

Raising Kids not Projects

Christi Nicholls, 4-H Program Coordinator

When you think about 4-H, you probably think about projects, county fair, camps, and of course the clover. There are so many projects in 4-H. Some include horse, livestock, robotics, arts, public speaking, shooting sports, etc.

Recently I attended a National Conference surrounded by 4-H professionals from the Western States. Although we have different programming in our individual states we all agree on one thing, the kids. My favorite quote from 4-H is: "We are raising kids not projects." Wow, what a responsibility! This is both intimidating and an awesome privilege that we are entrusted with.

How do we raise kids and not projects? We focus on a positive youth development approach that recognizes that all youth have interests, abilities, and strengths that can be enhanced by participation in 4-H programs.

Research shows that participation in high quality 4-H programs increases thriving in youth and thriving youth achieve important developmental outcomes, such as academic motivation and achievement.

Using the 4-H Thriving model it states that there are three ingredients that make up Thriving Youth.

1. Spark
2. Belonging
3. Healthy Relationships

A spark is described as an important motivational part in the life of the youth. Their identity/ what makes them tick. Sparks are connected to youth's sense of purpose.

Belonging is just what it sounds like. It makes us feel safe, have structure, supports efficacy, and helps with integration of family, school and community.

Healthy Relationships are more than just being physically present in the lives of our youth. They express care, provide support, challenge growth, share power, and expand possibilities.

When kids are thriving, there is no limit to the possibilities of their growth. In my own personal experiences, I have seen kids that persevere, explore, try new things, have competency, value, respect, and finally have positive emotional management. I think no one measures the impact of these thriving quite like the kids themselves, so let me quote just a few;

"4-H has helped me grow and learn in so many ways, it made me come out of my comfort zone and just enjoy the 4-H experience and be prepared for getting called on in class and not being embarrassed to talk to people." – Raelee 4-H member

"Being involved in 4-H has helped me in all the other activities that I participate in. It has taught me how to work hard. It has taught me patience, and perseverance. The first time my steer stepped on me, I wanted to quit but I didn't. I learned that all good things take time and effort and the reward in the end it will all be worth it." -Carter 4- H member

“4-H has helped me grow in a lot of ways. It has taught me how to do a lot of things like how to sew, cook, and for and show my animals.” -Makynlee 4-H member

4-H is such a beautiful thing. When dedicated volunteers and staff work together with thriving youth, there are endless possibilities. I have witnessed this magic first hand and can't wait to share it with more youth. To find out more information on upcoming projects follow us on social media, or feel free to call or stop by the office. Registration for all 4-H events is 4h.zsuite.org. We look forward to seeing you soon!