The National 4-H Impact

A National 4-H Impact Assessment (Peterson, B., et. al., 2000) revealed that young people and adults believe that 4-H Youth Development programs reflect very positively the critical elements that researchers identify as essential to positive growth and development. More research studies specific to 4-H are listed below.

1. **Caring Adults**: Much research points to a caring adult being a strong element in positive youth development. Our survey found strong agreement with both youth and adults that adults in 4-H make young people feel good about themselves.

2. **Safe Places**: Ninety-four percent of youth and 98% of adults agreed that in 4-H, youth feel safe to try new things. Ninety-three percent of youth agreed that “I feel safe when I do 4-H activities.”

3. **Learning**: This research shows that 4-H is open to new learning. Over 88% of the youth feel that they can try new or different things. Eighty-four percent of youth feel that 4-H can help them solve problems on their own.

4. **Service**: Ninety-one percent of youth and 98% of adults agreed that adults help youth to work with others as a team. Community service has always been an important component of 4-H with adults and youth working together with community organizations. One youth said, “I learned how to do community work and now I like it.”

5. **Responsibility**: Ninety percent of kids surveyed agreed with the statement “4-H teaches me to help other people.” Furthermore, they felt that “4-H teaches me to be responsible for my actions.”

6. **Belonging**: Ninety-two percent of both youth and adults agreed with the statement that “All kinds of kids are welcome in 4-H.” Ninety percent of kids agreed that gender made no difference in that “both boys and girls can be leaders in 4-H.”

A study of life skill development of Oklahoma 4-H alumni during the years of 4-H participation (Maass, 2004) found that former 4-H members rated (1-5 scale, 5=Strongly Agree) the following life skills as the top ten they learned from their 4-H involvement:

1. Public Speaking (4.79)
2. Community Service Volunteering (4.65)
3. Self-discipline (4.58)
4. Self-responsibility (4.58)
5. Teamwork (4.58)
6. Cooperation (4.57)
7. Marketable Skills (4.56)
8. Self-esteem (4.55)
9. Social Skills (4.53)
10. Responsible Citizenship (4.52)

In a survey of 4-H club members in Somerset County, New Jersey (Diem, 1992), parents of 4-H club members reported that 4-H had been valuable or very valuable in helping their children:

1. Learn new knowledge or skills (79 percent)
2. Get along with other people (77 percent)
3. Develop an interest in learning (72 percent)
4. Develop self-confidence (70 percent)
5. Develop an interest in helping others or the community (56 percent)
6. Speak in front of a group (56 percent)
7. Develop decision-making skills (49 percent)
8. Develop a career interest (23 percent)

Overall, 85 percent of 4-H parents believed 4-H had been valuable or very valuable for their children. The top reasons why parents believed 4-H was valuable were:

1. It offers a wide variety of projects and activities (78 percent)
2. Activities are inexpensive (47 percent)
3. 4-H offers worthwhile activities (47 percent)
4. 4-H makes learning fun (43 percent)
5. Both boys and girls can be members (43 percent).

Parents believed that 4-H offers quality programs, is appropriately structured, and offers enough awards and recognition. Other beliefs of 4-H parents expressed in this study:

1. 92 percent believe 4-H is valuable in complementing in-school education
2. 95 percent believe 4-H offers unique programs compared to other youth organizations.
3. 83 percent of 4-H club members have been involved in other youth organizations besides 4-H and 97 percent of parents believe 4-H is just as or more valuable as other such organizations.

A study of 4-H members in Illinois (Clark, Wilcoxen, Geitner, White, Anderson, Baker, 1998) found that 69 to 86% gained moderate to much leadership skills during their involvement in a 4-H Club.

A study by Cornell Cooperative Extension (Mead, Rodriguez, Hirschl, Gogan, 1999) on the impact of 4-H club membership in New York found that, when controlling for the influences of age, gender, family structure, and father’s education, 4-H club youth in New York scored higher than youth studied by the Search Institute on all developmental assets tested including: educational aspiration, achievement motivation, desire to help others, school grades, self-esteem, decision-making, having a value system, interaction with adults, and ability to make friends.

A statewide study of 5th, 7th, and 9th-grade students in Montana (Astroth & Hayne, 2001) found that 4-H youth are more likely than other kids to report that they:

1. Succeed in school, getting more A’s than other kids
2. Are involved as leaders in their school and the community
3. Are looked up to as role models by other kids
4. Help others in the community

4-H youth reported that they are less likely than other kids to:

1. Shoplift or steal
2. Use illegal drugs of any kind to get high
3. Ride in a car with someone who has been drinking
4. Smoke cigarettes
5. Damage property for the fun of it
6. Skip school or cut classes without permission

Overall, the Montana State University research indicates that Montana 4-H youth are busy making contributions to improve the quality of life in their families, neighborhoods and communities. 4-H does not just attract high-achieving kids from privileged families—nor is 4-H able to achieve the kind of results reported in this research summary by only working with “the best kids.” Rather, 4-H is a powerful, proven program that makes a positive difference for all who participate.

A study conducted in 1999 (Texas 4-H Youth Research Unit, Texas Agricultural Extension Service) examined the impact that Texas 4-H has on its youth participants:

1. 88% indicated that 4-H teaches them to work out differences peacefully
2. 86% indicated that 4-H has taught them problem-solving skills
3. 89% indicated that 4-H has taught them decision-making skills
4. 91% indicated that 4-H has helped teach them how to develop a plan to reach their goals
5. 94% felt that 4-H has helped them accept differences in others
6. 91% felt that 4-H helped teach them skills to be a leader

In an analysis of 4-H record books completed by 4-H club members in New Jersey (Diem & Devitt, 2003), 4-H members reported the knowledge and skills they learned or improved upon through their participation in 4-H projects during the past year revealed that these youth learned the following:
1. Personal Skills
2. To set goals for myself (79%)
3. Knowledge of my project (79%)
4. How to keep records of important information in my project (76%)
5. How to organize myself (70%)
6. What I am interested in (70%)
7. How to get more information about something I am interested in (70%)
8. To deal with winning and losing gracefully (67%)
9. To try something new (66%)
10. To understand my strengths and weaknesses (63%)
11. How to satisfy my curiosity about a new subject (62%)
12. Working with Other People
13. How to give a public presentation (73%)
14. To feel comfortable speaking in front of a group (72%)
15. How to work with adults (65%)
16. To make new friends (63%)
17. How to solve problems (62%)
18. How to work with the club to complete a community service project (62%)

Compiled by Dr. Keith G. Diem, Assistant Dean, UF/IFAS Extension & State 4-H Program Leader