

## **4-H Extends its Reach**

by Arianne Fosdick, Volunteer Management Program Assistant

Over the past 100 years 4-H has slowly been expanding its model. What began in 1902 as farm kids around a kitchen table can now be found in diverse urban homes, rural town halls, after-school programs, and at the Bridge House in Plymouth, NH. The Bridge House provides shelter, housing, outreach, education, and job training to a dynamic community of men, women, and children. Last year one of these children participated in a 4-H afterschool program. Inspired by her enthusiasm, I squirreled away the idea of The Bridge House as a possible location for future programs. During the late fall / early winter lull in traditional 4-H events, I approached Director Cathy Bentwood with my idea of 4-H for the Bridge House residents. In perfect practicality she replied, "Let's ask them!"

The following week I put together a few examples of the projects I wanted to work on (origami, wool felting, and recycled-fabric mittens), and presented my case to a colorful group of women and children. It was not a hard sell; at least two of the women were knitting as they listened patiently, and two more had been in 4-H as kids. Not surprisingly, as creativity and skill begets the same, the two youngest Bridge House residents were as excited as their adult counterparts. As we mulled over what day and time would work the best, the six and seven year old sisters were whisked off to bed. I packed up my things to the sound of the 4-H alumni trying to retrieve the 4-H pledge from the dusty reaches of their memory.

And thus started the Bridge House 4-H program. We have met three times so far and have successfully completed two of our three projects. Because we have fewer time constraints and more adult supervision than the typical after-school program, we are able to work together for at least two hours and can tackle more complicated projects...like those that involve sewing machines and patterns.

Though this logistical convenience plays a role in the success of this program, a larger part of the equation belongs to the ingenuity, willingness, and good humor of the participants. One of our senior contributors, hunched over a wool star she was decorating for her granddaughter, smirked as she recounted her daughter's reaction when she said, "I'm in 4-H now!" When, on the Sunday before Martin Luther King Jr. day, our youngest participant professed her love for this brave, brilliant man, she unwittingly reminded me that what happens when a group of people sit around a table and make things -be it garden plans, model rockets, or origami flowers -has as much to do with genuine, quality connection as it does with the projects themselves. And though 4-H has morphed, merged and modernized in the last 108 years, this is one part of 4-H that has remained the same.

For more information about 4-H programs and clubs in Grafton County, please contact the office at (603) 787-6944, or find us on the web at <http://extension.unh.edu/Counties/Grafton/Grafton.htm>.