

## Views from VanDeWalle

Brandy VanDeWalle, Extension Educator in Fillmore/Clay Counties

*June 23, 2021*

### Helping Others

One of the things I love about rural communities is the amount of help and support given when people go through difficult times. I can attest to that, on several occasions. For example, when my mom had her stroke in 2011, neighbors, coworkers and friends stepped up to provide support, send cards and helped when I was needing to make trips to visit her. Also in 2011, 2012 and 2014, I was laid up with ankle surgery and very blessed that many people in the community helped watch my girls, made meals for our family, and showed many other acts of kindness. A quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson is one of my favorites, “The purpose of life is not to be happy. It is to be useful, to be honorable, to be compassionate, to have it make some difference that you have lived and lived well.”

Last year, I was so humbled that we were able to find creative solutions for our youth to still have a county fair and showcase their projects. The 4-H Councils, 4-H superintendents, FFA advisors and county fair board/ag societies all pitched in to help Nebraska Extension staff navigate through unprecedented times. One of the biggest things learned in 2020 is that we can change and find creative solutions to circumstances beyond our control. In 2021, county fairs will be able to be celebrated by more and continue as a key social event in the county, but one thing that won't change is that our youth will be able to compete and continue learning life skills.

A part of the 4-H pledge is to “pledge one's hands to larger service” and “heart to greater loyalty”. These are the values we try to instill in our 4-H youth. It is great to see youth helping each other during 4-H workshops and programs and friendships being made. There is research that shows how helping others has benefits for themselves. A professor, Thomas G. Plante from Santa Clara University, and adjunct clinical professor of psychiatry at Stanford University has found that his students who attend a spring break trip working with people in poor and marginalized areas managed stress better than those who did not attend trips. He believes the research finding is due to a matter of perspective. Additionally, when helping others, you generally experience more empathy, compassion, and solidarity with others as well.

As we approach county fair season, it is important to remind adults, as well as youth of 4-H's core values of helping others with our hands. It might improve their stress management abilities and make for a smoother fair for all involved. Rather than seeking out problems, remember the 4-H pledge and help others. You'll likely be happier and create a better experience for everyone around you. So, instead of only worrying about your exhibits or animals or trying to get others in trouble, consider helping a fellow exhibitor and fill one's bucket with water or call that person and tell them their animal is running low on water. If an exhibitor is struggling to know where to check-in their static exhibit, offer to help them.

By practicing these small acts of kindness, you might be surprised how much less stressed you and those around you will be. I am certainly appreciative of 4-H parents who are able to help out my daughters when I am busy with my job. “I pledge my head to clearer thinking, my heart to greater loyalty, my hands to larger service and my health to better living, for my club, my



community, my country and my world.” If we practice these principles, we can make a positive difference in the lives of others.

### County Fair Schedules

You can find the events for the Clay and Fillmore County Fairs on each extension website or social media. Locally, go to [fillmore.unl.edu](http://fillmore.unl.edu) or [clay.unl.edu](http://clay.unl.edu).