us better understand what makes an effective youth program. One critical component is that youth participate in planning from beginning to end.

In a paper on research conducted at the Minnesota State Fair, James Mitchell and colleagues explore cooperative learning and team

building. Communication skills and team building help youth address diversity issues and prepare for tomorrow's workplace. Michelle Sims' article on workforce preparation skills helps connect 4-H to the state education standards and tomorrow's workforce. The self-directed learner is the basis of nonformal youth development and is explored in a paper by Stephan Carlson and Sue Maxa, who argue that nonformal pedagogy is well grounded in educational psychology.

We end with an article by Trudy Dunham on promoting organizational change through collaborations. The future of how we do our work is here today. Professionals are no longer isolated in counties, but connected to one another across the state and the country. Community-based programs become virtual 4-H clubs or cyber camps where youth participate from around the world. The university youth development knowledge is global in scope.

These articles provide a lens through which to view the work of youth development community-based programs as seen through the work of the Center for 4-H Youth Development. They represent the tools for building and shaping the future of the youth development profession.