

Characteristics of Effective 4-H Clubs



4-H clubs are the foundation of every successful 4-H program. They provide volunteers and youth with unlimited opportunities for learning, relationship building and fun. 4-H clubs can take many different forms. They can be single project clubs, afterschool clubs, in-school clubs, or community clubs. Regardless of the structure, the primary purpose of 4-H clubs is to support the development of each youth participant's full potential. The club structure is designed to help volunteers and members build significant and lasting relationships.

A 4-H club includes the following:

- At least five youth from two or more families;
- One or (preferably) more caring adult volunteers working with members, teen leaders and parents;
- A structure that gives members the shared responsibility for making decisions and operating the club (This is usually done with elected officers.);
- An organized, fun and educational program planned by members, volunteers and parents;
- Six or (preferably) more club meetings during the year;
- Participation in learning experiences outside of the local group;

- Involvement in the community such as through community service;
- Personal evaluation and recognition of progress on individual and group goals.

Active participation in a 4-H club helps young people develop the following assets and life skills:

- Greater knowledge and appreciation of themselves and others;
- Decision-making skills;
- Public and interpersonal communication skills;
- Positive interactions with other young people and with adults;
- Responsibility for themselves;
- An ethic of service to group and community;
- An attitude of lifelong inquiry and application of information;
- An ability to relate to a constantly changing world;
- Strengthened family interactions;
- Career exploration and work force preparation skills;
- Leadership skills;
- Ability to work effectively as part of a team;
- Greater understanding of and appreciation for diversity;
- Practical knowledge and skills in project areas;
- Positive conflict resolution skills.

Signs that your club is being successful in helping your members achieve these outcomes include:

- Youth actively participate in their learning.
- Youth have opportunities to make decisions.
- There is opportunity for social interaction among the members and the families that make up the club.
- Youth members serve in leadership roles within the club.
- Assessment of personal progress and club goals are done on a regular basis.
- Club members are recognized and appreciated in multiple ways.
- Youth have the opportunity to participate in public events that support and enhance their learning.
- Youth are involved in community activities that provide service to others.
- The club recognizes its connections to the county, state and national 4-H and Extension organizations.

To find out more about how to have a strong and vibrant 4-H club, you can talk with your local county 4-H staff about resources available through your county Extension office and visit the Michigan 4-H Youth Development Web site at <http://web1.msue.msu.edu/4h/>. There are many useful tools for volunteers posted on this site.