

Views from VanDeWalle

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Transcendent Awareness

There is a growing trend in communities today. Service-oriented organizations such as Rotary, Lion's Club, American Legion Auxiliary, churches, foundations, etc. are dwindling in numbers and donations. These groups have been invaluable to the development of strong and caring neighborhoods across the United States since homesteading days. From serving meals to the homeless to building playgrounds, service groups have provided countless man hours and dollars to citizens of all ages.

This dedication to selfless service is based on an understanding that there is a bigger reality than oneself. This understanding can be fostered in a variety of ways. Religion may play a significant role, but other things such as nature or art may develop what is known as "transcendent awareness."

The new 4-H Thriving Model recognizes transcendent awareness as an important ingredient to youth success. Along with openness to challenge and discovery, hopeful purpose, prosocial orientation, positive emotions, and goal setting/management, transcendent awareness builds the strong "base" for youth to grow into successful and involved citizens.

So, what might this look like in a well-orchestrated 4-H program? Immersion in the natural world is a common component of 4-H, whether it is in a camp setting, special interest group, or in a rural setting where youth are raising animals and crops. Quality 4-H programs also encourage youth to participate in and eventually organize service projects. It can be as simple as a trash pick-up or as complex as a year-long experience sewing a quilt for a Veteran. Sound, ethical decision-making is taught in every project. The 4-H pledge charges youth with using all parts of themselves to benefit others locally, nationally, and globally.

Research from the National 4-H Council states that 4-H'ers are nearly 4 times more likely to make contributions to their communities (Grades 7-12) and they are about 2 times more likely to be civically active (Grades 8-12). So, if we wish to reverse the downward trend in adult community involvement, one of the best steps we can take is to encourage young people to participate in positive youth development organizations where transcendent awareness is a key component.

This article was written by Michelle Garwood, Extension Educator.