



Extension FactSheet

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Keeping Older Youth Involved in 4-H Clubs



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Looking at Ohio 4-H enrollment numbers in 2004, there are three times as many youth in the 3rd and 4th grades involved in 4-H as there are youth in the 11th and 12th grades. What can be done to improve the ability of 4-H clubs to keep youth active in 4-H clubs?

According to Thompson (1998) the top three reasons youth did not re-enroll in 4-H were: 1) they were too busy; 2) other activities were more important; and 3) they did not have enough time for 4-H activities.

Research has been done to ask youth what they think about 4-H and the volunteers they work with in 4-H.

Valuable volunteer skills:

- Good communication skills
- A willingness to listen
- A sense of humor
- Flexibility
- Ability to keep an open mind

Challenges in working with adults:

- Adult leaders not allowing teens to do enough
- Adults not listening to teens
- Adults not understanding teens

Why youth continue their involvement with 4-H:

- High quality 4-H club meetings
- High levels of member responsibility and personal commitment
- Positive parental involvement and support
- Positive experiences with competition
- Participation in club, county, state, and national activities
- Like being part of a group
- Guidance and support from adult leaders and staff
- Programs adjust to meet their needs as they get older

Tips to encourage youth to remain active in 4-H clubs:

Whose 4-H club is it?

Youth are more likely to remain involved in a 4-H club if they actually feel that it is “their club.” Youth need to be active participants in the club and have a say in the club’s activities and structure. Older youth need to be encouraged to take on enhanced leadership roles within the club, such as club officers, commit-

tee members, and mentoring younger members. 4-H club advisors can serve as mentors for club officers and allow youth leaders the opportunity to “learn by doing.”

4-H club meetings a drag?

It should not be all about business. Add a little fun to your 4-H club meetings, activities, and experiences. Implementing fun activities into 4-H club work will engage youth and keep them involved. Vibrant youth groups work hard and play hard, making sure fun isn't forgotten in the 4-H experience (Astroth, 1996).

- Invite outside speakers to talk with your 4-H club
- Plan a 4-H club tour
- Challenge your recreation officers to bring games to the club that can involve everyone
- Organize a community service project that everyone can participate in

Listen to youth

It is very important that youth feel comfortable and accepted in the 4-H club environment. Make an effort to get to know each youth and what is unique about them. An easy way to begin this process is to vary the ways in which the club conducts roll call at each meeting. For example, after their name is called for attendance, have them reply not with the typical “here,” but with their favorite food, song, or movie (the possibilities are endless). Also, take the 4-H members' suggestions seriously and try to guide them in leading their club. Do not do things for them that they can and want to do for themselves.

Recognition

All 4-H members appreciate a little recognition for their time, work, and achievements. Often, 4-H experiences are so focused on competition that only

a select few receive the recognition that they desire. Infuse methods of recognizing all youth in your clubs. Consider fun awards for small achievements, notes on birthdays, or other methods of highlighting each youth at least once per year. A simple “hello and thanks for coming” as youth arrive to meetings is a great start!

Conclusion

Older youth have many activities available to them that demand their time. 4-H volunteers must work with young people to develop programs and activities that address the needs of older youth to maintain their interest and involvement. Keeping meetings fun, listening to youth, appropriately recognizing youth, and ensuring that youth retain a feeling of ownership of their 4-H clubs will help retain older youth active in 4-H club programs.

References

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