



“Essential Elements” for Young People

Over the years, educators and researchers have focused on the benefits of educational programs and opportunities that assist young people to become healthy, problem-solving, constructive adults. The 4-H Youth Development Program assists youth in acquiring knowledge, developing life skills and forming attitudes that enable boys and girls to become self-directing, productive and contributing members of society. 4-H is a community of young people across America who are learning leadership, citizenship and life skills.

The Essential Elements of 4-H are *Belonging*, *Mastery*, *Generosity* and *Independence*. Using these elements, 4-H programs across the nation create opportunities and environments that meet young people’s needs and build life skills.

4-H Offers opportunities for Belonging. Young people don’t just join 4-H...they belong!

Youth need to know they are cared about and accepted by others. Youth also need to experience a sense of physical and emotional safety. They need to feel a sense of connection to others in the group. Current research emphasizes how important it is that youth have opportunities for long-term consistent relationships with adults other than their parents. In fact, the research suggests that a sense of belonging may be the single most powerful positive ingredient we can add into the lives of children and youth.

4-H offers opportunities to experience Mastery. Young people master skills that are relevant.

Mastery includes the development of skills, knowledge and attitudes followed by the competent demonstration of these skills and knowledge. In order to develop self-confidence and a sense that they matter, young people need to feel that they are capable. They must also experience success at solving problems and meeting meaningful challenges. Mastery is sometimes called “self-efficacy.” Settings that promote self-efficacy and mastery encourage youth to take risks, seek out challenges, and focus on self-improvement rather than comparing themselves to their peers.

4-H offers opportunities to experience Generosity. Young people become active and engaged citizens.

Young people need to feel their lives have meaning and purpose. They need opportunities to connect to their communities and learn how to give back to others. As part of this process, youth gain an understanding of others' needs and learn how to respond to these needs. Generosity may also include the development of values such as compassion and tolerance for diversity and the ability to take the perspective of others, and to approach problems as “a member of a global society,” through participation in local and national politics.

4-H offers opportunities to experience Independence. Young people have opportunities to choose, and learn to make good choices.

Youth need to know that they are able to influence people and events through decision-making and action. Independence refers to an adolescent's growing ability to think, feel, make decisions, and act on her or his own. This continues to develop whenever someone is challenged to act with a new level of self-reliance. By gaining a sense of independence, youth develop personal responsibility and discipline.

The 4-H Youth Development Program of Rutgers Cooperative Extension, a unit of Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station is open to all youth in grades K-13 (one year out of high school) on an age-appropriate basis without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation or disability.

The 4-H program provides opportunities for young people to experience belonging, mastery, generosity and independence through a variety of 4-H project areas and educational programs and events.

For more information about the Cumberland 4-H Program, contact the 4-H Center at (856) 451-2800 ext #3..