

What does 4-H mean to you?

With the heavy influence of the media, the uncertain times as of late, and the hard seasons of life that we all have found ourselves in, it is more important than ever to involve ourselves in wholesome, beneficial activities. Youth especially are tasked with dealing with many of these on a daily basis and the people and activities they are involved with are key to surviving. There are still many options in which youth can participate that can benefit the growth and improvement of our youth, such as but not limited to: sports, the arts, robotics and engineering, speech and leadership groups, FFA, and last but not least, 4-H. All of these examples are prime opportunities for youth to be in a safe learning and betterment environment. They learn many life skills and important lessons by participating in such organized events. So, what does involvement in these activities and their gained knowledge from their participation mean to youth? I cannot answer that question for every kid that has ever participated in an activity as such; but I can answer from the perspective of a veteran 4-Her of 10 years.

So what does 4-H mean to me? I wouldn't be the person I am today without it. Through 4-H I was able to have many opportunities made available to me that I would've otherwise not had due to the rural small town I grew up in. I was able to learn and practice new skills such as sewing, photography, cooking/baking, horsemanship, and raising/showing livestock. I made friends that I have to this day that I worked and learned alongside. I developed lasting relationships with my leaders that I have looked up to my whole life. I was impacted so much by my Livestock 4-H leader Patsy Holden, that I tried to pattern my interests, schooling, and life after her example and find myself working in an extension office because of the impact she had on me as a youth in her club.

4-H gave me opportunities for leadership, service, fellowship, friendship, community outreach, and networking. I learned how to have confidence in myself, to be humble in times of success, and to be tough in times that were hard. I learned how to work hard at something no matter the outcome, to do my best, and let the judge determine the rest. I learned how to communicate with others, speak publicly, and overcome social anxiety restrictions and fears. I learned how to grieve on sale day, to celebrate others' success, and to be kind and courteous to those around me. 4-H has taught me perseverance in times of negativity, how to set goals and accomplish them, and how to manage my time wisely. I have learned to multitask, manage money, and operate my own sheep operation through 4-H.

Being a 4-H member gave me the opportunity to get more involved in the family cattle with my dad by showing home-grown steers. I learned so much shadowing my dad in the time I was in 4-H. My parents allowed me to expand my 4-H experience by starting my own sheep flock to grow my own show lambs. By the time I was a senior in my last year of 4-H, I had nearly 30 ewes and 2 bucks and had built a business selling lambs all over the state as well as direct marketing lamb to the consuming public. This taught me so much about the agriculture industry and myself. It helped me to strengthen my relationship with my family and my customers buying lamb from me. That opportunity through 4-H helped me pay for my college education without any debt, and has brought me years of joy, sorrow, learning, and life experience.

Thanks to my leaders in other clubs I was involved in, I was given the opportunity to learn home making skills that have benefited myself as well as my marriage. I learned how to serve those around me and see the needs of others through 4-H. I learned how to be a leader and how to be

a team player; both of which are extremely important in youth development. It may seem like a simple statement, but so many life skills can be gained from attending a club.

After I finished my final year in 4-H as a senior, my experience in it had helped me decide what to do after high school and what I wanted to pursue in college. The skills I learned provided me with the confidence to network, make friends, and experience things I wouldn't have if it wasn't for 4-H. I got scholarships and collegiate opportunities because of 4-H. Then and now, I have received interview opportunities and gotten jobs because I have all of my 4-H involvement listed on my resume and employers know that they are getting reliable, hard working people because of their 4-H involvement. I have had countless opportunities to better the lives of others, judge prestigious competitions, and interact with very knowledgeable people through networking in the 4-H community.

I will forever be grateful for the impact 4-H has had on my life, as well as those that made it possible. The volunteers that make the 4-H world go around as club leaders and chaperones are some of the most choice and generous people on God's green earth. They are the reason that 4-H impacts youth the way it impacted me. If you have a talent or skill that youth could benefit from whether it is livestock/horse/companion animal related, homemaking skills, or STEM and outdoor related things, reach out to your local extension office and start your 4-H story as an adult.

I cherish the memories and the knowledge I gained from my time in 4-H and hold a special place in my heart for it. I can only tell you what 4-H means to me and how it's impacted my story. But you have the power to see how it impacts yours.

Get registered for 4-H today by visiting <https://4h.zsuite.org/>

And get started on your 4-H story.