

4-H Club Offers Opportunities to Unique Group of Alabama Youth

Of the nearly 1,700 4-H clubs throughout Alabama, there is one that has unique membership – all Native American Indians and members of the Poarch Band of Creek Indians. And while they are like Alabama youth in most ways, they are unique because of their heritage and culture.

Christyn Sells, children’s services coordinator for the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, helped the Tribe start the club three years ago as a way to offer children in her program more educational opportunities. The group of 35 members meets twice a month and their programs offer knowledge on a variety of educational topics they wouldn’t otherwise receive.



“I try to get the kids to be involved in a little bit of everything,” Sells says. “It is my goal to expose them to any positive youth education program and 4-H is just great.”

“I think the greatest thing 4-H does is help children grow their leadership skills, and I’ve really seen that blossom in some of the youth here,” she says. “We also focus on Chef 4-H because of the healthy nutrition, basic cooking and baking skills it provides.”

Nutrition education is a vital part of Sells’ program as her after-school program feeds the youth a nightly meal. “Understanding the importance of good nutrition is key, and Chef 4-H helps me teach that, as well as provides fun while they are learning.”

“I’ve seen several of these members over the past years grow into capable and confident teens,” says Regional Extension Agent Cynthia Knowlton. “It’s great to see these teens help the younger members develop the same skills they have learned over time through 4-H and Christyn’s guidance.”



Sells also focuses on educating children on giving back, and youth have participated in a number of activities to fund raise for groups like Share our Strength and 4-H’s Paper Clover program. Last year, the group had a float in the Tribe’s Christmas parade and had bake sales to raise money to go on educational field trips.

They also attended the state 4-H Horse show in Montgomery this past summer, and some of the youth entered exhibits in the arts show. “When the kids saw their work next to other kids from

around the state, it really gave them a source of pride and also a challenge,” Sells says. “They saw what they could do to better their projects, and it’s good for them to compete.”

This club is unique because these children are unique, she says. “They have a much different cultural experience than most Alabama youth because of their heritage.” Her group ranges in age from 9 to 16 years old, and she’s watched members step up to mentor younger children.



For 14-year-old Caitlyn Barnhill and 13-year-old Breanna Hall, they took their first trip to Summer Camp at the Alabama 4-H Center.

“There is so much to do in 4-H, and I want the opportunity to do more,” Barnhill says. “I want to be a counselor in training at the 4-H Center when I’m old enough.”



Hall, who is president of the 4-H Club, said a recent fall meeting focused on nutrition and also discussing plans for a Christmas float. “I really like 4-H and what I’ve learned through 4-H,” she added.

“It’s great satisfaction to work with these members in their community club setting, as well as, with in-school enrichment programs,” Knowlton said. “To observe them as individuals and then as students gives me a good, satisfying feeling of having been a small part of their accomplishments.”

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