Remarkable 4-H Programs remember their central mission is Youth Development

Sometimes a penchant for tradition can become a barrier to doing what's truly best for young people. "It's got to be done this way! That's how we've always done it!" Similarly, we can become so busy with the "important"—rules, traditions, etc. that we miss the "imperative" – focusing on young people and their needs. Remarkable youth development programs don't make that mistake. They remember their dreams for youth and construct programs that reflect a sincere commitment to developing the potential of all youth.

4-H Youth Development Programs are essentially focused on creating opportunities for youth to meet developmental needs, and to build important life skills. The 4-H model emphasizes four basic developmental needs: belonging, mastery, independence and service. It's clear that youth with opportunities to meet these needs in positive ways are likely to grow into good citizens and contributing members of their families and communities. Remarkable 4-H Programs create those opportunities while teaching critical life skills – abilities individuals can learn that will help them to be successful in living a productive and satisfying life.

Remarkable 4-H Programs remember their unique purpose and plans

In some youth programs, it's not uncommon to hear comments such as: "Did you hear about the things they are doing at Youth-R-Us clubs? If we could only be like them, we'd have it made! If we could do video like that youth program, or had grant money like this youth program, or were close to ski resorts like the other program, things would be great!" It's easy to focus on another program's strengths. When we do, though, we miss the unique purpose and plans developed for our specific program. Each 4-H Youth Development Program is unique- with a whole set of strengths that connects the central mission of 4-H to the needs of local communities. We need to understand these unique purposes and plans clearly otherwise, we can easily get caught in a quagmire of doing "good things" rather than the best things for the youth in our local program.

Remarkable 4-H Programs create safe places where young people feel like they belong.

Youth shouldn't fear physical or emotional harm while participating in any 4-H experience whether from the learning environment itself, adults, other participants or spectators. Remarkable programs celebrate the success of all members and take pride in the collective efforts of all.

Remarkable 4-H Programs involve adults in the lives of youth.

Remarkable 4-H Programs encourage caring relationships between youth and adults. 4-H seeks support from parents, community members and business leaders to foster the gifts of 4-H youth.

Remarkable 4-H Programs teach life skills.

The cornerstone of 4-H is creating opportunities for youth to experience that they are capable. Youth practice new skills in a safe environment and learn to focus on the long-term goals of learning.

4-H encourages youth to recognize the benefits of lifelong learning and creates opportunities to practice specific skills that can be easily transferred from the learning environment to real life. 4-H strives to create opportunities for young people to see themselves as active participants in the future.

Remarkable 4-H Programs develop leaders.

Independence is being able to have an impact over life's events rather than submitting to the will and whims of others and it is the first step towards becoming an effective leader able to resist peer pressure. Remarkable 4-H Programs create opportunities for self-determination to flourish.

Remarkable 4-H Programs remember that fun is an important goal.

Fun is often what makes things worth doing- it can be a tremendous motivator, and is often the glue that turns a bunch of individual youth into a strong team or club.

The Habits of Remarkable 4-H Youth Development Programs

Remarkable 4-H Programs Treasure Service

4-H Programs create opportunities for youth to value and practice service for others. Finding oneself begins with losing yourself in the service of others. Service is a way for youth to gain exposure to the larger community, indeed the world itself.

Remarkable 4-H Programs Evaluate

Wouldn't it be great if every new idea, strategy, or program worked? Much work great, some are marginal, and others are total failures. Taking time for evaluation allows programs to examine what worked and what didn't, and to make needed course corrections. Evaluation can cause some people to become anxious, especially if shining a light on a particular area can make an individual look bad. Remarkable 4-H Programs anticipate this and make some room for failure. Everything doesn't have to be an overwhelming success, but evaluation can also accentuate program strengths and highlight what is already being done well.

Remarkable 4-H Programs Change

The core of 4-H – meeting youth needs and building life skills -- is timeless and unchangeable. It is as relevant today as it was when 4-H was developed to teach farming practices and food preservation techniques. But how we meet youth needs and build life skills continually changes. Adaptability in our programs, our rules, and our delivery methods ensures that 4-H Programs will continue to be important experiences for young people.

_____

Developed by Cathann A. Kress, Ph.D., Extension Youth Development Specialist, 10/99

18 USC 707

NDSU
Extension Service
North Dakota State University