

Why I Like My Job

By Kathleen Jablonski, 4-H Youth Development Extension Educator

I was having an interesting day helping volunteers figure out solutions to problems, answering questions about fair entries, talking to leaders and members as they walked into the office to drop off materials, and getting organized for 4-H camp staff training. All of this left me feeling a bit overwhelmed as I hoped I made the right decisions with some of the issues. Then I got an e-mail referring to a bit of tension throughout the organization as we deal with new philosophies and budgetary restrictions. After all of this I was starting to wonder why I do the job that I do.

After having a few days away I looked down through my long list of e-mails and saw one from Kristin Francini Walter, Director, Public Relations at National 4-H Council. I ignored it at first, thinking it was something I could come back to later. As I continued with my day that same e-mail was forwarded to me from two other folks in Extension, so I decided I'd better open it. When I saw the topic of the e-mail I read it with great interest.

It reminded me why I chose this profession years ago, and why I like my job.

Apparently, there was a blog site that made the statement that 4-H members are desensitized when they raise meat breed animals. Walter went on to say how much traffic the site received and how many reactions there were to the statement. She felt there was an overwhelming response to the blog spot from 4-H'ers and 4-H alumni who objected to the site's take on 4-H'ers being desensitized. Walter, as any person who embraces the 4-H program, took objection to the on-line site using 4-H'ers to draw attention to their controversial topic. She cited a particularly effective response that uses findings from a longitudinal study on 4-H done by researchers at Tufts' University. This response was posted to the blog site by, Jessica, a current Kansas 4-H member in her eleventh year.

"...I show sheep and cows. Do you really think we are desensitized? Why don't you come to our 4-H fair the last night of the fair at the auction? We know where our animal is going and there are definitely tears shed by a lot of the girls and many of the boys. I have shown since I was 8 and it doesn't get any easier, but I know that I am getting better quality meat and that they are hormone free and better for you, unlike meat you buy in the stores are. Buying show cattle also helps you with money management and how to run a "business" without losing money. I will never regret the time I spent as a leader in 4-H and I'm very sad that this is my last year to be in 4-H. Here are a few facts about 4-Hers verses Non-4-Hers...

If you are in 4-H you are...

More than twice as likely to contribute to their communities

41% less likely to engage in risky or problem behaviors

Twice as less likely to engage in drug use

Twice as unlikely to use cigarettes or drink alcohol

Less likely to be victims of depression

More likely to spend more time exercising or being physically active

More likely to have better grades and see themselves going to college

So really, I don't see 4-H as a bad thing at all and if you want to continue to call us desensitized go ahead, but know that 4-Hers go further in community organizations as adults and they are more likely to have a leadership career. I know that 4-H has been the best opportunity for me and because of 4-H, I was the Valedictorian of my class and a leader in all organizations at my school, so while all you guys argue about us being desensitized remember our motto "To make the best, better" and that it isn't all about animals and 4-H is an opportunity for all. I'll always be a 4-Her at heart and none of you will ever change me."

I agree with Kristin Francini Walter when she said, “No national spokesperson could do a better job.”

So, thanks Ms. Walter for bringing this to my attention. Thanks, too, to Jessica for representing all 4-H'ers well in her response. I've met many Jessica's in my 10 years here in Grafton County serving as the Extension Educator for 4-H Youth Development. They, and the leaders who work with them, are the folks who are weaving the fabric of our communities by teaching and learning life skills to help kids become productive citizens.

That's why I enjoy working with our 4-H leaders and members and hearing their success stories, their adventures in “Learning by Doing”, and seeing the fruits of their labor. It's a team effort to promote and do community service and to teach the life skills of responsibility, respect and resiliency. It helps all of us to grow and learn together.

That is what 4-H is all about. And that is why I like my job.

For more information about Grafton County's 4-H Youth Development program and how to become a leader, contact us at 603-787-6944 or email: grafton@ceunh.unh.edu. Don't forget to come and see the 4-H animal shows and the exhibit hall at North Haverhill Fair, July 27 through July 31.

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