



4-H Leaders Have Had a Positive Influence

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

Did you ever stop and think of the people who have made a great influence in your life, besides your parents and elder relatives? For me, it was my 4-H leaders.

As a kid, I didn't always realize their influences, but as I began to reflect as an adult, I realized the contributions that these leaders made shaped who I am today. For the 10 years I was a 4-H member in Schenectady, NY, I was being guided in hands-on experiences and learning lifelong lessons in life skills.

As my 4-H leaders lived and taught the values of the 4-H Pledge, these men and women taught me many life skills that I use every day.

“I pledge my head to clearer thinking...”

Youth need mentors to help guide them to places they need to experience, enjoy and be influenced in a positive way. In my 4-H days, there was Mrs. Stevens, the leader of the Stoney Brook Lassies who took me in when I asked to learn to sew. One of my classmates had brought her project to school and I wanted to learn how to make an apron, too. My mom had started me sewing, and Mrs. Stevens and the other leaders perpetuated the love of fiber and needle and creativity I still pursue today. They taught me to be frugal, the mechanics of the sewing machine, and how to present myself well during judging and on the stage. They gave me the courage to experiment and use my talents in a variety of ways (ask me about the curtain dress....)

“My heart to greater loyalty...”

Ever go by our house during the holidays? Folks have commented on the wreaths and arrangements. Thanks Mrs. Baranowski and Mrs. Taylor - my tutors in flower arranging and making all things with plant materials. This is where I first learned the principles of art and design, those ever important keys to harmony in our surroundings and in the things we create.

“My hands to larger service...”

There was Mrs. Bopp, one of our teen group leaders. She was always willing to help with community service activities and to lend a hand. As I reflect back on the experience, I now can see she was giving back for all that had been given to her and her family. She was there with time, and energy, and enthusiasm to help others at all times. Then there was my 4-H agent, Joel Soobitsky. Mr. Soobitsky was always having us teens help him on projects, opening our eyes to needs in our communities and helping build a network of community leaders in our lives. I remember him saying to me, as I worked as a summer assistant in an inner city gardening program, “How many kids can we reach with this program? See how little funding we can turn into great experiences...”

“And my health to better living, for my club, my community, my country and my world.”

4-H leaders taught me to make wise choices in foods, exercise, and fun activities. Mr. and Mrs. Young ran the 4-H Teen Square Dance Club. The dances were weekly, with some extra ones for exhibitions or when we went to competition. We learned the social graces, as well as the dance steps, in a good, clean, wholesome environment. We didn't know it, but we were exercising as well, in a very fun way.

The point of all this is that as we are wrapping up National 4-H Week it is time to thank the leaders who helped me become the woman I am today. Most have passed over to another side of life, but they live on in me, my friends and other 4-H acquaintances.

It's time, as well, to thank the one hundred and twenty-two men and women who support 4-H'ers in Grafton County, New Hampshire, as volunteers for UNH Cooperative Extension 4-H Youth Development.

My **H**heart goes out to you all for the caring kindness you show our 4-H'ers and their friends when you teach them a project. My **H**ands applaud the work you do with our young people in "learning by doing". My **H**ead thanks you for giving of your talents, abilities and knowledge in guiding and mentoring young people. And I toast your **H**health for a continued life of service to 4-H, our communities and our world. Because of leaders like I had as a youth and the leaders we have today, 4-H Youth are learning "To make the best better."

Thanks.

The week of October 5-11 is National 4-H Week. For 107 years, 4-H has been the Cooperative Extension Services youth program, bringing current research to the young people of families in counties all over the country. I charge you with finding the youth group leaders who made a positive difference in your life...and thank them - with a phone call, a letter, or posthumously, with a note to their family.