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Kerry Elsen
Buffalo County Extension
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Hopeful Purpose

There are many distractions that adults and youth alike face in today's ever-changing world. Finding something that provides oneself with a sense of purpose and hope can help one stay grounded. Today's 4-H professionals continue to work in the positive youth development area by helping youth find their spark which motivates youth to accomplish something and find a purpose in their lives.

National 4-H has launched a model, called the 4-H Thriving Model, which has several social, emotional, and cognitive learning pieces that intentionally aim to help youth succeed or thrive. One of the indicators of a successful youth program is providing youth with a sense of "hopeful purpose". When youth have hopeful purpose, they see themselves as being on the way to a happy and successful future.

Research shows that youth with a sense of purpose are more goal-directed and have increased life satisfaction, better emotional well-being, and great positive affect. To help youth achieve a sense of hopeful purpose, program staff and volunteers should aim first at helping youth identify what interests a youth or "makes them tick". This is known as a spark. For some youth, they may know what their spark is right away while others, they may need to explore several areas to find their spark. An adult should work to actively facilitate the development of a young person's spark. This could be done by inviting that youth to a series of workshops, connecting that youth to a mentor or if appropriate, involve that youth in co-teaching a program.

Adults should encourage, and assist, youth in developing meaningful SMART goals.

Following this a caring adult should coach youth to achieving them. Which, in turn, shows youth a pathway to the future.

Today's youth have so much to offer, such as skills, ideas and resources, which aid in the development of future leaders. Some ways you can help facilitate a hopeful purpose in youth include: create youth development programs that empower youth voice and show how they can make a difference; help youth work on a service project they are passionate about and help them succeed; help youth identify their unique gifts and talents and courage them to understand how those strengths can be used to make the world a better place.

In summary, thriving youth have a sense of hope and purpose, and see themselves on the way to a happy and successful future. For more information on how to help a youth find their spark, reach out to the Buffalo County Extension Office, 308-236-1235.

Article rewritten with permission from original author Brandy VanDeWalle.