BEING THANKFUL FOR 4-H

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Thanksgiving is right around the corner, and I have noticed my Facebook friends putting up items they are thankful for, such as family, friends, job, roof over my head, food in my stomach, and clothes to wear. I am thankful for all these things, and I am also thankful for 4-H members and volunteers for what they do for our communities. Things you’re probably not aware of.

Growing up, I thought 4-H was all about children and their farm animals. Being a girl scout in an urban area, I didn’t know much about 4-H except the stereotype that comes with the clover. There really wasn’t a prevalent 4-H program in our area. If there had been, I would have been sure I was not qualified to be part of it. As an adult, I look back and wish I had known then what I know now; after all, hindsight is 20/20.

The 4-H Program is for boys and girls, ages 5 to 18. That is the only qualification. It does not cost anything to be a member, and there are no uniforms to buy. What you do in 4-H is really up to the youth and their parents. We provide the opportunities and encourage them to take the challenge to try something new, like raising an animal, taking part in science activities, or taking on various leadership positions. We work with youth in the areas of public speaking, etiquette, writing, and so much more. Youth have the opportunity to make 4-H whatever they want it to be, trying new things until they find their niche. Then they can plan around what they like and what they are good at - in other words, learn life skills and set goals for themselves.

One of the key things we work with youth on is giving back to their community. We have 20 4-H clubs throughout Robeson County that are officially chartered. Each club is required to complete at least one community service project a year; many complete more than one. Some of their projects have included canned food drives, coat drives, community beautification, weeding and trash pickup, creating an outdoor sitting area at Hospice House for patients and family members, planting and maintaining a community garden to feed seniors healthy meals, volunteering at the Christian Care Center, and visiting patients and volunteering at nursing homes. Our 4-H members donated more than 900 hours in community service work to our county this year. Based on 2010 rates for volunteer service ($21.36 per hour), that adds up to $19,224 that our youth have invested in our community.

That is not even mentioning the emotional impact these projects had on individuals and families. Imagine the child who did not have a warm coat and now has one thanks to these youth. The nursing home patients who received a goody bag packed and decorated by a 4-H member that brightened their day. What about the family that would have gone hungry if it had not been for a 4-H member or club who took time to collect and donate food to the local food pantry.
The 4-H pledge includes “…I pledge my hands for larger service…for my club, my community, and my world.” I am thankful for our 4-H members and volunteers, because they live the 4-H pledge making our community and world a better place every day.

For more information about 4-H, please contact Shea Ann DeJarnette, Extension 4-H agent with North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center, at 671-3276, by E-mail at Shea_Ann_DeJarnette@ncsu.edu, or visit our website at http://robeson.ces.ncsu.edu.