

# EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

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## 4-H Alumni Give Back As Volunteers

Once a 4-Her, always a 4-Her. According to the [Illinois 4-H Alumni Association](#), 25 million Americans share the unique bond of being a 4-H alum, each with a unique story. Whether it's spending time at 4-H camp, conquering public speaking fears, leading as a club officer, traveling the world as an exchange member, competing at the county fair, or working with 4-H club leaders; 4-H experiences played a part in personal development. Being a 4-H member is an unforgettable experience.

"4-H alumni give back in so many wonderful ways and want kids to have the same great experience they had as a 4-Her," stated Cathy Ludolph, Peoria County 4-H program coordinator. In 2019, the 4-H program serving Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties surveyed its 4-H alumni about current and past involvement. Over 170 people responded with details and memories about their time as young people in 4-H. Of those that responded:

- 67% indicated that they were still involved in 4-H in some way.
- 40% of respondents were active volunteers, with an additional 11% having volunteered in the past. (This far exceeds the volunteer rate of the general public, which was just under 25% in 2015 according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#).)
- When these volunteering alumni were asked about the duration of their service, they most often indicated 15 years or more as 4-H club leaders, judges, superintendents, or mentors.

When asked about the impact 4-H had on their lives, alumni laid out a wide array of benefits. However, respondents most commonly indicated that 4-H helped to build life skills, such as responsibility, confidence, a good work ethic, and leadership.

"One of the wisest young people that I have come to know always tells people to be the example that you needed when you were younger," stated Peoria County 4-H livestock judging coach and 4-H alumni Kristi Smith. "I think that is the best way to describe what we do as alumni when we give back to 4-H. When you look back on your 4-H career, you also think about the friends you made and the people who were your mentors. It was amazing to be enrolled in 4-H, but I believe that it is equally amazing to continue to stay involved with 4-H. My last year in 4-H, there were a lot of tears, I didn't want it to be over. Now that it is 'over' I have the opportunity to realize that it really isn't over, it was just a new beginning of the impact that I could make on other 4-Hers."

Assistant 4-H club leader Sarah Stevens explained, "4-H has made me the person I am and has impacted my life in a positive way. Through 4-H, I have gained leadership, public speaking, and life skills. Once a 4-H member and now an alumnus, I am thankful for the opportunity to give back as a volunteer. I want to help make 4-H an experience where younger members can grow within themselves and continue to 'Make the Best Better.'"



4-H alumni & Peoria County 4-H livestock judging coach Kristi Smith (far right) is one of many 4-H alumni who have returned to the program as a volunteer. "Having the opportunity to give back to the program and share the skills I gained in 4-H with today's youth is a very rewarding experience," is a statement made by many 4-H alumni.

### Cathy Ludolph

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