

# 4-H PREPARES YOUTH TO LEAD AND SUCCEED



Youth programs can create opportunities for youth to lead and succeed. Research shows positive youth development happens when youth:

- feel physically and emotionally safe
- experience belonging and ownership
- develop self-worth
- discover self
- develop quality relationships with peers and adults
- discuss conflicting values and form their own
- feel the pride and accountability that comes with mastery
- expand capacity to enjoy life and know that success is possible

Adapted from G. Konopka (1973) and K. Pittman (1991).

Not all youth activities and programs result in positive youth development. More than 100 years of experience and research has proven what it takes to develop youth who are more prepared to learn, lead and positively engage in today's complex world.

Extension's youth development creates positively engaged youth through 4-H, Minnesota's largest youth-serving organization, and teaches other youth organizations how to do the same, creating a receptive environment that challenges and supports youth in communities across Minnesota.

"Youth development, the process of growing up and developing one's capabilities, happens no matter what we do," explains Dorothy McCargo Freeman, Extension associate dean for youth development. "But, it's not always positive. We know that it takes intentional interactions and engagement of youth with caring adult mentors to create positive development of youth."

The results are clear. High-quality youth programs that build social and emotional skills lead to positive youth development outcomes like better grades, enhanced leadership skills, improved self-esteem and a better ability to interact with others.

"Through our research and the 4-H youth development program, we know how to build a force of engaged young people who are able to learn and lead in a global society," says Freeman. Extension's statewide 4-H program, with more than 71,000 engaged youth, serves as a laboratory to study and develop the most effective models for positive youth development. Extension shares this

knowledge by training adult youth workers, volunteers and organizations to create and deliver effective youth programs in their communities.

Experiential learning is at the core of Extension's model. It occurs when youth are involved in a project or activity, look back at their experience critically, determine what was useful or important to remember, and then use the information in real-life situations. Adults can get in the way of this process if they haven't learned how to support and guide rather than direct the youth experience.

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Through training, 4-H volunteers and youth organizations learn how to apply the experiential learning model. This includes setting aside enough time for reflecting on the experience, asking the right questions, planning developmentally appropriate experiences that lead to reflection, listening carefully and supporting each young person's unique learning.

"Youth learn most successfully when they use and connect new knowledge to other life experiences. In this way, knowledge becomes a part of their experience," says Freeman. "A caring adult who mentors effectively is the cornerstone to this process of positive youth development."

# YOUTH LEARN BY DOING

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Adapted from D.A. Kolb, 1984.

