

OPINION

Notes from UW Extension

VOLUNTEER DEVELOPMENT IN 4-H

By Amanda Kostman, 4-H Youth Development Program Advisor

Most people see 4-H as a for-youth organization... and they are correct. But they are missing that 4-H is also helps volunteer leaders gain knowledge also. Insuring that 4-H members have a quality experience is Priority No. 1 for Wisconsin. 4-H Volunteers are the backbone of the 4-H experience. It is critical that volunteers have the support, tools and training to be able to fulfill their role. This year is the fourth year annual trainings for volunteers bring held to help Wisconsin 4-H to reach that goal.

This year we will be focusing on 4-H Project Leaders. 4-H project volunteer leaders play a significant role in the experiences of 4-H youth. Across Wisconsin, there are over 33,400 youth involved in 4-H community clubs working with over 18,000 volunteer leaders. When 4-H members need help, the first people they usually turn to are 4-H organizational and project leaders. Projects are hands-on learning experiences focused on a specific subject or area that youth want to learn about. Projects include everything from art to zoology, from raising animals to building rockets and everything in between. Through project learning, youth gain the essential elements of youth development: belonging, mastery, independence and generosity. This training will help volunteer leader:

- To recognize the importance of three things: knowing themselves, knowing their audience, and knowing the topic.

- Expand their knowledge of how we all learn. By knowing how people learn, they will learn better – and in turn, teach members better. There are three primary learning styles: Auditory (learning pri-

marily by hearing and listening), Visual learning by (seeing and looking) and Kinesthetic/Tactile (learning by touching and doing). Leaders will learn to assess how to develop agendas and information to target each of these types of learners.

- 4-H strives to teach youth life skills through experiential education or as the 4-H Slogan says “Learning by doing.” Leaders will focus on using their knowledge to create an experiential learning environment with the 3 components of “Do, Reflect and Apply” to not only learn about a project but use their knowledge to gain life skills.

- Project work can be defined as a series of educational experiences designed in partnership with members to help them achieve their goals. Once members have set their goals, or identified their destination, leaders can guide them in making a plan to achieve those goals. Leaders will learn to engage youth to create a project path that meet the needs and goals of youth.

The more comfortable leaders are with these skills, the stronger they will be in teaching the information needed by 4-H members. During the 90 minute training, volunteer leaders are engaged in learning to improve knowledge and skills.

If you are interested in learning more about 4-H or how to getting involved in Lincoln County 4-H, please feel free to contact Debbie or Amanda at the UW-Extension office at 539-1072 or visit the Lincoln County Extension UW-Website at <http://lincoln.uwex.edu/>. 4-H is open to all youth throughout Lincoln County between kindergarten and one year past graduation from high school. 4-H also welcome volunteers with skill they are willing to share!