



4-H ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

PYD: Independence

"There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in." – Graham Greene

Essential Element: Seeing Oneself as an Active Participant in the Future

Gaining the ability to see oneself in the future is to have hope and optimism to shape life choices which will in turn transfer into actively engaging in future choices. Youth today are faced with so many opportunities it could appear that the transition into living their future would be an easy one; however these same opportunities can turn into challenges.

One of the most difficult tasks for youth is learning to set attainable goals and defining realistic strategies for reaching those goals. Success in setting and achieving goals gives youth the confidence to aspire for increasingly more difficult and challenging accomplishments.

4-H volunteers can play a key role in helping youth make this transition. Think of the 4-H club experience and answer these questions. In our 4-H club ...

- Do all members set goals and work toward those goals?
- Do members think about life plans and their future?
- Do members develop hobbies and leisure interests?
- Do youth take healthy risks?

Some practices the 4-H club might want to implement if they have not already done so include:

Provide opportunities for youth to assess their work – both their success and their failures. Youth often need help in identifying the changes they need to make to turn a failure into a success. 4-H leaders can engage the youth in discussions to explore their options and future strategies.



Encourage youth to enjoy life by exploring hobbies and leisure activities. Have them discuss these hobbies and think about why there are drawn to these types of activities. Encourage them to think about how they might turn these skills into marketable skills in the workforce in the future.

Invite parents of members to come to club meetings and present a short program on their work or career. Ask parents to highlight some of the skills that are needed to be successful in their line of work and help them relate those skills to various 4-H project areas. 4-H members might shadow adults in their job or invite the adults to become project leaders and share their knowledge with other 4-H members.

Incorporate discussion of careers into project learning activities, club programs and field trips. Journaling can be a powerful way for youth to gain insights into individual interests and strengths. Encourage members to keep a journal of possible careers they can think of related to a project they are enrolled in. *WOW! Wild Over Work*, a 4-H career curriculum for grades K-6 might be used as a group project or theme for a series of club meetings. Also explore connections that exist between 4-H project work and schoolwork. Help members learn about career opportunities in their own community.

Encourage youth to try new projects and new activities, particularly as they get older. Be sure to share information with teens about county, regional, state, national, and international 4-H activities so they remain active in 4-H and also they develop a future perspective of new 4-H experiences.

Assist older youth in setting goals related to career aspirations. The advanced units of most projects include leadership, community service and career related activities that can help youth connect their interests and skills with their future. As teens narrow their career choices, encourage them to enroll in the advanced units and spend time setting both short and long-term goals they would like to achieve.

Essential Element: Self Determination

There are two key components of self-determination. Young people must believe they can influence life's events rather than life's events having control over their lives. During the early stages of a young person's development, many decisions are made for them by parents or guardians, by teachers, or other outside forces. As young people mature, we must help them foster that personal sense of influence over their lives, helping them exercise their potential to become self-directing, autonomous adults.

It is critical at this stage of development that adults examine their own attitudes about youth. How an adult sees youth, whether they view them as capable and strive to develop a strong partnership; or whether they view them as incapable, and consider their role to be to plan the experience "for the youth" will impact the development of self determination in youth.

Some practices 4-H volunteers might want to implement in their clubs to foster self determination include:

Allow all youth to have a voice in selecting activities for the club. A good club program plan should provide every member an opportunity to do something they are personally interested in.

Allow time during each meeting for members to talk about their own experiences. Young people need to be active by doing and experiencing. They also need time to share feelings, ask questions, learn from each other, and consider how the things they have learned affects them and how they might apply their new knowledge or skill to other aspects of their life. Each member should have **three** opportunities to speak during a club meeting.

Provide opportunities for youth to test their independence. Match them with younger members as "Big Friends" or mentors for the year.

Have older members plan, implement, and evaluate a program or activity for younger members. Make this an opportunity for older members to practice and demonstrate their skills. Be supportive and interested in the project they choose, but allow them to work through the problems and come up with their own solutions. Follow-up with the older members to help them reflect on their leadership experience. Help them consider "What went well, and what would I do differently the next time?"

Give youth numerous opportunities to set their own goals. Guide them to set realistic goals and then recognize them for their successes.

Make certain youth are heard and taken seriously by others. Strategically create opportunities for youth to contribute their ideas, concerns, and opinions in committee discussions. It can be difficult for some youth to speak up and share their thoughts if they feel no one is paying attention or respects their views.

Ensure they once youth have joined a decision-making group, they are not ignored. Adults sometimes forget that youth have important things to say. Listening is a skill that takes efforts and practice. A rule of thumb is to listen twice as long as you speak. It is also wise to summarize what you believe you heard the young person say in order to be sure you understood them correctly.

Encourage youth to take on leadership roles in club, county, regional, and state level programs. A 4-H club setting is a safe environment for young people to practice and develop leadership skills. Make sure those opportunities exist at all level of 4-H programming.



Author: Patricia C. McGlaughlin, Extension Specialist 4-H Youth Development
University of Illinois Extension, State 4-H Office
February 2010

