

Volunteers...making a difference in the lives of our youth. Coming off of a 4-week marathon of Twin Creeks Extension District county fairs in Norton, Decatur, Sheridan and Graham counties, realization of the importance of our community volunteers runs high. Judging events, parades, food concession stands, etc. require the leadership of engaged youth and adult volunteers who believe in our 4-H program and community involvement. There is a night and day difference between the mind-set behind today's 4-H members compared to other Generation Z students when addressing the topic of volunteerism.

4-H youth appear to have higher levels of the developmental assets that a 4-H Study conducted by Tufts University have found most important in promoting Positive Youth Development: relationships and, in particular, caring, competent, and committed adults such as parents, teachers, and mentors. (Theokas & Lerner, 2006) Positive Youth Development is driven by the Five C's of Competence, Confidence, Character, Connection, and Caring, leading to youth Contributions, the "sixth C" of Positive Youth Development. 4-H youth are substantially more likely than other youth to make contributions to their communities. (Bowers et al., 2010; Jelicic et al., 2007; Lerner et al., 2005; Phelps et al., 2009) Because of these relationships between our youth and caring adults, this longitudinal study has concluded the following information related to Contribution and Active/Engaged Citizenship:

- 1) 4-H youth are 3 times as likely as youth in other out-of-school-time programs to have higher scores for Contribution and 1.6 times as likely to have higher scores for Positive Youth Development.
- 2) Consistent with the results from Grades 5 to 10, this study finds that through Grade 11, 4-H youth are 2.1 times more likely than other youth to make contributions to their communities.
- 3) These same youth are also 1.8 times more likely to have higher scores on measures of active and engaged citizenship.

In a more recent study by the University of Maryland's Do Good Institute, students in Generation Z (those growing up in the 21st century) desire to "make the world a better place". Even with this thinking, volunteering among this group is down, not up. The study used U.S. Census data to track rates of volunteering and charitable giving by Americans from high school age to retirement age, from 2002 to 2015. Across every age group, volunteering has declined since 2005. About 25 percent of teenagers volunteered in 2015, down from 28 percent in 2005 which ended 30 years of rising volunteerism among high-school-age Americans. Less than a quarter donate to charity, a rate that has been flat since 2008.

This study also indicated that though nearly half of incoming college freshmen surveyed wanted to become leaders in their communities and 80% indicated a desire to help others, volunteerism and charitable giving among high school students has declined since 2005.

Eleven states require students to be involved in service learning projects, but there is little correlation between state policy requirements and the true rate of volunteerism. Some studies indicated that high school students who are required to volunteer are less likely to do so. Volunteerism among parents has declined as well.

Over the past four weeks at our county fair events, volunteerism has run rampant among our youth and adults. These major community events would not be possible without those individuals and groups donating their time for the good of the cause.

Parents, grandparents, and guardians -- consider enrolling your youth in the largest national youth organization that promotes positive youth development and community involvement. Our 4-H youth are NOT volunteering just to be able to have something as a resume builder. They volunteer because it is instilled in them that it is the right thing to do. Adults in our communities very generously support our 4-H program through their time commitments in serving as community club and project leaders as well as financial support from individuals and businesses.

Our 4-H youth look for community service projects as they take pride in their community and strive "To Make the Best Better". These members strive to uphold their 4-H Pledge saying, "I pledge my Head to clearer thinking, my Heart to greater loyalty, my Hands to larger service, and my Health to better living, for my club, my community, my country and my world."

A huge THANK YOU to everyone who gave their time and talents to make our county fairs successful for the 2018 year. Our Extension staff appreciates everyone who helped in any way. We are always looking for additional volunteers, so if there is something that you are passionate about or would like to help out in any, please contact your local Extension office.

Start this school year off on a positive note by seeking information about your local 4-H program. Contact Patsy Maddy at pmaddy@ksu.edu or contact your local Twin Creeks Extension District office in Norton, Decatur, Sheridan or Graham counties to take advantage of the benefits of participating as a 4-H member and parent that stresses Positive Youth Development. #TrueLeaders; #4-HGrowsHere.

Information in this article has been adapted from Dr. Tim Elmore, founder of Growing Leaders.

Article Header

“Volunteerism -- Making a Difference”

“Chasing Clovers”

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