

MAKE A DIFFERENCE GOING TO THE FAIR

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A long time ago, yet not so very long ago, I was a 4-Her. The month of July was a preparation time, a last minute detail time, a time of great anticipation for THE FAIR. As a 4-Her, I showed sheep, hogs, and steers, plus I always had a sewing project. After my 4-H years were over, I went back to our local Extension office under the College Work Study Program and July continued to be a flurry of activity preparing for THE FAIR. I was quite startled, an epiphany of sorts, when I had to go back to the Extension office in the afternoon during the fair to realize that many people were just doing ordinary things and the whole world wasn't at THE FAIR. At that time, for that week, my world was at the fair and it was filled not just with people I knew but with people who I never met. These people would ask me questions about my animals or my sewing project. They, strangers if you will, members of the community, spoke to me that week like I, youth that I was, was an expert. I answered to the best of my ability, and I received encouragement and a positive feeling about myself. These events shaped my life. Needless to say THE FAIR was pretty important to me as a 4-Her and now I know why. You, too, can go to a fair and make a difference in the life of our youth.

Little did I know back then why the fair experience was so important to me. It was more than just a fun time. Many times, especially with animal chores, it was hard work. In many aspects the fair was the "grand finale" of my 4-H project year. Most importantly the 4-H programs at the fair were an opportunity to practice skills that I was unconsciously developing. Those skills are the backbone of positive youth development programs. Those skills are: competence, character, caring, confidence, connections, and contributions.

In an article entitled "What is Positive Youth Development?" posted at <http://extension.unh.edu/4H/P4HVR.htm> (there are many more resources and information here as well), positive youth development is explained as occurring "from an intentional process that promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, choices, relationships, and the support necessary for youth to fully participate." The 4-H youth program is an excellent example of a positive youth development program. Through a gradual process of research based, experiential education opportunities, youth become "competent, confident, connected, caring, and contributing" citizens of our community. Yet the character cannot fully develop without the experience in the wider community. This is where community members like yourself, with no other 4-H youth connections, come in. You make the difference. A huge one.

Throughout the project year, 4-H trained volunteers offer youth a framework of experiences centered around a project or projects that the youth choose. Many 4-H members meet

regularly, elect officers, run committees, perform community service, participate in county wide 4-H activities such as Food Show, Fashion Review, or County Activities Day. Most of these activities are attended by people the 4-Her knows or that are part of the 4-H community. The fair, for many 4-Hers, offers the opportunity to venture out and test their skills to a wider audience.

So, how can you help to make a positive impact on the future leaders of our world? Easy. If you go to the fair for a day or even for one of the evening shows, carve out some time to go to one of the animal shows, to the Style Show, to a 4-H youth lead demonstration, really take in the 4-H youth exhibits in the exhibit hall. Ask questions. Be interested. Be present. Offer encouragement. Smile. I remember when my boys showed sheep. When a fair goer was interested in how to groom a sheep my boys stood taller. I could visibly see their confidence grow. It is an amazing thing how a small amount of your time, intentionally placed, with a spirit of connection grows a brighter future.

For more information of the services Grafton County Extension can offer to you please peruse our website at <http://extension.unh.edu/Counties/Grafton/Grafton.htm> or call 603-787-6944 Monday thru Friday 8 am – 4 pm.