

4-H'ers Benefit from doing Public Presentations

By Kathleen Jablonski, Extension Educator, 4-H Youth Development

I was struggling with an idea for this column and one of the 4-H alumna that work in the office said, "Why don't you do a column on public presentations?" When I pressed her further, she started talking about all the things kids learn when having to do a public presentation.

I got to thinking, she was right.

I started remembering how I started in public presentations. I don't remember the first time I was asked to talk in front of a group, but I do remember a time at 4-H Club Congress at Cornell when I was asked to introduce the guest speaker. There were about 1,000 of my peers in the audience. I got up on stage, full of confidence, went to introduce him, and froze. The house lights were up just enough that I could see all 1,000 of my fellow Club Congress delegates. Out of my mouth came, "Wow. There sure are a lot of you out there!" Everyone laughed, and so did I...and then I went on to introduce the man.

I know in my ten years as a 4-H member I did numerous demonstrations and public presentations that helped me build the skills needed to be the person I am today. We hope all 4-H members learn how to present themselves and their ideas in public.

Who would think that the young lady who is now a key part of our Extension staff, once had to be convinced to stand up and give reasons at a 4-H livestock judging event?

What about the young lady with learning challenges, who needed quizzes at the horse showing events read to her, but had the courage to write and present a public speech on a horse topic, earning her a trip to the National Eastern 4-H Horse Round Up in Louisville, Kentucky? And the mother of the same gal who called me up one morning to report, after her daughter's first college public speaking presentation, that she earned the grade of an A. Her daughter reported, "It was because of 4-H, Mom!"

What about the 8 year old who decided at the quilt week presentation to parents and friends that someone needed to show these folks how to operate a sewing machine? By herself, with a little help from a high school age friend, she prepared a 5 minute demonstration on how to use a sewing machine, and did it in front of 70 people.

I've been here long enough to remember a Cloverbud who did a Food Show presentation, licking more of her product off her fingers than actually got on her plate, to see the same 4-H'er win our Senior Cook Off contest, and go on to a national cooking competition to represent her school...and her future career as a chef.

Or the 4-H alum who just got a promotion with a local bank. Did she learn how to present her ideas and get her point across as a youth leader during her 4-H experiences?

Then there's the young lady who interviewed for a 4-H awards trip. The first year she interviewed, she was shy and reserved. The second year, she walked into the room, shook the judge's hand and stated her name. When asked why she wanted to represent New Hampshire at this event, she eloquently spoke about her family's farm, her passion for raising dairy cows and how we, as a county, a community and a state, needed to look at protecting farm lands and our agrarian roots to feed our population, as well as preserve the lifestyle we've come to Grafton County to celebrate. She was later asked for her input on an important issue of land use by one of the county commissioners, all because of her interview and her experiences in 4-H.

A young person's first public speaking adventure may be in 4-H where they learn to state a position and research information to support their stand. One mom, when recently asked, reported to me about her son who took a position about a group at his school that he felt was needed by the student body. She shared with me that he prepared well, presented his ideas to faculty and board members and was lauded by one of his teachers for his eloquence and ability to present the information in a non-controversial manner. The group has been established at his school.

Have you ever been to the New England Building at Eastern States? Those young people doing demonstrations and action exhibits are all 4-H members. They started with their local clubs and county events, learning the skills of marketing an idea to the public.

There are so many more stories of confidence, courage and growth I could relate, but why not see for yourself? The public is welcome to attend any of the 4-H events to see these kids in action performing public speeches, doing demonstrations, action exhibits, helping to present lessons or whatever else the project meeting or event requires. Watch the local community calendars, check out website <http://extension.unh.edu/Counties/Grafton/Grafton.htm> or visit our UNHCE Grafton County Facebook page for upcoming events.

Who knows? Maybe we have another Dolly Parton, Jim Davis or Julia Roberts who are just beginning their public presentation life in our local 4-H program.

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