The Military 4-H Club Program in New Hampshire!

The Military 4-H Club Program is connected to the partnership between the Department of Defense and National 4-H. Cooperative Extension’s Youth and Family oversees several programs supporting military children, teens, and families in New Hampshire. These programs include Operation: Military Kids, the Military 4-H Club Program, and seasonal camps--all of which provide outreach to our geographically dispersed service families.

What are our goals?

The primary goal of the Military 4-H Club Program is to help service families and their youth learn about the great benefits and availability of 4-H programming in New Hampshire, including clubs, camps, competitions, science nights, conferences and more. The role of the Military 4-H Club Program Coordinator is to publicize information about 4-H opportunities, and help link military families, Extension 4-H Youth staff, and family support personnel from the various branches of the U.S. Armed Forces. In contrast to other CE Military Youth and Family Programs (extension.unh.edu/4-HYouth-Family/NH-Military-Youth-and-Family-Program), which provide opportunities focused primarily on the specialized needs of military youth, the Military 4-H Club Program works to integrate service family kids into ongoing 4-H networks oriented to all youth. This provides additional year-round support and access to a wide variety of opportunities.

Is 4-H compatible with military life?

4-H is a great match for busy military families, and there is no need to find separate opportunities for male and female siblings. Programming is offered in some locations for children as young as age 5 (“Cloverbuds”), all the way up through extensive opportunities in leadership and career development for adolescents. The 4-H organization and all 4-H programming is solidly based on current research in Positive Youth Development. Studies show that youth involved in 4-H are more likely to get good grades and go to college, to contribute meaningfully to their families and communities, and to avoid engaging in risky behaviors.

There are many similarities between the values emphasized in 4-H and military culture: leadership, service to community and country, and development of personal aptitude, skill, and character. The transportability and continuity of 4-H for military youth who must relocate is another important benefit, as there are over 90,000 clubs in the U.S. and in 80 countries overseas. No longer just “plows and cows”, modern 4-H projects encompass everything from aerospace to zoology, and there is a strong
current focus on Healthy Living; Citizenship; and Science, Engineering, & Technology (akin to the Army’s STEM initiative). 4-H is true experiential education--kids “learn by doing”, and keep coming back because they are having fun, and enjoying positive relationships with peers and committed adult volunteers.

What are the opportunities?
Many people are familiar with community-based 4-H clubs that are ongoing, but there are also short-term “project clubs”, afterschool groups, Teen Conferences, regional and national competitions, conservation camps, Leadership Councils, fairs, quiz bowls, family activities, and more! Many events and activities are open to the public to participate or spectate—it is not necessary to be enrolled in 4-H to check them out!

The Military 4-H Club Program is also seeking adult volunteers from military families or other sources, to support the addition of military youth to existing clubs, or even to start new clubs oriented to military youth in areas where there are high numbers of service families. Volunteers receive training and ongoing support, and have access to the extensive resources of 4-H Youth Development. There is more information on the 4-H website about the many benefits of volunteering, and practical information about logistics and support for volunteers.

Future plans or possibilities for the Military 4-H Club Program include providing 4-H events at National Guard armories, and other events for military families. Another possibility is a “virtual” club for service youth, if volunteer leaders become available.

Web Access: To find out more about 4-H news and activities in each of our state’s ten counties use the links in the right sidebar of the Military 4-H Club Program home page.

To learn more about 4-H in general, or what’s going on at the state level in New Hampshire, just go back to the “4-H Youth and Family” page (http://extension.unh.edu/Youth-Family). There you can find detailed information about the 4-H organization, and news of statewide activities like 4-H Camps and NH Fairs.

For more information, contact the knowledgeable 4-H staff in your County office, via the contact info shown on the website. They can help you find the most appropriate 4-H programs for your kids--the best matches aren’t always the closest ones!

If you have further questions, please contact us at the Military Youth and Family Program office: 603-862-0876.