Mission Statement: To engage youth, in partnership with adults, in quality learning opportunities that enable them to shape and reach their full potential as active citizens in a global community.

Vision Statement: Minnesota 4-H Youth Development is recognized and respected by a broad cross-sector of audiences as a leader in the application of positive youth development through educational programs that balance research, design, and practice.

Why 4-H?
4-H provides a chance for young people to belong – to be part of a group their own age, to learn new things and do fun things together. Through 4-H, young people have opportunities to:

- Learn new skills, gain knowledge, and develop positive attitudes.
- Develop and use their creative talents.
- Learn to make intelligent decisions and to solve problems.
- Develop a feeling of self-worth, while respecting the rights and privileges of others.

In brief, the purpose of 4-H is to provide a variety of learning experiences for youth that contribute to their personal growth and development which will help them to become contributing, self-reliant, and responsible members of society.

Essential Elements of Positive Youth Development
Youth development, the process of growing up and developing one's capacities, happens no matter what we do. The challenge is to promote positive youth development and plan quality experiences with young people. In 4-H, we use the following Essential Elements to accomplish this: (National 4-H - Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture)

Belonging
Youth need to know they are cared about by others and feel a sense of connection to others in the group. This “fellowship” has always been an important part of a 4-H experience. 4-H gives youth the opportunity to feel physically and emotionally safe while actively participating in a group. Research suggests that a sense of belonging may be the single most powerful positive ingredient we can add into the lives of children and youth. This includes:

- Positive relationships with a caring adult.
- An inclusive environment.
- A safe environment.

Mastery
To develop self-confidence youth need to feel and believe they are capable and must experience success at solving problems and meeting challenges. By exploring 4-H projects and activities, youth master skills to make positive career and life choices. To do so, youth must have access to quality research-based content and have the opportunity to learn by doing. They also need a safe environment for making mistakes and getting feedback, not just through competition but also as an ongoing element of participation. Finally, youth need the breadth and depth of topics to pursue their own interests. To be successful, youth must have:

- Engagement in learning.
- Opportunity for mastery.

**Independence**
Youth need to know that they are able to influence people and events through decision-making and action. By exercising independence through 4-H leadership opportunities, youth mature in self-discipline and responsibility, learn to better understand themselves and become independent thinkers. For independence, youth must have the:

- Opportunity to see oneself as an active participant in the future.
- Opportunity for self-determination.

**Generosity**
Youth need to feel their lives have meaning and purpose. By participating in 4-H community service and citizenship activities, youth connect to communities and learn to give back to others. It's clear these experiences provide the foundation that helps us understand the “big picture” of life and find purpose and meaning. Community service projects allow 4-H club members to see that their effort to help others is important and valuable. Youth learn they do not live in a secluded world, but in a global community, which requires awareness and compassion for others. To learn generosity, youth must have an:

- Opportunity to value and practice service for others.

**Youth Program Quality**
The quality of the learning environments we offer young people participating in Minnesota 4-H Youth Development programs is a priority. But what do we mean by “quality”? The Pyramid of Youth Program Quality was developed by the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation. (See Pyramid of Youth Program Quality on the next page).
Safe Environment is at the base of the pyramid and reveals that quality youth programs must pay attention to the physical and emotional safety of young people. Once young people feel safe and secure in a learning environment, the other three elements of quality are possible to achieve.

Supportive Environment is above safe environment and is mostly provided by the volunteers, leaders and staff. Do they plan sessions so that they’re at the right pace for youth? Do youth have an opportunity to build skills, and are they encouraged to do so despite mistakes? Are adults providing support for learning?

Interaction looks at the relationships between youth and other youth and between the adults and youth. Are young people able to lead and mentor others? How do they partner with adults? Do they feel a sense of belonging?

Engagement is about youth having opportunities to plan what they’re doing, make choices about what they’re doing, and reflect on what they’re doing. Engagement is at the top of the pyramid because all of the other domains below it set the stage for these to happen.

