



EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

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“Let’s Learn!” experiential learning theme develops self confidence in 4-H youth

Experiential learning is a longtime piece of the 4-H philosophy. It is one of the program’s guiding principles that focuses on intentional learning experiences, where the integration of knowledge, skills, and behaviors of formal and non-formal education strategies are applied. Pleasant Workers 4-H Club in Mason County implemented an experiential learning, kid-friendly theme this year called “Let’s Learn!”

Amy Dowell, club leader explained the theme permits youth to learn from each other rather than relying solely on adults.

“This method has allowed the members to show independence as they research a topic, and then develop a program including trivia questions to present to the club,” Amy stated. She feels this allows the youth to develop confidence in speaking in front of their peers, as well as filling the roll of the educator, by sharing what they learned about the topic.

Veteran 4-H volunteers will tell you the best way to engage youth in learning is to create experiential learning opportunities that allow youth to explore and discover, rather than listen to lectures or read information. Amy shared how this process has become something her members look forward to. “Prior to these educational sessions, youth would barely interact/answer questions. Now they are less intimidated to interact with their peers. The trivia provides a fun facet and game-like atmosphere.”

Evidence supports that youth learn by teaching. Eleven year old Addison Liesman took her turn teaching the club about types of evergreen trees. “Kids like to be the teacher and not always the student,” she shared. She taught facts on the topic and acknowledged learning things she didn’t already know. The science behind how we learn supports this theory. We are more likely to remember things we do or teach, rather than what we just read or hear.

The 4-H program encourages youth to use and practice life-skills in all parts of the learning process. This format encourages teamwork, especially as they share information with each other and evaluate the activity. Addison shared, “I think everyone in our 4-H club likes this because we are learning something from someone our age and not from an adult. So far, all of the “Let’s Learn!” lessons have had fun fact questions, so that keeps our attention.”

4-H history shows in the late 1800’s, the idea of practical and “hands-on” learning came from the desire to connect public school education to country life. Building community clubs to help solve agricultural challenges was a first step toward youth learning more about the industries in their community. By 1902, the first 4-H club was formed.

Current 4-H membership is structured with individually selected and self-guided project areas including animal sciences, natural resources, career and leadership development; civic engagement, creative arts, environmental sciences, food systems, healthy living and nutrition; and science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).



Photo by Pleasant Workers 4-H Club

Experiential learning is proven to be engaging for 4-H club meeting activities. “Let’s Learn!” has been the theme of the Pleasant Workers 4-H club meetings. Paul Jackson shows the chicken coop he created from edible goodies after learning facts about rabbits, chickens, and the avian bird flu from club member Tatum Bruce.

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