

EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell

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Alex Riviere, a 4-H Federation member is one of many teens who has developed leadership skills through a variety of 4-H opportunities. She recently assisted during the unit-wide 4-H Clover Clinic event. Examples of leadership opportunities in our unit, in addition to Federation, include 4-H Teen Teachers and 4-H club officers.

4-H Provides Many Opportunities for Leadership Skill Development

The 4-H youth development program prides itself on helping young people grow into outstanding leaders. A statewide study conducted in 2016 showed that participation in any 4-H leadership opportunity leads to a significant increase in leadership skills, including: getting along with others, understanding yourself, working with groups, communication and management skills. Moreover, the more leadership opportunities youth are engaged in, the more their leadership skills increase. As such, the 4-H program in Fulton, Mason, Peoria, and Tazewell counties offers a wide variety of leadership opportunities to allow participants plenty of ways to build those skill sets.

One of these programs is 4-H Federation. Federation members, grades eight and above, help plan programs and community service projects in each county. They also volunteer at county, unit and state-wide 4-H events. In Fulton County, for instance, Federation sponsors a county-wide party at the local YMCA. This year, the 100+ people in attendance were able to have fun, make new friends, and practice healthy habits while Federation members learned time management, organization, and collaboration skills in planning the event. Mason County Federation Vice President, Samantha Maslana, expressed how her Federation experience has helped her develop the skill of working with groups by saying, “In small groups at school, we’re able to take charge easier than others. People who haven’t had these opportunities have a harder time getting involved.”

4-H Teen Teacher programs in Peoria and Tazewell counties are yet another leadership development opportunity. Here, teens undergo extensive training in positive youth development, classroom management techniques, and curriculum content in order to deliver lessons to younger youth. Last year, Peoria County teen teachers reached over 1,000 students with STEM, nutrition, and other programming. Sierra Bailey, a former Tazewell County 4-H Teen Teacher, exemplified the development of self-understanding, and management skills as she reflected on her first week of service, saying “This week has really made me think about how I acted when I was seven years old. I learned that it is a lot harder to watch over 18 kids than I originally thought.”

4-H clubs also help to develop leaders in the form of youth officers. The club president, vice president, treasurer, secretary, and other positions are all filled by young people who plan meetings, facilitate group discussions, and execute group decisions. In this way, these young people take on a huge responsibility and practice a multitude of skills. Katharine Gironi, former 4-H club officer turned 4-H staff, remembers how her service helped increase her communication skills, saying, “As a club officer, you’re presenting to the entire group, so just being at ease in front of a large audience is a skill I developed through 4-H.”

“I feel like the plethora of opportunities offered by 4-H ensures that our future will be in good hands,” mentioned Emily Schoenfelder, 4-H youth development educator.



Photo by Anita Wilkinson, U of I Extension