

## **Lesson 2:** **Reviewing Youth Development Principles**

Because 4-H is the youth development arm of Land Grant University outreach, 4-H youth development professionals are responsible for knowing and applying to their programs the most current and valid information regarding support for the growth and development of the youth in their communities.

Many people do not know that non-formal, out-of-school youth development work has a professional knowledge base or that the quality of programs offered in these settings depends upon the training of professionals in the field. It is up to the youth development professional to explain the field to the community and to assure that community members recognize the vital role this profession plays in our society.

The goal of youth development programs is to help youth become fully prepared for transition to adulthood. Youth development professionals offer youth opportunities within healthy environments to master the competencies they will need to make this transition.

In order to master skills, young people must have certain needs met. Research tells us that they must have<sup>1</sup>

1. safety and structure
2. a sense of belonging and membership
3. closeness and several good relationships
4. experience with gaining competence and mastering skills
5. independence and control over some part of their lives
6. self-awareness and the ability and opportunities to act on that understanding
7. a sense of self-worth and the ability and opportunities to contribute

Because youth grow and develop in the context of the family, community and society, these are the places where these needs must be met. Environments that provide the conditions for the healthy growth and development of youth can be described as those that: <sup>2</sup>

1. Pittman, K. and Fleming, W. (1991). *A New Vision: Promoting Youth Development, testimony before the House Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families, Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, Academy for Educational Development. Washington, D.C.*

2. National 4-H Impact and Design Team, Astroth, Kirk; Chair (1999). *Critical Elements and Practices for 4-H. Montana Cooperative Extension Service, Montana State University. Bozeman, Montana*



- Are inclusive and create connections and sense of belonging including a positive relationship with a caring adult.
- Provide opportunities to value and practice service for others.
- Provide autonomy including an opportunity for self-determination.
- Provide opportunity for mastering skills and engaging in learning.
- Assure physical and emotional safety.
- Help youth vision a positive role for themselves in the future.

Programs that are offered for youth within these environments and that are successful in assuring changed behavior in the positive growth and development of the youth they serve:<sup>3</sup>

- Have well prepared and well supported staff who are offered ongoing training, who apply developmentally appropriate and culturally appropriate practices, and who know of and use community resources.
- Serve a broad based audience that reaches all youth in the community including those at high risk and reaches them early in their development.
- Offer comprehensive programming that is based upon the principles of youth development and that offers opportunities for youth to master skills in competence, character, and connections.
- Are designed with input from participants and involve and empower youth in their delivery.
- Have clearly defined outcomes that inform staff and participants of the developmental changes that are targeted.
- Collect and use evaluation information to refine the program and have the ability to become self-sustaining over time.

Youth Development professionals must understand and apply these two sets of components to their work. They must assure that the conditions necessary for healthy growth are present in the environments in which youth live, and that opportunities to develop competence are offered in the youth programs within those communities/environments.

In addition, 4-H professionals are responsible for the outcomes of working directly with youth to help individual youth achieve the skills they need. For this third responsibility, they must know the specific competencies to target for individual youth and identify the means by which those skills are learned.

3. Betts, S.C. & Dalla, R.L. (July 1995). *Youth, Families and Community: The Arizona Agenda, the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension. Tucson, Arizona.*



## SECTION I: Understanding 4-H: Purpose, History and Structure

Research has identified five competency areas that youth must master for positive development and preparation for adulthood. These are:<sup>4</sup>

1. **Health/physical competence:** having the appropriate knowledge, attitudes and behaviors that will ensure current and future health
2. **Personal/social competence:** personal skills such as an ability to understand one's emotions and practice self discipline: and interpersonal skills such as working with others and developing and sustaining friendships
3. **Knowledge, reasoning and creativity competence:** a broad base of knowledge, knowledge application skills, life long learning skills and an ability to appreciate and demonstrate creative expression.
4. **Vocational Competence:** Understanding and awareness of life options and the steps necessary to accomplish them. Adequate preparation for work and family life.
5. **Citizenship competency:** Understanding of the history and values of one's nation, community, race, ethnic and cultural heritage. Desire to be ethical and to be involved in contributing to the broader good.

The role of the Youth Development Professional is to provide environments that meet the needs of youth and to offer opportunities within those environment for youth to master the competencies that prepare them for successful adulthood.<sup>5</sup>

It is also important that youth development professionals are prepared to advocate for their work. Parents and community groups need to know how the activities and experiences that are offered through your youth program support the development of youth. Staff and volunteers who work in these programs must be able to explain how a given activity or series of experiences enhance the development of the young people who participate in them. Community support occurs when the importance of a youth program to the health of the community is recognized.

4. Pittman, K. and Fleming, W. (1991). *A New Vision: Promoting Youth Development, testimony before the ouse Select committee on Children, Youth and Families, Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, Academy for Educational Development, Washington, D.C.*

5. Huebner, A., and McFarland M. (2002) *Youthworks Self Study Guides: A Perfamance Based Training Program for Youth Development Professionals, Kansas State University cooperative Extension and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas*

