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What is 4-H? Written by Stephanie Miller

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Stephanie Milner, 4-H Youth Development Specialist

When I tell people what I do for a living I usually get one of two questions: “What is 4-H and what do you do?” or “I grew up in 4-H...is it still the same?” These are both difficult questions to answer and you may think why? It should be easy to describe your job and the program. I will tell you why this is difficult for me and others I work with in the 4-H program.

First, when people ask what I do it is hard to answer because it is a large range of things on a daily basis and each day changes. I usually start with informing others about the 4-H program. Youth members ages 5-18 can join the program and learn life skills needed all while having fun. In Stoddard County we have several clubs in the area to choose from and youth and families can be as much or as little as they would like to be involved. 4-H has over 40 projects to choose from and our youth do a lot of community service to help others in their area. I inform others that my job is to grow the program and promote positive youth development, which can be done in the clubs or in programs throughout the community such as school enrichment. All of this sometimes is so broad that people still do not grasp what the program does.

When I hear people have been in the 4-H program and they ask if it has changed it is hard to answer because the answer is both yes and no. 4-H still stands for head, heart, hands and health which are the four values of our volunteers, members and families.

4-H started in 1914 when the Smith-Lever Act established Extension Service for the College of Agriculture. Two Superintendents in Iowa trained teachers in developing judging teams and exhibits of work with youth. From growing corn to compete with adults to the current 4-H model some things have changed over the years. 4-H still has the same values and ideas but we have just added more as the years have gone by. Now 4-H has over 40 projects ranging from agriculture to aerospace, robotics, and more. It is almost limitless in what you can do in the program.

So what does it mean to be a 4-H member, parent or volunteer? Everyone involved in the program is able gain from being involved. Youth are working with at least one caring adult and doing hands on activities. Members, parents and volunteers contribute time to the program and to grasp the full experience of 4-H you can spend countless hours. This shouldn't be a detourance, because you can be in the program and only spend 1-2 hours per month as well. Those more involved can participate in county, state and national events. 4-H offers so much for youth to get involved in. There are camps, judging events, teen conference, state congress and always the fun events like 4-H Day with the Cardinals! 4-H is an affordable option to many since our dues are \$20 a year and we provide scholarships to help youth attend programs throughout the year.

I could go on about 4-H for hours since the program is so broad and there is so much that members, parents and volunteers can do. If you have questions about 4-H youth development programs in the area contact Rachel Elder at 568-3344 or visit your local office at 314 S Prairie in Bloomfield, MO. There is so much to do in 4-H I hope you consider this an option for your family.

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