



EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

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The evolution of 4-H: Looking at the many ways 4-H impacts the lives of young people

Did you know that 4-H is the largest youth development program in the country?! According to the [National 4-H website](#), "4-H serves youth in rural, urban, and suburban communities in every state across the nation." However, this impressive organization stemmed from modest beginnings.

In 1902—more than 120 years ago—agricultural youth clubs began popping up in the Midwest. These clubs were a way to give young people hands-on experience tackling challenges in agriculture, and to help youth encourage their families and communities to adopt new practices coming from university research. In 1910, the first H-adorned clover pin was created, and by 1912, the 4-H name was established. These humble beginnings, coupled with the creation of the Cooperative Extension System, slowly transformed 4-H into the educational behemoth it is today.

Here in [Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell Counties](#) (FMPT Unit), 4-H has maintained the long-standing tradition of youth clubs and continued to tout the importance of agriculture. However, we have also developed new and innovative ways of reaching young people from all backgrounds in myriad subject areas. Throughout the 2021-2022 program year, we touched the lives of over 5,000 young people with the help and dedication of over 650 volunteers.

Our [club programs](#)—the flagship of 4-H going back to our earliest roots—regularly gathered 837 young people in 73 clubs. These long-term groups help youth develop life and leadership skills, explore potential careers, and provide service to the community. Sixteen of these clubs are a newer type of the club model called Special Interest (SPIN) clubs, in which the group as a whole focuses on one area of concentration, such as gardening, shooting sports, or dog obedience.

Additional 4-H delivery modes, such as in-school enrichment and camp programs, reached 2,532 young people in the FMPT Unit last year. For instance, the [Embryology in the Classroom](#) program allowed 52 groups to learn how to care for and observe the development and hatching of chicken eggs over the course of four weeks. Moreover, the [Teen Teacher](#) program provided a handful of teens with the youth development knowledge and leadership skills to then facilitate fun, educational activities for an additional 753 younger participants.

Some of the newest 4-H programming, such as the [Connection Corner](#) blog and family activity kits, focused on activities and information provided to the whole family for at-home implementation. This allowed even further reach and the flexibility that today's families need. These at-home offerings reached 486 youth and an additional 488 adult, and are a great example of how the 4-H program continues to evolve to meet the needs of the community.



The Teen Teacher 4-H program provides youth the experience of leading educational activities for younger participants. During the 2021-2022 4-H year, the Teen Teachers reached 753 youth. Overall the unit 4-H program impacted the lives 5,072 youth ages 5 to 18.

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