Engagement and Interaction are actually the most important indicators of quality. The youth programs that score high on engagement and interaction are among the highest rated by youth, and the potential for learning is greater because youth are more fully engaged. That tells us that to give young people a powerful learning experience in 4-H we must pay attention to creating a learning environment that maintains safety but sets its sights on engagement.
Minnesota 4-H Youth Development:
A part of the University of Minnesota, 4-H Youth Development offers a range of short and long-term educational programs that meet the needs of young people from kindergarten through one year past high school. The 4-H Youth Development program invites all youth to participate. 4-H Adventures are short-term programs specialized by specific subject matters such as performing arts, technology, animal science, or nutrition and fitness. 4-H Clubs meet regularly in a sequence of at least six sessions in community or school settings encompassing a variety of learning topics. Minnesota 4-H also offers online opportunities, after school, youth leadership, camping, and other programs for varying lengths of time throughout the year. Older youth can be involved as volunteer leaders in their areas of interest. In result, all youth participating in any program offered by Minnesota 4-H Youth Development are considered 4-H members.

What Makes 4-H Different?
4-H is unique because it is the only youth organization tied to the research base of our nation's land-grant university system. This connection allows Extension staff and the volunteers they work with to receive training based on the most up-to-date research on youth development theory and practice. 4-H club work is supported by a combination of federal, state and county funds. Substantial support also comes from private sources - local, state and national. Business and industry, farm and civic organizations and individuals support 4-H because they believe in the worth of the program. The National 4-H Council and the Minnesota 4-H Foundation are not-for-profit organizations that support the 4-H Youth Development program by working to acquire resources.

What’s In It for Youth?
The Minnesota 4-H Youth Survey was conducted in 2001 to determine whether youth were experiencing positive youth development opportunities through their 4-H experiences and to assess their attitudes about school and community, risk indicators, and involvement in other activities. The survey revealed:

- Through 4-H clubs, youth reported:
  - A greater sense of belonging
  - Quality relationships with adults
  - Active parent involvement
- Youth involved in 4-H are more likely to:
  - Volunteer in their communities
  - Be involved in sports and fine arts
- Youth involved in 4-H are less likely to have:
  - Spent six or more hours per week watching TV or playing video and computer games
  - Stolen something
Damaged property
- Smoked cigarettes
- Consumed alcohol
- Ridden in a car where the driver was drinking

The complete survey can be found on the University of Minnesota's Center for Youth Development web page at www.fourh.umn.edu.

Research Shows 4-H Helps Young People Excel Beyond Their Peers
The structured learning, encouragement and adult mentoring that young people receive through their participation in 4-H plays a vital role in helping them achieve future life successes. For nearly a decade, preeminent youth development scholar, Dr. Richard Lerner, and the team at the Institute for Applied Research in Youth Development at Tufts University have been working with faculty at land-grant universities to conduct the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development.

The 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development is a longitudinal study that began in 2002, and continues today, surveying more than 7,000 adolescents from diverse backgrounds across the 44 U.S. states. The study is made possible by the contributions of our nation’s land-grant universities and National 4-H Council.

This in-depth study has discovered that, when compared to other youth, young people involved in 4-H:

- Have higher educational achievement and motivation for future education.
- Are more civically active and make more civic contributions to their communities.

4-H Youth Make More Healthy Choices
According to Wave 8 of the study, 4-Hers – regardless of their background, socio-economic status, race, and gender – thrive through healthy/safety education and experiences they receive through 4-H programming. In fact, young people in 4-H are:

- 3.4 times more likely to delay sexual intercourse by Grade 12.
- Shown to have had significant lower drug, alcohol and cigarette use than their peers.
- 2.3 times more likely to exercise and be physically active.

4-Hers Excel in School and Sciences
The advantages of 4-H participation also include higher educational achievement and higher motivation for future education. Young people in 4-H:

- Report better grades, higher levels of academic competence, and an elevated level of engagement at school.
• Are nearly two times more likely to plan to go to college.
• Are more likely to pursue future courses or a career in science, engineering, or computer technology.

The study also finds that girls in 4-H are two times more likely to pursue science careers over their peers.

**Young People in 4-H are Committed to Improving Their Communities**

A notable trend of the study indicates that grade 11 4-H youth are 3.3 times more likely to actively contribute to their communities when compared with youth who do not participate in 4-H.