

Views from VanDeWalle

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Youth Developing Personal Responsibility

Several years ago, National 4-H Council launched a campaign that 4-H grows “True Leaders”. Every child has the potential to be a true leader and 4-H can help empower kids with the skills they need to lead in life. There are many definitions of what it means to be a leader, however one characteristic of being a true leader is embracing the principle of personal responsibility and making accountability an expectation.

National 4-H has launched a model, called the 4-H Thrive 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 through a pro-social orientation. Pro-social youth care about others and take actions that reflect this caring attitude. Pro-social development happens when youth observe and remember behaviors that are rewarded and start to practice them.

To help youth achieve a pro-social orientation, help youth feel that they belong and matter to others. Help youth internalize positive attitudes and actions until they become a part of the child’s core value. A 4-H volunteer should ensure that all programs are welcoming to all and set clear behavior expectations for programs. This can be done by involving all youth in an activity where they create their own set of ground rules, and all agree to promote and practice these positive behaviors.

Disagreements will naturally occur; however, helping youth practice being open-minded and consider the other person’s point of view is important. Caring adults should recognize, support, and encourage kindness and empathy among youth. Modelling this helps youth mimic this positive behavior.

Teaching youth how to have a pro-social orientation can also be done by encouraging them to engage in regular community serve projects and activities. This could be started by the adult volunteers, but as youth see the impact and importance, allow youth the chance to choose, lead and implement a service project. Finally, help older youth in the 4-H program see how they serve as important role models for younger 4-H members and encourage them to take leadership roles.

In summary, thriving youth see helping others as a personal responsibility and live up to the values of respect, responsibility, honesty, kindness, and generosity. Thriving youth care about and give back to their communities.