

Positive Youth Development and 4-H: *Making the Connection*



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4-H has been described as the “exemplary programmatic approach to promoting positive youth development” (Lerner, 2004, p. 129). This publication provides information on how 4-H can facilitate positive youth development within county programs. In addition, individual assets of youth that may indicate or predict positive outcomes are also presented.

Introduction

Youth development is an ongoing process and not a one-time occurrence. For young people to develop into productive adults, they must be afforded positive experiences and leadership opportunities throughout their early childhood and adolescent years. While organizations such as 4-H offer a wealth of activities and services, youth development is most successful in exposing young people to an environment where all components of a community (people, places, and supportive systems) are engaged.



This is the second of a four-part series of publications on Positive Youth Development. Upcoming publications will address the following:

- How to apply positive youth development to county 4-H programming efforts
- Identifying resources that incorporate positive youth development concepts

Positive Youth Development and 4-H

Positive youth development employs the support of young people by ensuring that their developmental experience is positive and empowering. In retrospect, 4-H has been a strong advocate for positive youth development. However, as an organization 4-H must ensure that young people continue to have the chance to develop socially, intellectually, physically, and emotionally through the most positive experiences possible.

4-H youth development programs at the county level have the potential to encompass the full capacity of effective youth programming by focusing on the five “Cs” of positive youth development:

Competence – Encouraging youth to take the initiative to do their best in school and as leaders within community organizations; this generates a sense of self-confidence and belief that they are capable of high achievement

Confidence – Promoting high self-esteem by making sure youth have the opportunity to become involved in a multitude of constructive, healthy activities and receive praise for their efforts

As youth development professionals, county 4-H agents serve in a critical role that creates opportunities for youth to develop the skills, leadership, and relationships necessary to grow into responsible adulthood. Youth development is certainly not something that is done TO youth but is the result of programming FOR and WITH youth. Positive youth development can indeed serve as the catalyst in assuring the continued success of 4-H programs.

Connection – Generating positive networks and bonding between youth, their peers, and adults by working together as community partners

Character – Adult volunteers serving as positive role models for youth to emulate; Demonstrating high moral values around youth creates an environment where young people can witness desirable traits (responsibility, dedication, respect, dependability, strong work ethic) and behaviors

Caring/Compassion – Adults showing concern and respect, which helps youth to be sympathetic to the needs and issues of others

Positive youth development, in several ways, is evident in the overall mission of 4-H. The example below highlights the Four Hs, the Five Cs, and how they relate to individual assets developed by young people. The list following the chart includes outcomes that may occur as a result of youth possessing these assets.

4-H	Individual Assets that Foster Positive Development	5 Cs of Positive Youth Development
Head	Intellectual	Competence Confidence
Heart	Psychological & Emotional	Character Caring/Compassion
Hands	Social	Contribution Connection
Health	Physical	Competence Confidence

(Source: Adapted from the *Comparing Frameworks Chart*, 4-H Center for Youth Development, UC Davis; also see Lerner, 2004)

Head

Challenging opportunities offer the intellectual development of skill sets which strengthens the competencies and confidence in youth decision-making abilities.

Heart

Psychological and emotional development is essential in building character and compassionate personal values.

Hands

Learning by doing exhibits youth serving as contributors and within social networks (connections) among peers and adults.

Health

Encouraging youth to engage in a healthy lifestyle instills the competency and to take care of their bodies; this, in turn, invokes an emotional confidence and physical sense of “better living.”

Essential Elements of 4-H

In 1999, a team of evaluators from National 4-H determined what factors are critical to the 4-H experience. The results were eight elements that are dependent upon a young person’s family and other adults in the community. Moreover, these elements are key components of positive youth development.

1. A positive relationship with a caring adult
2. A safe environment
3. An inclusive, welcoming environment
4. Engagement in learning
5. Opportunity for mastery
6. Opportunity to see oneself as an active participant in the future
7. Opportunity for self-determination
8. Opportunity to value and practice service for others

Source: Kress, C. (n.d.). The eight essential elements of 4-H. A national report.



Individual Assets that Foster Positive Youth Development

Intellectual Development

- Knowledge of essential life skills
- School success
- Critical thinking and reasoning skills
- In-depth knowledge of multiple cultures
- Good decision-making skills

Psychological and Emotional Development

- Good mental health
- Coping skills
- Conflict resolution skills
- Confidence in one's own self-efficacy
- Optimistic mentality
- Culturally sensitive values
- Strong moral character

Social Development

- Good relationships between and trust of peers, parents and other positive adults
- Sense of value/being connected to social networks
- Commitment to civic engagement/ community service

Physical Development

- Good health habits
- Health management skills

(Source: Eccles & Gootman, 2002)

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