



4-H Youth and You!

A Wealth of Hands-On/Minds-On Experiences

Welcome! You may be new to 4-H or you may have been involved in 4-H “once upon a time!” You may think of 4-H as general clubs where young people get together in a church, a school, or a home to work on projects and explore new ideas. While that’s a major part of 4-H, there is much more. 4-H can be a one-hour self defense or computer workshop or it can be a year-round community-based club. 4-H groups even meet in cyberspace to chat about subjects such as Labrador retrievers or Web site design. *They are all 4-H – and all are important!*

4-H is an exciting organization, changing and evolving to meet the changing needs and interests of Alabama’s young people. We are glad to have you working with us to make a difference in the lives of some extraordinary and wonderful young people.

Here in Alabama, we have a vision of what we want the 4-H Youth Development Program to be. Our **Vision Statement** is our big dream:

Alabama 4-H is an innovative, responsive leader in developing youth to be productive citizens and leaders in a complex and dynamic society. Our vision is supported through the collaborative, committed efforts of Extension professionals, youth, and volunteers.

We have also created a statement of who we are as an organization and what our purpose is. That is our **Mission Statement**:

4-H is the youth development component of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. 4-H helps young people from rural and urban areas explore their interests and expand their awareness of our world while providing opportunities to develop a greater sense of who they are and who they can become—as contributing citizens of our communities, our state, our nation, and our world. This mission is achieved through research-based educational programs of Alabama A&M and Auburn Universities and an ongoing tradition of applied, hands-on/minds-on experiences, which develop the heads, hearts, hands, and health of Alabama youth.

So, WHAT IS ALABAMA 4-H?

4-H is a community of young people across Alabama who are learning leadership, citizenship, and life skills.

The Alabama 4-H Program helps young people develop skills in making decisions, thinking critically, building relationships, practicing leadership, and developing a concern for the community and the environment. 4-H provides learning opportunities in the following areas:

- ♦ **Science and Technology**
- ♦ **Leadership, Citizenship, and Communications**
- ♦ **The Arts**
- ♦ **Healthy Lifestyles**
- ♦ **Environmental Education and Natural Resources**



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♦ Plant and Animal Sciences

4-H is a “learning by doing” youth education program for boys and girls ages 9 – 19 and our Cloverbuds program is for kids 5 - 8. 4-H can reach “any kid, anywhere, any time” through events, camps, clubs, or activities. 4-H Club members have a wide array of choices in when, where, and how these learning activities take place. Wherever energy, creativity, and involvement can be applied to the 4-H mission, values, and objectives—*that is 4-H!*

4-H is:

Belonging

- 4-H provides a positive relationship with a caring adult.
- 4-H provides an environment where everyone feels included.
- 4-H provides a safe environment.

Mastery

- Youth are involved in the learning process.
- Youth have an opportunity to master skills.

Independence

- Youth have an opportunity to feel that they have control over their future.
- Youth have an opportunity to pursue their own interests and abilities.

Generosity

- Youth have an opportunity to value and practice service for others.

Alabama 4-H is a part of the *Alabama Cooperative Extension System*. Each county has an Extension office that administers and advises the 4-H program. At the national level, 4-H is a unit of the Cooperative State Research, Education, and Extension Service (CSREES) within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the federal partner of the state land grant university system. 4-H is the youth development program of the land-grant universities' Cooperative Extension System.

Volunteer adults who serve as 4-H leaders are valued partners in developing Alabama's young people to become productive citizens and leaders. Our volunteers have access to research and information from Alabama's land-grant system by contacting their county Extension offices.

How Is the 4-H Program Delivered?

Many options exist for how, when, and where 4-H can reach young people:

- **Community or project clubs.** Youth are organized into groups (clubs) that function for several months or throughout the year. This method is the *traditional* 4-H delivery method and can be general in nature or devoted to a specific interest—from acting to zoology.
- **School enrichment.** University research-based curriculum is used in the classroom during regular school hours. The classroom teacher or another resource person teaches the subject matter. This hands-on/minds-on learning activity generally focuses on a topic such as character development or personal health.



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- **Short-term/special interest.** 4-H curriculum is generally taught for a specified time, ranging from an hour to several months, outside of regular school hours. After-school programs, community programs, special interest group programs, cooperative programs with other agencies and organizations, and school-age childcare programs are examples of this delivery method.

How Does the 4-H Program Work?

It's often said, "It is better to build a child than to mend an adult." That, in a nutshell, is the main objective of the 4-H program. We want to help build great children into great adults. In 4-H clubs, that means that kids take responsibility—making all of the decisions on determining what the club is like, what activities are undertaken, and what rules the group follows. That is important!

In 4-H, volunteer leaders and Extension staff encourage youth to gain knowledge and learn practical life skills and to apply both in all their 4-H activities. Young people learn to work together as a team and develop a sense of fair play. And they even learn from making mistakes! As young people mature, they have opportunities to learn and practice leadership skills within their own club, at county activities, and during state events. They also begin to develop an appreciation and understanding of their community through individual or club service projects.

4-H helps youth improve their communication skills through working together. In the club setting, that includes interactions with other club members, presentations, and 4-H record keeping. They also develop positive attitudes about themselves and others, learn basic health and safety practices, have educational and vocational experiences, and learn how to set and achieve realistic goals for themselves through wise use of their time.

What Is the 4-H Leader's Job?

- **Help 4-H participants learn.** 4-H kids have fun with projects while learning by doing. Youth remember better if they actually experience something and have an opportunity for "hands-on learning." Learning takes place within the learner—it is not something done to the learner. We encourage skills that will be useful to the young person now and in the future. We help young people develop good habits, experiment with new ideas, and practice problem solving skills. By doing this, we help them become self-directed, productive, contributing members of society.
- **Help teach youth *how to think*, not *what to think*.** We help develop creative thinking in young people by giving them a chance to make decisions on their own. They'll learn from their own choices.
- **Recognize and encourage each 4-H participant so he or she feels noticed and important.** The most significant recognition that can be given to kids is sincere praise, attention, or compliments—letting them know they are important and what they have done is worthwhile.
- **There's more! Listen. You can serve as a worthy model of what an adult should be.** That is what 4-H is all about—the personal development of the boy and girl.