4-H in Nebraska: Taking a Closer Look

The mission of University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension 4-H is to empower youth to reach their full potential working and learning in partnerships with caring adults. Explored more closely, 4-H in Nebraska intentionally targets four outcomes for the youth 4-H serves: Science, Engineering, and Technology; Healthy Lifestyles; Career Development; and the development of Life Skills. In 2009, more than 1,500 young people contributed responses to a mixed methods study. The results provide a closer look at the impact 4-H is making in the lives of Nebraska youth.

Science, Engineering, and Technology

Nebraska 4-H is invested in leading youth in the discovery and exploration of Science, Engineering, and Technology (SET). 4-H SET programs in Nebraska provide youth opportunities to learn about how science, engineering, and technology impact their everyday lives. Youth are able to apply SET skills to their 4-H projects and explore careers related to SET. Seventy-eight percent of youth enrolled in SET programs are confident regarding SET content and skills, and 60 percent are interested in exploring a SET career.

Fillmore County youth involved in a Crop Science Investigation program experienced the influence of science and technology on crop management through hands-on activities. One participant reported using science and technology in 4-H to “read the watermark sensors, calculate how much irrigation is necessary, and help my dad decide when to water the fields.”
Life Skills Development

Life Skills Development has been a cornerstone of Nebraska 4-H programs for many years. 4-H provides opportunities for youth to be leaders and to apply their goal-setting, public speaking, and organizational skills to local programs and community service events.

In 2009, a Cuming County 4-H’er organized a project to prepare 5,000 bandages for medical communities and missionaries in Third World countries. A Cass County 4-H’er invested 110 hours of her time to redesign and landscape a local flag pole garden at the Riverview Cemetery. Overall, 91 percent of 4-H club members participate in community service projects through 4-H, and 53 percent of high school-aged 4-H’ers report serving on a community committee or board.

Healthy Lifestyles

Helping youth live healthy, well-balanced lives has long been a priority of Nebraska 4-H. To accomplish that goal, 4-H programs in clubs and schools are working to increase youth knowledge about MyPyramid dietary recommendations, enabling them to make healthier choices. Youth enrolled in Healthy Lifestyles programs most commonly report “drinking less soda” and “eating more fruits and vegetables” as ways they can live healthier lives.

A Valley County parent of a nutrition program participant commented, “My son’s interest didn’t just last a few weeks; your program has made a lifelong impact on his food knowledge and skills. He checks the nutrition label on just about everything I buy and judges the serving sizes accordingly. I feel, as a parent, he came away from a program that started out as fun, and through one of those ‘moments,’ gained a lifelong skill.”

Career Development

The project areas in 4-H often serve as a catalyst for helping youth make decisions about their post-secondary education. Sixty-nine percent of 4-H club members report they are actively exploring a career related to their 4-H project and 35 percent of graduating high school seniors in 4-H report selecting their college major based on their 4-H project participation. Additionally, more than 98 percent of youth who are actively engaged in 4-H through their senior year go to college.

A former Otoe County 4-H’er, now a UNL student, shared this about his 4-H experience: “My first 4-H project was photography. From the beginning, 4-H provided the opportunity to learn the basics of photography: changing film, the rule of thirds, composition, exposure, aperture, and shutter speed. Additionally, my 4-H participation played a significant role in my decision to go to UNL. I knew that I was interested in photography and that I wanted to go to a good journalism school and become a well-rounded individual. It was a balance of my interests, my familiarity with UNL and Lincoln, and many intangibles that I cannot even describe!”