

EXTENSION UPDATE

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4-H Makes You a Better Person

It's that time of year when youth are signing up for 4-H. If you are a parent wondering if you should enroll your child in Otoe County 4-H, you might find inspiration in the following reasons for being a 4-H member. As a 4-H alumni, parent, leader, and extension educator I understand the many benefits of 4-H. I hope this message helps you see the value of 4-H too.

If the smell of pigs brings gut-wrenching nostalgia; if cross-stitching a windmill deep into the night gets your gears going; if you feel upset when two cookies from the same batch look dissimilar, you might be a born-and-raised 4-H member. Which means you are a better person than most.

1. You learned to lose with grace and dignity. You were a hardworking eight-year-old, slaving long nights baking imperfect muffins and some fifty-year-old judge gave you a red ribbon. Yes, 4-H judges can be heartless. But you learned, as you ate your sad and lumpy muffins alone with your red ribbon in hand, to lose with grace and to understand that you can't always be the best, not in 4-H and not in the real world.

2. You learned to be a role model. As you aged-up in your 4-H club, younger children joined turning their attention to your abilities and, most of all, saw that you conducted yourself with strength and courage. Now, in your adulthood, you understand the values of respect, responsibility, and trustworthiness.

3. You learned how to meet a deadline. You could wrangle eight projects, quilt deep into the night while watching the *Sound of Music*, meet all your 4-H deadlines, and still maintain your social connections with the kids at the swimming pool.

4. You learned how to cook. Read: no ramen in college for you! You stood on a rickety chair to reach the stove and stirred, sizzled, and spiced your way to 4-H cooking honors. Early-on, you knew how to take care of yourself, to fill yourself with proper nutrition outside of the realms of pop tarts and fruit roll-ups. Which means you're an adult without a full reliance on fast food.

5. You learned that practice makes perfect. No matter the 4-H skill, you had to perform that sucker a ton of times doing the same task over and over throughout the hot humid summer until, miracle-of-miracles, you perfected the chocolate chip cookie. If you were lucky, next year you could move up to quick breads.

6. You learned that doing things correctly takes time and effort. During 'bad years,' you stayed up until four in the morning on entry day, perfecting your stitching and putting the finishing touches on your quilt. But during good years, you spent months on those projects, never taking a single stitch for granted. Time and effort yielded the results you wanted and deserved.

7. You learned organization. Children aren't that organized, but 4-H members had to be if they wanted purple-ribbon bragging rights. And so to the barn you trudged to organize some hay bales, you lined your sewing thread by color, and you remembered everything. Like some sort of alien elementary student, you never missed an assignment. And now your type-A-level organization skills are through-the-roof, helping you win at life every day.

8. You learned the circle of life and where your food really comes from. If you showed livestock, you knew early on: That steer wasn't coming home. You appreciated where

your meat came from and that treating animals well was an important element of food production.

9. You learned not to be afraid of trying new things. Woodworking? Cake decorating? Photography? You could try anything as a 4-H member, which was freeing, allowing you to discover your passion. Now in your adult years, you're unafraid of that move away from home, your next career step, or just trying something new for the first time."

4-H is truly a life-changing organization. If you have any questions about joining 4-H, contact the Nebraska Extension in Otoe County Office at 402-269-2301, email us at otocounty@unl.edu, check us out on the web at otocounty.unl.edu, or stop in. The Extension Office is located just east of the Otoe County Fairgrounds, at 620 1st Street in Syracuse.

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Sarah Purcell is a Nebraska Extension Educator for Otoe County and Southeast Nebraska. She can be reached at 402-269-2301 or via email at spurcell2@unl.edu until March 12. This is her last Extension Update due to retirement.